

Unique People

UP



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Issue 9

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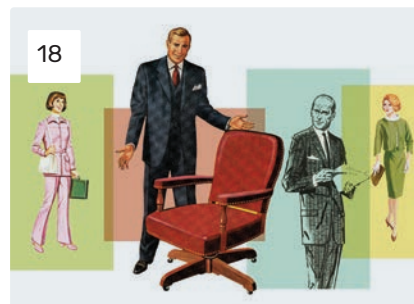
Emotional intelligence.

What is it and do you possess it? We find out more.



Automotive Technology... Friend or Foe?

As the technological landscape changes, we discuss the impact on business and the labour market



What if 'right on paper' is just 'right on paper'?

Often when organisations look to hire, they go on experience, but often 'less' can mean 'more'.



Q&A with Christopher Alcock

Managing Director at Weldricks Pharmacy



Q&A with Beckie Hart

Regional Director, Yorkshire & the Humber at CBI (Confederation of British Industry)

Welcome to the Winter Newsletter

A very warm welcome to the latest edition of Unique People magazine. It's undeniable that this has been both an extraordinary and challenging year so far, it is certainly a year in which organisational leaders have faced unprecedented tests.

As we head towards the end of Q3 and into the concluding months of the year, it will certainly be interesting to see how businesses, and indeed society on the whole, have transformed and adapted in response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

To quote a famous physicist: "In the midst of every crisis, is an opportunity" and it is safe to say there are some organisations that have thrived since the pandemic began. Technology and communications companies for one, have seen an incredible surge in demand as a result of the world's powerful desire to stay connected and operational.

Emotional intelligence is a trait which isn't always the first thing that springs to mind when we consider the attributes that make a great leader. In this edition, we take a closer look at why it shouldn't be a quality that is overlooked. We also take a look at the increasingly prominent role Automotive Technology is playing in the modern world. It's designed to make our lives easier, and contrary to popular belief, could in fact create many more jobs.

Finally, we touch base with Beckie Hart, Regional Director of the CBI in Yorkshire and the Humber. Having worked over a decade in the manufacturing sector,

To quote a famous physicist: "In the midst of every crisis, is an opportunity" and it is safe to say there are some organisations that have thrived since the pandemic began.

It is important to remember however, that these most challenging of circumstances have impacted other sectors in a far from positive way. It is therefore crucial, that leaders have access to well-informed advice to continue supporting all who benefit and work within their organisations and sectors. I expect for the foreseeable future, it will continue to be a time for adaptability and resilience as we look to bounce back as best we can in the weeks and months ahead.

In the latest edition of Unique People Magazine, we were delighted to catch up with Christopher Alcock, Managing Director of Weldricks Pharmacy, who talks about evolving his local family business into national E-Commerce success. We also take a look at some of the latest industry insights and trends facing organisations in the current climate, taking a look at the key role manufacturing is playing in the UK's economic regeneration.

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Current talent trends

Manufacturing is the key to UKs regeneration

The manufacturing sector plays a significant role in the UK economy, providing over 2.7 million jobs, making up £191bn of economic output and accounting for 65% of UK research and development (R&D) spending. Sectors such as advanced manufacturing and technology are paramount, as these are rich producers of valuable intellectual property and innovation which will create sustainable growth and even more jobs for the future.

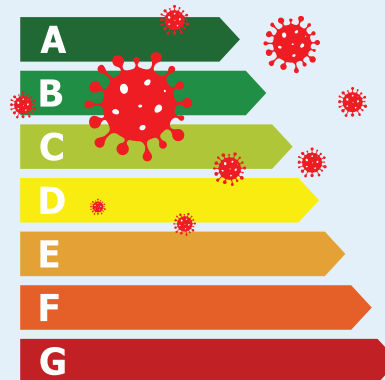
Although the Government has already instigated measures, including the recent £186m R&D funding to back new research and innovation projects, the current pandemic is a stark reminder that there needs to be a focus on investment in valuable R&D projects, innovation and IP.

One way to help rebuild will be to take a look at the UK supply chain. This has been tested during the pandemic, with 53% of all imports being manufactured goods costing £367bn. The UK currently imports more goods than it exports, and over the past 20 years the deficit in manufactured goods has widened from £7.5bn in 1997, to £92bn in 2018.

Although this will not solve all of the UKs problems, buying closer to home will deliver longer term, more viable growth. The UK manufacturing industry is cutting edge and therefore we should utilise this to promote a stronger, faster recovery.

UK businesses cutting environment-related investment due to coronavirus

A survey conducted by cloud finance firm Ivalua of 200 UK-based businesses, has found that 60% have either decreased their investment in sustainability initiatives as a result of COVID-19, or are planning to do so. The survey asked professionals within



the procurement, supply chain and finance professions for an overview of how their priorities and remits had changed since the start of March.

95% said their business had developed short-term plans to address environmental concerns in their direct operations and supply chains, however the majority voiced concerns that these plans now face delays or downscaling as a result of the economic impacts of COVID-19.

Moreover, while almost nine in ten (87%) agreed that greening the supply chain can deliver a 'key' competitive advantage, just 15% said environmental factors are their top priority when working with suppliers. Instead, the most commonly cited top priorities were quality and cost.

Leaders feel lockdown has affected their ability to do their job

In these unprecedented times, 45% of CEOs are now working more hours than they were before the pandemic, with 62% reassessing their work life balance.

Figures according to growth architects ORESA, surveyed circa 200 business leaders from a wide range of sectors in May and again in June in order to create a better understanding of how they are feeling, adapting their thinking and evolving their strategies during the pandemic.

"As the novelty of working from home wears off, the risks of anxiety and poor work-life balance are on the rise – it's vital that leaders work optimally, not to the bone, to avoid burnout. There is some light at the end of the proverbial Zoom call, however".

"The majority of companies we spoke to said they will reopen their offices within

the next three months, and an increasing number are looking to recruit," says Orlando Martins, CEO & Founder, ORESA.

In terms of employment, 41% of leaders will look to recruit over the next three months, and remote hiring is starting to become normalised. 40% of leaders are happy to employ and on-board someone without having met them in person – a figure that is up 11% from May. Over three quarters (78%) of leaders say that recruitment will be focused on those with broader skill sets, rather than single subject experts, suggesting that there will be fewer, but better, more diverse roles available.

Businesses succumbing to cyber-attacks have doubled

The number of UK businesses succumbing to cyber-attacks has doubled in the last five years, according to Beaming, the specialist business ISP.

Beaming's five-year cyber security study, details of which were published in its recent Five Years in Cyber Security report, suggests that a quarter (25%) of UK businesses were victims of cyber criminals in 2019. This equates to 1.5 million businesses, up from 755,000 (13%) in 2015.

Large companies comprising of 250+ employees were most at risk, culminating last year with nine out of 10 (87%) falling victim. Small businesses experienced the steepest rise in victim rates: 28% of 11-50 person firms were hit in 2015, rising steeply to 62% last year.

The total cost of cyber security breaches over the last five years is believed to be more than £87bn, and includes damaged assets, financial penalties and lost productivity.



As companies grow they become more susceptible to cyber criminals. Over the past five years, larger companies consistently saw higher rates than smaller businesses. This can be reflected in the figures that show the risk increases by 60% simply by a company hiring its first employees.

Although more companies are taking measures against these attacks, uptake on specialist measures remains low with only 9% of businesses having a cyber security policy, and 37% having a firewall at the network perimeter. Overall however, 61% of UK businesses do have a minimal level of cyber security defences, relying heavily on anti-virus software and basic router protection.

Beaming

There's nowt like Yorkshire digital

Yorkshire has seen a 48% growth in its digital sector in just three years, making it the fastest-growing tech region in the UK, according to new data.

Since 2017, the area has enjoyed a huge growth in digital tech jobs with the number of people employed in the sector increasing from 58,000 to 86,000. The rate at which this has grown far outpaces the rest of the UK, including London with Wales being the next highest at 29%.

Yorkshire as a whole is doing well within this sector but the success is being underpinned by the city of Leeds. Of the 86,000 tech employees in Yorkshire, two thirds are

based within the Leeds City Region, which further concretises its reputation as a thriving digital hub.

To support the growth in the city of Leeds, Leeds City Region Local Enterprise Partnership has launched #welcome, a £2.4m digital inward investment fund to support tech companies in the area. This, alongside the new Channel 4 hub, will help to see the city of Leeds propel further within the digital sector over the next five years, hopefully keeping Yorkshire firmly on the map for future Digital and Tech businesses.

Fintechs aim to close compliance skills gap

Fintechs are growing their compliance teams to meet new regulatory challenges. Brexit is accelerating this trend further, as fintechs look to ensure they can roll out innovative, cross-border digital services, while remaining compliant. Bolstering compliance measures, like acquiring licensing, will enable UK fintechs to provide services that were traditionally exclusive to banks – and fintechs should now focus on hyperpersonalisation to continue standing apart from banks.



Working from home after lockdown?

Once lockdown measures are fully lifted, 60% of people would like to work from home more often than they did previously, according to research by StarLeaf.

Of these, almost two thirds would like to work from home either two or three times a week, and one quarter only want to pay the office a visit one day a week.

Around one in five 18-34 year olds say they would move to a different area if they could work from home more. This is especially true in London, where one quarter of all respondents in the city said they would move elsewhere, more than double the national average of 12%.



The greatest leaders possess high levels of

emotional intelligence...!

Do you?

When thinking about a truly great leader, the person who springs to mind is someone who has the complete trust of their staff, listens to their team, is easy to talk to and always receptive, whilst making careful, informed decisions.

The leader who doesn't spring to mind is one who doesn't take the time to listen, makes rash, unjustified decisions and is often curt and unfriendly.

The difference between these two hypothetical leaders is emotional intelligence. Emotional Intelligence is the ability to understand and manage your own emotions in any given situation and tune into those of the people around you. Having a high degree of emotional intelligence means you know what you're feeling, what those emotions mean and how these can affect the people you come into contact with.

It's imperative that leaders have a strong degree of emotional intelligence in order to succeed. Emotionally intelligent leaders are able to be in control of situations in a calm way, make rational decisions based on evidence rather than gut feeling or bias and lead their team in a way that fosters trust, respect and appreciation.

No matter how good your technical skills are, you'll never become a truly successful leader without having a strong level of emotional intelligence to go along with it. According to a study by Harvard Business Review* having a degree of emotional intelligence is what sets 90% of high performers apart from their colleagues with similar knowledge and levels of technical skills.

If you recognise that your emotional intelligence levels might not quite be where they need to be, there are ways in which you can work to improve this and

make yourself a better leader, or a more attractive prospect for promotion to a leadership role.

One of the key features of being emotionally intelligent is having a high level of self-awareness. This means having the ability to understand your own strengths and weaknesses as well as your emotions and how they could affect your own performance and that of your team. Analysing your own strengths and weaknesses by getting feedback from colleagues and superiors on what you're best at is a great starting point for improving these.

Another of the key features of emotional intelligent individuals is having the ability to manage or regulate yourself and your emotions. This means being calm under pressure, not lashing out at others, not making emotional or unjustified decisions and always staying in control.

Emotionally intelligent people also have a high level of social awareness, which means being able to read the emotions and dynamics at play with those around you. In doing so, this means you're better placed to be able to communicate and motivate your team in the most effective way.

Emotionally intelligent people are generally highly self-motivated and strive to work consistently towards their goals. If you recognise that you may need to improve your motivation levels, it's important to start by looking at what your goals are and why you want to reach them. Once you've identified this, take a look at what stage you're at with regards to reaching all of your goals and assess what you can do today to get closer

towards them. Break things down into small, manageable steps and it'll seem far easier to tackle.

Having a large amount of empathy for others is another example of skill successful leaders possess. This means being able to put yourself in someone else's position in order to understand their viewpoint, rather than always looking at situations from your own. Try doing this each time you make a decision and see how stopping to consider other people can impact upon the final decision you make.

Emotionally intelligent leaders are also aware of their body language and the body language of others. Open body language suggests you're open and interested in what the other person is saying, open to their opinions and open to the discussion. It also suggests engagement and a positive attitude meaning that your team members will feel far more likely to be able to discuss everything and anything with you, no matter how uncomfortable the subject might be. This is far more appealing than a manager with closed or negative body language, such as crossed arms or the tapping of a foot suggesting boredom or lack of interest and focus.

Taking the time to work on these skills to develop your emotional intelligence will undoubtedly pay off. Your increased self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy and social skills will soon make you stand out from the crowd and make you a more attractive candidate for leadership roles.



*<https://hbr.org/2004/01/what-makes-a-leader>



with Christopher Alcock

Managing Director, Weldricks Pharmacy

Having trained and qualified as a Pharmacist, Christopher joined the family business, HI Weldrick Ltd in 2000, becoming Managing Director in 2011.

Under Christopher's leadership, the business has grown (with revenues of over £65m) to become one of the most recognised and respected independent retail pharmacy chains. With 65 pharmacies and a fast growing national internet retail operation, Weldricks are currently ranked number 1 in the UK with Trustpilot. With a keen interest in service sector businesses, Christopher is also an active investor and Non-Executive Director with

a number of other organisations including QDoctor, an online Doctor service supporting both NHS and private patients nationwide and one of the region's fastest growing physiotherapy practices. Christopher co-founded Brewster Partners in 2011 and has been an active non-Executive member of the Board ever since.

Continues overleaf →

GET WELL LOCAL WITH
WELDRICKS
 PHARMACY





with Christopher Alcock

Q Looking at your career to date, what initially interested you in a career within Pharmacy?

A My father was a pharmacist and a huge role model and inspiration to me. As soon as I could, I would help out in the pharmacies, working in the school holidays and assisting in the Hallgate Pharmacy on my way home from school. It was clear to me that a career in pharmacy was the path I wanted to follow – every day presented an opportunity to make a difference to an individual's health and wellbeing. I really enjoyed building relationships within the community I worked. I took every opportunity to work in the family business, working in the warehouse, on the delivery runs, within each of the departments at the branch service centre, and of course, in the pharmacies.

I studied Pharmacy at De Montfort University, Leicester, and qualified as a Pharmacist in 1999, and after completing my pre-registration year I worked as Pharmacist in Epworth, although I continued to help out in the warehouse and with deliveries. I progressed to Pharmacy Manager, to Area Manager, Business Development Director and then to Managing Director. I have been honoured to work with an excellent and loyal team.



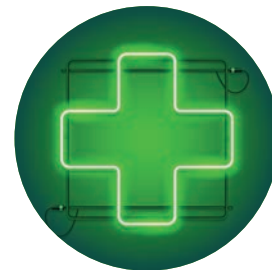
Q What in particular interests you in the Healthcare sector and can you provide an overview of what it's like to operate within that sector?

A Working in healthcare really does give you the opportunity to make a difference. Our relationship with our customers is so important, their health is always at the heart of everything we do. This can, at times, cause disagreement, how an individual wants to self-medicate is not always the best solution and at times can be harmful. There are many facets to the healthcare sector and pharmacy is an integral and vital part of the healthcare system in the UK.

The landscape is rapidly changing with online disruptors creating turbulence in the sector. It's important that we keep reviewing the way we deliver our services and ensure we offer our customers what they need in the format they want. We have no right to exist, we earn that right by adapting and changing to meet customers and patients needs. COVID-19 has accelerated the change, Doctors are offering less face to face consultations

and moving towards telephone and video platforms. Patients have had to embrace technology and access healthcare differently as have we with the introduction of things such as the Weldricks App and automated central dispensing.

The government has significantly reduced funding to the pharmacy sector over recent years and this has created its own pressures and need to review the services we offer and the way we deliver them. Whilst online pharmacy providers do offer a degree of convenience, they are not there when you need them for face-to-face advice and immediate care to solve the many issues that can occur with a medication regime. Pharmacy is vital to our high street and local communities. We need their support to ensure we are here when they need us.



Q What have been some of the key experiences and challenges you've faced running the retail side of the business.

A Our local pharmacies mostly dispense prescriptions and deliver healthcare services with minimal retailing. However, nationally we have grown from nothing to a major online pharmacy that is in the top five of Trustpilot's ranking for UK online pharmacies.

Retailing is definitely shifting sands. We have to continually adapt and change our ranges to offer the products our customers are looking for. While retailing is in our own hands, NHS dispensing has provided a major challenge for our sector since the Government funding review back in October 2016. Back then, the

Government imposed a two-year funding package on community pharmacy, with a £113 million reduction in funding in 2016/17, a reduction of 4% compared with 2015/16. This was to be followed by a further reduction in 2017/18 with funding dropping by a further 7.5% compared with November 2016 levels and this was locked in for five years with no adjustment for items such as inflation, national minimum wage increases, etc. The Government's aim has been stated as closing up to 3,000 pharmacy's across the country by these funding cuts.

GET WELL LOCAL WITH
WELDRICKS
PHARMACY

Q Can you tell us about your experience working in and running a family business, particularly at scale?

A I am so proud to be working in a family business. It's pressured, challenging and all consuming. You cannot switch off. However, it's equally rewarding. I am one of seven and although all my siblings chose different career paths, they do retain a keen interest and offer support. I had a great working relationship with my father, we challenged each other, had differing opinions at times, but always had the desire to push the business forward.

Q How does your experience in running bricks and mortar retail compare to running the internet/e-commerce side.

A Our pharmacies are limited in space, so they can only retail over the counter medicines with some basic non-medicine essentials that customers might run out of from their weekly shop and wish to buy from us as one of the last 'shops' remaining in their communities. While we have always done this retailing professionally, it clearly is very different from full range, national retailing where we are competing with the big brands such as Boots and Amazon.



Q COVID-19 has had an impact on all sectors in one way or another. What have been the key challenges for you as a leader of Weldricks during the pandemic?

A Keeping our staff safe and ensuring our customers received the care and attention they needed was a challenge. During the COVID-19 pandemic, community pharmacy became the frontline to immediate care and advice as the GP's instantly closed their surgeries leaving pharmacies and hospitals as the only accessible locations. Pharmacy teams across the country worked tirelessly to ensure the communities they serve received the care and attention they needed. At one point we had 117 staff, including several pharmacists, self-isolating. This created additional pressures and the need to recruit additional team members for support and caused us significant overtime costs. During the initial lockdown and peak we experienced unprecedented pressures.

Thankfully, the majority of customers understood the increased waiting times caused by the workload and the measures we put in place to keep both our team and customers safe. Whilst our turnover increased, our operating costs increased beyond that income, from the cost of providing cover for isolating staff to providing daily PPE to the increased demand on free delivery, it has been a challenging time.

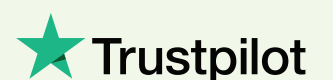
We are now experiencing a reversal of this pressure. GPs continue to offer a reduced service, often using telephone and video appointments in lieu of face-to-face consultations which has resulted in a significant reduction in medicines prescribed, so the focus has now moved to cost control.



Q Weldricks has an outstanding 5-star reputation on Trustpilot. How important are these customer satisfaction websites for business, and do they form part of your overall strategy?

A Despite criticism of them in the press, reputable customer satisfaction websites such as Trustpilot serve several valuable roles; a high score enhances brand image, very happy customers can give undecided buyers detailed reviews of the benefits of the site and that insight can sway them into becoming customers themselves. Most importantly, no bad customer service can be hidden from me by colleagues, as customers are very eager to report a bad experience on Trustpilot as an outlet for their frustration. I read every review and dissatisfied customers alert me to anything that has gone wrong. I always arrange a full investigation of the customers journey to understand what went wrong and why. This has often caused me to make changes to our processes and/or staff training. If a customer complains, I want the cause of the complaint changed so that incidence of bad service is prevented from happening again.

Sometimes however, we cannot make the change a customer wants, such as if a frustrated review is because our brand does not do something or does not do it in a way that a specific customer wants. We will often be compared to Amazon for instance. Such a review gives us the chance to post a reply and explain why we are different. It is not possible to be all things for all people nationally, so we try to make sure that our brand delivers what Weldricks customers want.



AUTOMATIVE TECHNOLOGY

FRIEND OR FOE ?

It's undeniable that technology is playing a bigger role in today's modern world. After all, anything that's designed to make our lives easier must be good, right? Technology is all around us, from heating and lighting our homes, to ensuring goods are delivered to our door within 24 hours of ordering them.

Technology has changed the business landscape. Jobs that were once incredibly dangerous for humans to carry out have been made far safer with the use of technology and many processes have been made much easier too.

But now, many people are becoming more and more worried about the prospect of automation and smart technology. For many, the idea of increased automation is intrinsically linked to human job losses as a technological process can remove the need for human intervention.

133 million new ones. This shows that just over 43% more jobs will be created by smart technology than those that are lost. This is undoubtedly good news, as it means more jobs for people who are currently without employment and that there's room for both humans and robots in the workplace.

It's also predicted that AI, robotics and other forms of automation have the potential to contribute up to \$15 trillion to global GDP by 2030. That's an absolutely massive amount and this will undoubtedly lead to more jobs being

completed by robots. This could mean more time for business planning, strategising and creativity – just a few areas where robots just can't compete against us humans.

The key to safeguarding your organisation against the feeling of automation being the enemy is being adaptable and open to new technology, rather than being against it and resisting it.

This may mean having to train workers in order to update their skills and make them better suited for roles that are influenced more by technology. Being prepared for this and having plans in place for how to do this is key. Being able to reassure your team that provisions have been made for these advances and that they will be trained sufficiently in order to cope with this will help allay any fears that automation will replace them.

Those workers who are dedicated to embracing technology and seeing it as a friend, rather than foe, will be the ones who truly flourish. Those who are engaged and take time to learn about new technology and its impact on their job and industry will be the ones who become indispensable and show they can never be replaced by robots.

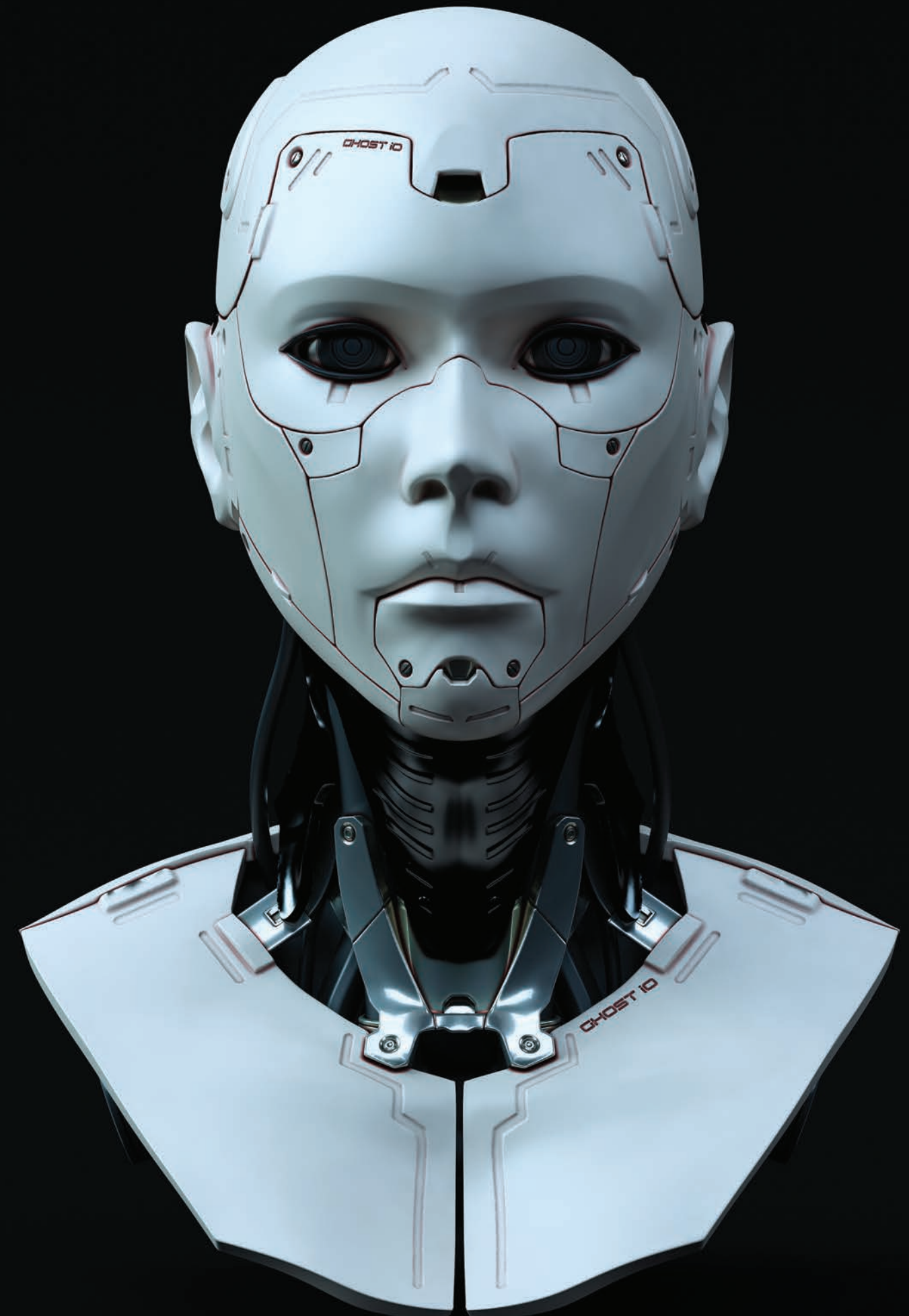
The World Economic Forum predicts that robots will displace 75 million jobs globally by 2022, but will create around 133 million new ones.

For manual labourers, the prospect of technology/robots taking over their role is undoubtedly a fair thing to worry about, and it would be naïve to assume that automation use won't continue to cause some level of disruption to the jobs market. But robots won't be coming to steal your jobs... honest!

The World Economic Forum predicts that robots will displace 75 million jobs globally by 2022, but will create around

created by the increase in wealth around the globe. It should also lead to better financial growth and economic state in many places throughout the world.

Smart technology is there to increase productivity and will be able to take away some of the simpler and more mundane, manual tasks that we do on an everyday basis. This would mean workers had more time to dedicate to other tasks that simply can't be





with Beckie Hart

Regional Director, Yorkshire & the Humber at CBI
(Confederation of British Industry)

CBI

Having worked for over a decade in the manufacturing sector, Beckie has an excellent understanding of the world of business and the challenges faced by enterprises of all sizes. Through CBI's exclusive networking events, business intelligence, brand enhancement and lobbying opportunities, she helps companies to shape their business strategy. UP talked to her to find out more about her career so far.

Q Can you talk us through your career to date and how you became Regional Director at CBI

A I joined CBI in September 2014, after nearly a 20-year career in manufacturing. I spent two of my four years at university, living and working in France and I knew, when I came back and graduated, that I wanted to continue using my language skills. My university city had a strong manufacturing sector with good exporting links, so it made sense to choose that sector. I started working for a company that made static caravans and at the time, they exported over 40% of their volume predominantly to France. I had stayed on sites like these as a youngster but hadn't appreciated the vans were actually made in the UK. The company also supplied to Holland and Belgium, but France was the main market. It was fascinating. I learnt a massive amount about sales, after sales, working through distributors, and learned a whole new set of vocabulary that certainly hadn't been part of the university curriculum. I then went from there to a toy company, which ironically makes the toys that my 10-year-old is

playing with now – perhaps I should have stayed, I could have taken advantage of the company shop. That company exported on a huge scale to over 100 countries direct into retailers and via distributors (there were no online sales channels then). International sales did become the common thread to my roles, all of which were in SME businesses based in Yorkshire and the Humber. As a result, I had the opportunity to travel all over the world, learning so much about different business cultures from countries you may never have considered visiting on holiday to those which were regular destinations – collecting money we were owed in Kuwait made for an interesting experience! I feel that I was very lucky to have such opportunities at such an early point in my career.

Following another stint in security print, I decided, after 20 years, it was time to look for something different. The CBI was indeed very different and I think I have been quoted as saying "I've landed on a different planet".

Q Given that you've been all over the world working with different cultures, are there any learning curves or key things that you've taken with you into the CBI?

A One thing I noticed early on was the attitudes towards dress and what was acceptable, and not, in different business cultures. The Europeans were more casual in their dress but they were quite focussed in their business dealings, in the Middle East traditional dress was worn and certain protocols observed. My colleagues and I would always wear formal suits for any meetings, which at the time was considered the norm, but with the dress code becoming less important, it was important that we had still done our homework on the businesses we were dealing with, the countries they operated in and what was likely to make a difference. Often it is the small things that make an initial impact and I think I've always tried to remember that. Fast forward to the present day where the vast majority of business meetings are still taking place virtually and I think it's fair to say that dress code is much further down the priority list than it once was. Just understanding that countries are different in their approach to business and negotiations is interesting and it is well worth learning what those differences are. When I went to the Arab countries, I read something called the Arab World Handbook and really took the time to digest it. I was a lone female going into a very different business culture and I had to make sure that I respected the customs there and as a result our business dealings were successful.

Continues overleaf →



with Beckie Hart

Q What would you say has been your biggest challenge during your career?

A In the early years of my career all the businesses I worked in were very male dominated, and I had to prove that I was credible if I was to be taken seriously. For instance, that meant spending time working in the production environment or in the labs, warehouse or after sales, not just having a quick chat with colleagues in those areas. I knew that if I wanted to be taken seriously, when I asked a question on behalf of a client, about what was and wasn't possible from a manufacturing perspective, then I needed to have experienced the manufacturing environment, have spent time with those who worked in it and not just rely on what I was being told. I'd occasionally get comments such as; "Oh well, the client doesn't know what they're talking about" or "Oh, what does she know, she's only the sales person" so being taken seriously and really being all over what was possible or what could be possible was important.

From a CBI perspective, the ongoing impact of the EU negotiations, and more recently the impact of coronavirus pandemic, has been challenging for our members and of course, it is still going on. From our perspective, we're here to make sure that our members have as much information as they possibly can, and to get as much evidence in from them so that when we go to present to the Chancellor or other Ministers, we have a really good understanding of what businesses are facing and what solutions they need to overcome those challenges. It's tough because you can't see people face-to-face and you can't go and visit their operations, so it is more difficult to get a really good understanding of what's going on in their world.

Q How effect has the COVID-19 pandemic had on you on a day-to-day basis, and on your working environment?

A We closed our offices very early as we had a suspected case on the 12th March and because the colleague in question had visited both the London office and a regional office, we took the early decision to our offices immediately. That meant very quickly rolling out the plans we'd been discussing, but not yet put into action. So, by the 13th March, our whole company, which is about 180 people, were working from home. Fortunately, we did have some insight already, because our Beijing office had been working from home since January, so we had good intel from them regarding what to expect. They have since been back in and out of the office because, of course, Beijing went into a local lockdown again.

During lockdown, I stayed at home with my children whilst my husband worked in a factory making an essential products. This meant that home schooling was down to trying to balance my work time with the children's needs, and, as you've just seen on this call – one of them wants me to listen to his drum practice and the other wants help with French, so it's been a delicate balancing act at times. That has been one side of it, but the other has been talking to our members as they've been through this process from the initial two or three weeks, where they were being bombarded with information, some of which was contradictory and dependent on where they were in the country or what sector they were in to

the longer term health impact on their work force and their families. Seeing businesses just trying to take on board all of what was happening around them and then trying to work out what they could do, and how they could ensure their colleagues and customers were safe whilst still trying to keep the business going made me understand very clearly where we could best help them and that was to cut through the noise, give them concise, unambiguous information and opportunities to talk to others to share best practice.

I've been really humbled by how businesses have responded. I've been concerned about who supports the HR Directors at times, because there is no precedent for what they are dealing with and every day they seem to be confronted by something different and that's quite a challenge. We have still got a long way to go. We are discussing with the Government now what economic stimulus might look like and how they can continue to support businesses that are nowhere near open yet and have encouraged businesses who are operating, to share some of their best practice because so many of them have done amazing stuff to instil confidence in their employees, in their clients and in their supply chains. It's just giving as much help as we possibly can to businesses and help with their individual challenges.

Q Are there any particular key skills or strategies that you think businesses will need in the months ahead?

A Forecasting cash flow is number one. What it's going to look like for the next month, six months, eighteen months and what that means for their relationships with both their supply chain and also their customers. Where do they think there might be opportunities for them, because there will be opportunities for some businesses but they need to think where they can re-purpose or change their business model to cope with what we think is coming along in the short-term up to the long-term.

We're advising businesses to talk amongst their networks to understand what they've been doing. I think businesses have needed to concentrate 'in the business' rather than 'on the business' and they've had to have a laser like focus on survival. Looking externally and discussing how they've found it, what they've learned and their experience in general has been beneficial, whether that's how you're dealing with test and trace, sick pay or furloughed staff, it's actually really good to listen to what other businesses are doing.

Q What has been the most rewarding thing about working for the CBI?

A Without a shadow of a doubt, understanding what the business community does, not only in our region, but nationally. I think when you work for an individual business, you will know your product or service, client base and your supplier base very well. I've been lucky to have insight into the amazing things so many of our regions businesses make or provide and it has made me realise the variety of different jobs that can exist within one business.

It's also been fascinating to understand what LEPs, Combined authorities and local councils do and the contribution that the FE and HE sector make. Our support of the breakfast clubs, run by the Greggs Foundation, has given me an opportunity to bring different businesses into schools to share with pupils the different types of careers that are accessible to them. Using our newly honed virtual skills, I think this could extend even further to include virtual tours and demonstrations and really bring the world of business to life.

Q How do you anticipate your role or career might develop over the next 12 months?

A I do think that for the next twelve months there will be a very blended approach to going into the office. We, like many other businesses, have proved that, to a large extent, we can work remotely however, I do think we've missed being in the office. I certainly have. When I first went back into the office in June for a day,

I have to say, I was giddy with excitement. My role will be helping businesses work out how they can be part of the economic recovery, and how they are going to approach new working practices, how they'll approach the inevitable recession, and how together, we can build back better from it.

Q Are there any key developments or trends you think we'll see in business in the next twelve months?

A The drive to digitisation, whether that's in manufacturing, or in companies who traditionally have been quite slow to adopt digital practices whatever they may be will be a key development. We've talked to a lot of businesses who have had to bring forward their digital adoption plans and strategies sometimes to the tune of years, not just months. So, I do think that there will be no going backwards from that. I think as new companies adopt more and more new technologies, that will have an impact on what the labour market looks like so, it is likely to be one of the bigger trends. I think they'll also be a massive focus on education and retraining. I'd say they are my two key trends to watch out for.

We've been polling many of our members during our regular online meetings and one of the questions we asked a few months ago was "Are you preparing to go back into the office?... and none of them were, apart from the absolute few who needed to go in. That will have an impact on the commercial property and real estate market over the next twelve months for sure.

Q Do you think businesses have embraced the need to adapt those skills in order to move forward?

A I think there are quite a lot of businesses who are really thinking about how they can change things. Right now though, I think there's a lot of businesses that are still fighting for survival and trying to navigate the best way forward through the current crisis. I do think most businesses are pretty clear that things will be different when they are clear on what the 'new normal' may look like and are keen to adapt to that as quickly as possible.

CBI

The CBI exists to help business create prosperity for all

The CBI believe that business has the power to do good. To make a difference. When the economy booms, society prospers, and every business plays a part in protecting and growing that economy. They create opportunities, build, innovate and cultivate a better future for the next generation. That's the true purpose of business. And it's the CBI's purpose too.

They drive positive change through



Campaigning



Collaborating



Sharing



Empowering

What if 'right on paper' is just 'right on paper'?

So often when organisations look to hire new staff they go into the process stating that they want someone with a defined amount of experience. That could be one year, five years or ten years.

But, all too often, too much weight is placed on how much experience an individual has, rather than other skills and traits they possess, such as shared values with an organisation, the right mindset, the drive to succeed and a plethora of soft skills.

Very often a candidate with less experience and more drive to succeed

can perform far better in a role than someone with years of experience but who has become jaded and complacent. It's key to remember this and consider carefully throughout the interview process what is more important to your organisation; experience or a wide range of skills that will be beneficial for the role.



These are the things to look out for during the interview process that will tell you so much more about how a person will perform in a role than the amount of experience that they have...

Attitude and values

Does the potential candidate have a positive attitude and seem friendly, motivated and enthusiastic? A person's attitude can tell you so much about the type of employee they would be. If they're passionate, easy to communicate with and full of good ideas during the interview process, it's likely that this is their personality and that this is how they would be within a role.

A person's values are also incredibly important if you're considering hiring them to become a part of your organisation.

If you want a loyal, reliable employee who is likely to stick around long-term, the easiest way to find this is to choose an individual whose values are in alignment with those of your organisation.

No matter what it is that your organisation values most, knowing that a potential new hire feels the same way is a great sign that they'll fit into your organisation well and is something that could even end up being more significant than the amount of experience they have.

Soft skills

There are many roles where soft skills could be considered by many to be even more important than the amount of experience someone has. The World Economic Forum recently stated that 'social skills – such as persuasion, emotional intelligence and teaching others – will be in higher demand across industries than narrow technical skills' and this is something we're starting to see.

For example, if the role in question is one that is communication-heavy, it is likely more imperative to find a candidate who has excellent communication skills and is comfortable communicating with those around them, as well as with clients and customers, than someone with lots of experience and poor communication skills.

Finding a candidate who you know has the correct soft skills for the role in question will help differentiate them from others who don't have the right soft skills, no matter what their experience level might be.

Whilst experience is undoubtedly significant, it is worth considering whether to hire a person with less experience and a better attitude, mindset and determination to succeed within your organisation. Someone with better communication skills, interpersonal skills and initiative will always be a better hire than an individual with decades of experience but who doesn't work well within a team, has a poor attitude and little drive or motivation.

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