UNLOCKED:

CULTURE

CONTENTS

CREDITS

INTRODUCTION

The intangible truth

Culture – it's incredibly hard to define and even harder to create; also impossible to get away from. It's become a buzzword that organisations and leaders use to tell everyone why they're brilliant, without usually understanding their own culture or how to improve it.

Let's get it straight – a positive culture is not only about hybrid working, flexible hours or a casual dress code. It's a set of values, behaviours and actions that signal what your company stands for and what's important. Understanding your people and creating an inclusive environment that works for them, while remembering that fun is an intrinsic part of work, is a significant step in the right direction.

You can measure engagement, staff retention and job satisfaction in various ways but our experience is that too many organisations feel that culture is something they should leave to HR. But it's not an HR issue. It's engrained in everything an organisation does and should start at the top.

What is a culture to me? It's how you behave, what you stand for and who you are – it's your identity as a business. It's how all the different characters within your organisation mesh together. Your culture will never stand still; it should always evolve.

The tangible impact

Culture might be hard to define, but it has a very tangible impact on your business. When you neglect your culture, people will leave and your business will go backwards… It's our job to create an environment where our people are progressing, learning and developing; have a reward scheme which is industry leading; understand the business strategy and are excited by it; and enjoy coming to work.

For this magazine, we've brought together a range of views, from both inside and outside our organisation, on many aspects of culture. These include: *Cohesive cultures in global teams, How to create a high-performance culture* – where I speak to culture expert and best-selling author Damian Hughes; and *Scaling cultures without breaking them* – from entrepreneur Phil Burns.

I hope you'll not only find this magazine an interesting read, but a useful source of advice on how to solve your culture-related challenges.

If you'd like to discuss any of these articles or just want to talk culture, please get in touch.

Nick Baxter, CEO, The IN Group

HOW TO CREATE A HIGH-PERFORMING CULTURE.

Professor Damian Hughes is an international speaker, best-selling author, and alongside Jake Humphrey, co-host of the much-loved High-Performance Podcast. An expert within the world of sport, organisational development, and change psychology, Hughes helps organisations create high-performance cultures.

Damian Hughes

In a recorded conversation with The IN Group's CEO, Nick Baxter, and the founder and CEO of Caraffi, Graeme Paxton, they explored the ways in which organisations can create a high-performing culture. We've unpacked the highlights of their fascinating 90-minute session so you can find out how high-performance cultures are created.

NICK: What does high-performance mean to you? Has it changed since you started The High-Performance Podcast?

DAMIAN: It's changed massively, yes. Like a lot of people, I had a perception of high-performance that was stereotypical: it focused on coming out on top, winning the trophies, making money, and being a champion who was lauded. What preceded that was struggle, sacrifice, hard work, late nights, early starts, and all that goes with it. High-performance back then was solely focused on outcome.

That changed when I met Phil Neville, who was the head coach for England's Lionesses. Phil and his brother, along with a few former colleagues, bought a hotel just opposite Manchester United's Old Trafford. During the pandemic, they opened it up to NHS workers who needed a place to stay for free.

I told Phil that I admired what he did. I thought it was far-sighted, generous, and kind. What he said next was one of those penny dropping moments where the true meaning of high-performance to me shifted completely. He said, "I just think you've got to do the best you can, with what you've got, in the moment you're in."

I love how that way of seeing it acknowledges three important components: one, we all start from different places; two, we've all got different resources available; and three, we're all in a different time in our lives. When I look at high-performance that way, it forces me to ask myself, "right now, wherever I am and whatever I'm doing, am I doing the best that I can? If I answer "yes" to that then it stops me falling into the trap of comparing myself to others, and telling myself that "I've got to be number one. I've got to hit a certain figure. I've got to be in a certain position." That's not helpful.

NICK: Do you think there's a fundamental difference in high-performance because it depends on what someone does, or have you noticed a consistency regardless of what people do?

DAMIAN: In over the hundred or so interviews for The High-Performance Podcast, we haven't had a single definition of what high-performance means with any consistency. That said, a brilliant example of what it means to me

personally came from the rugby player, Jonny Wilkinson. He spoke about the struggle and the sacrifice in his career which were what he felt drove him to get to be the top of his game.

Compare that to Dan Carter, the New Zealand rugby player. Arguably, he and Wilkinson are pretty much equals in terms of their success. But they came from completely different places: Carter just played for the sheer joy of playing, whereas Wilkinson did it for the sheer fear of losing. This is a brilliant illustration that there's no right or wrong way when it comes to high-performance; only what's best for you.

So much of what we do is an amalgamation of the physical and the mental, and even what you might term the spiritual. It's simply about knowing how to bring out the best in people.

I worked with a Premiership rugby team a few years ago, who were close to collapse and in a state of crisis. How did they get there? An inconsistent team performance: when they were good, they were very good, but when they were bad, well, they were pretty bad.

> ## 66
> **Thinking about it in terms of who ends up on top, can often lead to unhealthy versions of high-performance – for anyone, doing anything.**

I said, "right, let's start by looking at when you've been very good and then divide your performance into two categories – hard skills and soft skills. Hard skills we can quantify and measure. For the softer skills – including effective communication, confidence, and team spirit, etc. – these are the ones we'll find harder to measure."

I asked them to think about when they'd been very good, what percentage of their performance had been down to the hard stuff, and how much down to the soft stuff? Like most elite performers, they said 30% is the hard stuff, and 70% the soft stuff, because when you're playing at that level a certain level of competence is a given. So those numbers made sense. Then I asked them how much time they invested in the development of soft skills: they said very little. Why so little you might be wondering?

It's the same every time – soft skills are incredibly hard to measure and quantify. Now let's translate this to the business world.

It's rare that what you do is substantially different to your competitors, though things like price, size, or where you're located will vary of course. Think about this from a personal perspective and ask yourself why you decide to work with the people that you do? Why do you buy from one business over another? I guarantee it's mainly down to the soft stuff such as the relationships that we've forged; the way you feel listened to as a client; how much empathy you're shown; and how they relate to you on a human level. That's where a firm's competitive advantage lies because when treated like a human, you're able to cope under pressure, and these tie directly into how much effort you put into developing your soft skills.

GRAEME: Is high-performance something that everyone can achieve?

DAMIAN: It goes back to the definition of high-performance. If you start by seeing it as doing the best you can in the moment with the resources you've got, then yes, everyone can be a high-performer, because it's about you

improving, not your performance compared with someone else's. Thinking about it in terms of who ends up on top, can often lead to unhealthy versions of high-performance – for anyone, doing anything.

I once asked Dame Kelly Holmes about how much of her success in the Olympics was down to her ability to run really fast, or her ability to run really fast under pressure. It was the latter, she replied. She explained that it wasn't all down to how hard she trained. Some of her coping skills andresilience came from dealing with personal trauma.

That's something important to remember: we all have mental health issues at some stage in our lives, whether it's stress, or depression, or a life-long battle with how much self-care we give ourselves. It's a scale that will vary for everyone, but something that will always impact our performance.

GRAEME: Do you believe that high-performers sometimes need to reverse engineer a narrative when they think about how they got to where they are because it's so hard to see at the time?

DAMIAN: Yes, they do, and studies about the stories we tell ourselves back this up. It's why if you interview an elite performer, you want to ask them about the traits that they consistently developed as opposed to how they achieved success in a particular season, for example. When you talk about those, you'll get closer to the real story.

What's always intrigued me about high-performance hasn't been seeing the wins and the bright lights that they bring, but what precedes them: the sacrifice, the dedication, the discipline, the hard work, the diligence, etc. I call all those traits and characteristics "the work in the shadows".

If you look at my own journey from a retrospective narrative, what I do now seems to make perfect sense. My dad founded one of those dark and gritty boxing gyms in Manchester City; it was an oasis in the middle of a concrete jungle. I grew up around guys who went on to become Olympians, boxing champions and achieve significant success, despite having a less than easy start in life. Back then, Manchester City was Europe's third poorest district. Yet despite the social deprivation, crime, gang culture, and unemployment, I feel really blessed that I grew up there.

Dad's gym really was an oasis. People would show up and felt seen, heard, and respected. Why did they? It was because we all made a concerted effort to comply with certain cultural norms. One of those was there was no bad language allowed in the gym. Now this wasn't about being virtuous, or taking a moral high ground, but because discipline was one of the non-negotiable behaviours that we had to develop when training. The coaches at the gym argued that when you're faced with a tough situation, and your first response is to swear, it indicates a lack of discipline that will probably cost you somewhere down the line.

Another thing we did to maintain self-discipline and keep the gym feeling like an oasis was to shake hands with everyone we met as soon as we came in, as a mark of respect. It didn't matter if we were going up against each other later on, we still had to respect that self-discipline as it was part of what shaped our cultural norms. When you think about culture in that way, you start to view culture as fundamental to our societal DNA.

Another thing that went on to shape what I do today began in university, when I was talking to a lecturer about possible research avenues.

He told me that they didn't actually do research there, they did something he called "me-search". "Me-search?", I wondered. Yes, he explained, because we only make sense of things that have happened in life when we look back on them. That's why he preferred the term "me-search" to "research". From that moment, I became fascinated in the fields of organisational psychology and culture.

NICK: Culture has to be one of the most overused terms in business. What I prefer to talk about is high-performance and how this ties to expectations. To me, high-performance is seen in a person's attitude and work ethic. How much they care about what they do directly correlates to how willing they'll be to go that extra mile. All the time I see extremely capable people with so much potential ahead, yet years later they've failed to realise that potential which I believe comes from not pushing hard enough or jumping high enough.

GRAEME: I agree, it's why at Caraffi, when we're working with clients our conversations almost always begin with culture, which is rather challenging because culture is an amalgamation of so many different factors. What we talk about instead is output, because output we can measure. Do you agree with that way of thinking about culture?

DAMIAN: Using the term "culture" is problematic because it's an abstraction, which I don't encourage leaders to use. This point was made loud and clear in some advisory work I did with twenty coaches from the Football Association.

The first thing I asked them to do was to write down how they defined culture and then share it with everyone else. Guess what came back? Twenty different definitions of culture, which perfectly demonstrates why the term is rather unhelpful to organisations and the people in them.

What is helpful, however, is to find a common language that brings our notions of culture to life. By looking at an organisation's behaviours and traits that manifest as culture, so we reduce misunderstanding and communicate more effectively when talking about it.

Why exploring common language is constructive stems from organisational psychology studies in the early 1990s, carried out by Stanford University's James Baron and Michael Hannan, and published in 2002. They lectured on the ways that they believed culture could drive competitive advantage. The issue was, at the time, they had no data-driven evidence to back it up – which is less than ideal in academic research. As they were close to Silicon Valley, they got some funding to go explore and see if their ideas had legs. Their exploration continued for nearly twenty-five years.

Five types of organisational culture

Baron and Hannan identified five types of culture. Sometimes they saw an amalgamation of two or more cultures at play, but generally these five categories crop up over and again in organisations, regardless of their size, sector, or industry.

Star Culture

The first type is a star culture. These are organisations that raise a heap of VC funding and can hire the best talent, pay the highest salaries, get the plushest of offices that they fill with cool stuff. Then they sit back and wait for all that talent to come together and deliver spectacular success. One of the startups Baron and Hannan researched was Google. Whilst Google was a monumental success, the reality is that around 98% of star cultures eventually crash and burn.

Many years ago, I interviewed Diego Lopez, an ex-head coach of the football team, Real Madrid and spoke about star culture. When I asked him about what he found as a leader, he said it's like a restaurant kitchen: everyone wants to be the head waiter, or head chef, but no one wants to wash the dishes. This illustrates the chief flaw in star cultures.

Autocratic Culture

The second type of culture Baron and Hannan identified is an autocratic culture. This is where a CEO or founder runs the company from a "my way or the highway" way of doing things, like Steve Jobs did at Apple until he was fired by the board as a result. Autocratic leaders make flawed decisions because they become complacent or arrogant, and fall into their eventual demise, and this risks dragging the organisation down with them.

Bureaucratic Culture

The third type of culture they termed bureaucratic, and it is where an organisation makes decisions by committee. This results in rules, regulations, policies, and endless procedures that slow an organisation down, and make innovation and transformation nigh impossible.

Engineering Culture

Fourth came engineering cultures. Despite the name, these focus on people's technical expertise above all else, and don't refer to engineers or the engineering industry. These organisations recruit people because they're technically good at their job but don't place much importance on a person's behavioural traits. This fundamentally flawed way of running an organisation means people end up defending their territory, because they're the specialists and not you. The result? Sharing ideas and working creatively grind to a halt, and ultimately stagnate the company's ability to grow.

Commitment Culture

The fifth and final culture Baron and Hannan termed a commitment culture, which starts by asking, "What's our sense of purpose?" and "What are we here to achieve through our shared sense of purpose?" Organisations with this type of culture clearly define their values and identify the behaviours that underpin how they make decisions – and all of these tie directly to their sense of purpose.

Which culture leads to high -performance?

Over twenty-five years tracking organisational culture proved that commitment cultures won hands down every time – on average by around 22% when Baron and Hannon measured things like market share, speed of growth, profitability, and employee turnover.

Their evidence, along with years spent working in organisations and observing cultures, is why I believe what I do: high-performance cultures can only be created when there's a shared sense of purpose and measurable behaviours that demonstrate commitment. These are what empower us to overcome the challenges we face, and find what we all need individually, to reach our personal best.

HOW TO CREATE A PEOPLE STRATEGY FOR COMMERCIAL SUCCESS.

Graeme Paxton in conversation with Kate Hodsdon.

Graeme Paxton is the founder of Caraffi, The IN Group's talent advisory and employer branding experts who help organisations devise effective people strategies. For many years, Graeme has believed that HR can and should do more. So Caraffi provides people leaders with a clear, big-picture view of the talent landscape, helps them create brilliantly simple solutions to their core challenges and works with them to make the talent function a driver of business success. Find out more here.

Starting points
First of all, it's important to note that great people strategies are very, very rare.

In twenty years of consulting with people leaders, I reckon that only around 10% of the people strategies I see could be classed as a "strategic strategy." The remaining 90% are tactical people strategies. I believe this is the primary reason chief people officers or HR directors are not considered in CEO succession planning.

Chief people officers, heads of human resources, and HR directors all seem to struggle with the same thing – how to articulate a people strategy so it's recognised as a business driver, and not as a subservient support service.

The best people strategies are the ones that demonstrate how the people function drives the company's growth and can be measured and tracked as such. You cannot be seen as strategic if you can't write a clear strategy.

What keeps a CEO awake at night?

There are three things that keep a CEO awake at night. One, customers: have we got enough of them, are they spending enough money with us now and is that set to continue or grow in the future? Two, cash: do we have enough money to fund the growth, expansion, or acquisitions we want? Three, talent: have we got the right people, in the right jobs, who are doing the right things?

How is a CEO reassured these are getting done?

Easy. A clearcut strategy, target metrics/KPIs, and accurate data to track performance.

Customers are owned by the chief marketing officer (CMO) and cash is owned by the chief financial officer (CFO). Both have clearly defined strategies and clearly align KPIs with the performance of the business. A glance at any analyst report of a FTSE 250 or Fortune 500 company will show you a chairperson or CEO statement peppered with metrics, graphs and insights relating to customers (customer acquisition, customer retention/growth, lifetime value of a customer etc.) and cash (EBIT, profit conversion, margin etc.). There is no surprise that these two positions have become the most likely succession to CEO. They have defined a path and draw a direct line between their performance and the success of the business; they matter.

Now let's look at how talent is run and owned, which is the third thing that keeps CEOs up at night. The chief people officer, or HR director, is hardly ever considered as a potential successor for the CEO. Why's that? Is the business world against them? No, I don't think

so, nor is their role less important. According to PWC's Pulse Survey last year, more than three-quarters of CEOs say that hiring and retaining talent is unquestionably their greatest pathway to growth – outweighing digital transformation investment and cutting costs. Therefore, the role of people leaders is critical to CEOs and the board.

Where HR directors and chief people officers go wrong

The reason that the people function doesn't get considered is because it rarely articulates its importance to the success of an organisation by writing a cohesive and measurable strategy. Knowing that alone is one of the key differentiators between what we see as forward-thinking CPOs and service-led HRDs. I use that terminology for the following reason.

Human resources has renamed and rebranded itself goodness knows how many times over the last twenty years. HR director was the norm, then they were given the title of chief HR officer. Chief HR officers redefined themselves as chief people officers, and I'm sure we'll see yet more rebranding in time.

What does this mean? Unfortunately, it means that a people function struggles to position itself as strategic or commercially minded. The impact of that perception is a loss of influence on the board. Brutal as that might sound, it's what I have seen from real world experience consulting on all things people for the best part of two decades.

The fact that HRDs and CPOs are not considered in succession planning is a direct consequence of what seems like a collective, sector-wide

> ## " The best people strategies are the ones that demonstrate how the people function drives the company's growth and can be measured and tracked as such.

inability to draft clear, memorable, relevant, and commercially aligned people strategies. As an aside, to avoid using three titles every time I talk about people leaders, from now on, I'll just use CPO, but am referring to anyone who heads a people function.

The four drivers that will give you a successful people strategy

One - Where is the business going?

Before writing any people strategy, CPOs need to truly understand where their business is going. You can't write a people strategy or create a winning culture until you understand the mission. Ask yourself simple questions like "How does this company make money?" or "What revenue streams, products, geographies are in focus?" or "How will the business need

to evolve to maximise its potential/realise its ambitions?" To be considered as a strategic influence on any organisation you need to be a businessperson that knows a great deal about people, NOT an HR expert that knows a little about business.

Two – What is your value proposition as a people function?

A CFO worries about the investor value proposition and owns it. A CMO owns the customer value proposition. Both are crystal clear about what that means, and how it is delivered so value is demonstrable.

CPOs don't tend to take that level of ownership. Sometimes an employer value proposition (EVP) is outsourced to marketing (wrong). Sometimes it's outsourced to

recruiters (wrong again). Sometimes it's outsourced to learning and development (wrong, wrong, wrong). Your EVP is the essence of your culture and the distillation of who you are. Prioritise the creation of an authentic EVP which is unique, compelling and relevant; it's your north star and will provide the bedrock of any measurable and scalable people strategy.

How do you create a purpose-led EVP? Begin by asking these five questions:

1. Why should people work in our organisation?
2. Why do they love our organisation/what do they dislike?
3. Do we have the talent density we require to achieve success?
4. Do we communicate well with our people?
5. Have we built the right environment for high-performance?

Three – Measure your people function and align your metrics to business performance

The majority of CPOs measure the outputs of their people function. They list the number of hires made in this type of role with this type of pay grade; they count the number of complaints lodged against the organisation; how many tribunals they had or managed to avoid; the number of performance reviews completed; and how much it costs to run their people function. Sometimes in people and culture teams metrics include how many communications have gone out; the range of

incentives they've brought in; the engagement levels for events and personal development talks.

These are all well and good but fall into what Gallup would term, in their article [Why HR Leaders Never Become the CEO, but Should](#), as "keep your job safe metrics", which is a way of defending your function by highlighting what's been done. These don't carry the kind of impact that CEOs listen to.

This isn't an opinion; it's based on analysis and reporting. Look at how annual reports are written, or what shareholder quarterly calls cover. In both of these, you'll see an abundance of tracked and evaluated metrics, such as customer growth, customer acquisition costs versus the lifetime value of a customer, the average value of a basket, or how many new accounts have been won through lead generation and new business. Why is that? Because they know the metrics to measure and how to show their strategic value to a business's goals.

For investors, the CFO will show how the business is performing. They measure how customer conversions impact revenue, what a business is spending to grow, where they've cut costs, and how these tie to EBITDA. The best CFOs do this with metrics based on the past and use forecasting to show how this might raise further investment and grow the business even more.

When it comes to reporting about a people function, what do you hear from a CEO? "Our people are our most important asset." Full stop. But are they measuring it? No. Can they prove it? Rarely in a way that carries clout. I don't have numbers, but I do know HR, and I can tell you that almost all people strategies highlight how they've been activated, and not how they've been aligned from the start to business objectives. What I see most of the time is activation tactics that are measured and then explained as "strategic." If all you do as a CPO is measure the service you offer, by tactical box ticking, then be prepared to be seen as a back-office support service and not a strategic driver that is essential to your organisation's commercial performance.

It was the same for marketing twenty-five or thirty years ago, before CMOs had technology to map, measure, and evaluate their impact on the business. Before marketing got its act together, sales were counted as revenue, and marketing a cost. Now, the vast majority of sales functions sit under marketing, report to the CMO, and deliver a marketing-led growth strategy. How did this happen? Marketing aligned with business objectives, identified personas to target, set performance KPIs, designed a tailored activation plan, continually measured performance and communicated successes and lessons using defined data points.

Four – Activate your people strategy across your employee experience metrics to show if you're doing a good job, or way off the mark

You know where the business is going, what your EVP is and how you can measure the success of your strategy against the performance of your organisation. The thinking is done, but the hard work is just getting started. The fourth driver of any people strategy is about activation through colleague experience. This means creating a detailed plan for every colleague touchpoint, including TA, L&D, internal comms, business partnering, leadership, payroll, rewards, ops, and systems.

After all, strategy without execution is mere hallucination.

WHY YOUR CHANCES OF GOING FROM CPO TO CEO ARE LOW.

Graeme Paxton speaks to Kate Hodsdon.

In this article, I talk about the advantages that working strategically rather than tactically offers people leaders. In it, I address some hard truths about the common perceptions that CEOs and their board have about CPOs and argue they're the reason barely any CPOs make it to CEO.

It's sad, often unfair, but that's how it is for 99% of business. Now, I don't have hard data to back up that claim but have spent over fifteen years working with people leaders and following their careers, so stand by it from experience.

To illustrate: picture your board of directors. Now, imagine you've just heard your CEO's leaving. What is the first thing that comes to mind? "Hmmm, I wonder who's going to replace them … ?" Naturally, this varies according to your firm's sector, industry, service, and product offering, but still, imagine the board sitting around an oversized table. You'll have the CEO and alongside them probably the CPO, CTO, CFO, CMO, CSO and COO. Who do you see taking over? I reckon it was either the COO, CMO, or CFO, right?

If you just imagined the CPO taking over as chief exec, you're in such a small minority, I'd love to know. The fact is, we just don't see people leaders in the same way that we do business leaders.

Why is that? Why do we not equate people leadership with business leadership? How can we actively change this perception? And, what can CEOs do differently when it comes to the training and development so that the next generation of people leaders get to change this? Let's consider these one by one, now.

Why we don't equate people leadership with business leadership
Often, when you move up the ranks in HR, you rarely get the same breadth of business experience compared to other managers. For marketing and business execs, there's always a chance to move around internally, or switch from sales to operations, marketing to digital, etc. In the people and culture function, managers generally stay within their department, so as they move up their career ladder,

you'll rarely find that they're groomed for a major leadership role, let alone as CEO.

If we go back to PWC's 2022 C-Suite Pulse Survey, we see that more than three-quarters of CEOs surveyed believed that the most critical factor in their business's growth depended on hiring and retaining talent. So, successfully communicating your organisation's vision and values moves from a nice-to-have to a must-have for your business's survival and growth, doesn't it?

Now let's think about that in the context of what Gallup's State of the Global Workplace: 2022 revealed about employee engagement: 85% of staff are either not engaged or actively disengaged at work – this means only 15% are engaged – which is a terrifying stat.

The role of the CPO to commercial growth
Not strategically planning how to motivate and engage your employees as a CPO poses another threat to your potential climb to CEO.

As Harvard Business Review reported that 70% to 90% of mergers and acquisitions fail to deliver due to cultural clashes and a dilution in the merged companies' purpose, a robust people strategy is increasingly important to growth and the bottom line. Even though I'd argue this level of strategic planning should come from the board in the lead up to any M&A, blame can frequently be directed at the CPOs involved.

With M&A deals continuing to drop from their 2021 high, there is mounting pressure for growth by innovation. Once again, this comes back to people, and how they feel at work. Are they empowered to be autonomous? Does your culture encourage personal growth by experimentation, open reflection, and learning by failing?

I believe these emotional environments are the starting point for innovation, as Harvard Business School's Amy Edmondson backs up. In research spanning thirty years, Edmondson has shown time and time again,

that growth can only be driven by innovation when employees feel psychologically safe enough to fail, without fear of punishment. Commercial growth stagnates when people play safe out of the sheer fear of failing.

If the shoe were on the other foot
As we know, most CEOs have risen up through operations, sales, finance, or marketing. Bar marketing, where empathy and understanding into why we do what we do is a major part of success, CEOs aren't often experts in emotional, psychological, or behavioural people-matters. But CPOs are. They have a natural talent for building trust and knowing how best to invest in their people, which is why they often stay in the people function.

I wonder what would happen if we were to give people leaders business experience and offered business leaders people experience. It's pretty obvious that CPOs rarely get the opportunity to become CEO, but what about if the shoe was on the other foot?

When all leaders, not just the CEO, fail to spend any time in a people function – which we've made loud and clear is one of the most valuable assets a company has – I'm not sure things will change at the top.

CORPORATES, CREATIVES, AND CONTRARIANS – WHY MISFITS ARE THE KEY TO UNLEASHING THE FULL VALUE OF YOUR CULTURAL MIX.

Alf Rehn speaks to Kate Hodsdon.

Alf Rehn is a professor of innovation, design, and management at the University of Southern Denmark, and is recognised as a thought-leader in the field of innovation and creativity. In addition to being an academic, he is a bestselling author, a strategic advisor, a board professional, and a globally active keynote speaker. For more, see alfrehn.com or connect with Alf on LinkedIn.

A new understanding of your most valuable resource
"Sure, she has a great portfolio and the competencies we need, but I am just a bit worried whether she's the right fit for our culture. Her views were somewhat contrarian in quite a few of the questions I asked."
"Yeah, I was thinking the same. She came across as quite confrontational in the interview, and I think it is important that we retain our team culture of psychological safety."

Alf Rehn

"So she's a no, then? We're going for Bob?"

"Yeah, I think he'll fit in well with the team."

The conversation above is made up, but its sentiment is still alive in organisations today. Hiring a corporate bod? Not a problem. Hiring someone conventionally creative? Still fairly easy. A contrarian? Hang on, what exactly do you mean? Let's not go crazy.

Leaders have become so enamoured with the values-aligned harmonious company culture and ever-elusive notion of "cultural fit" that many organisations suffer from not just a lack of healthy DEI, but a critical lack of contrarians.

The result? Organisations with hard-working, earnest, and dependable corporates and creatives, and almost no creative friction or innovation potential. With culture, fit is as important as misfit.

Just to serve as an illustration, let's imagine that contemporary organisations have three archetypal forms of workers – corporates, creatives, and contrarians. The corporates are the core of the organisation. They're the kind of people who do what they are asked to do and do it well, and who fulfil the tasks that take care of business. They may not always be dazzling, but without them, the company would fold within a week. The creatives – again generalising to make a case – often do the more showy kind of work in the business – think branding, comms, design, marketing, and all things digital, etc. They use their creative capabilities to support the corporates, and bring in a level of novel thinking that can both support the way a business operates, and breathe a little razzmatazz in to the mix.

What is often forgotten in all this is that there is a third archetype, one which goes against the grain of the first two. This category is regularly overlooked, frequently disliked, generally misunderstood and at times, simply despised (and then fired). In my experience working in innovation, contrarians are often perceived as the ultimate enemy of a cultural cohesion, and the smooth running of a corporation. This is far from wise for leaders today.

What makes a contrarian, contrarian?

As a word, "contrarian" evokes a plethora of emotions and reactions. To some, it refers to an iconoclast, someone brave enough to say the unsayable, or do what few of us would ever dare. Thinking about the likes of Christopher Hitchens (one of the most outspoken writers of all time); Germaine Greer (famous feminist and author of The Female Eunuch); Anita Roddick (who founded of The Body Shop decades before vegan beauty and natural skincare became a norm); Warren Buffet (the world's fifth richest man and founder of Berkshire Hathaway is what's called a "contrarian investor"); and then there's Michael Burry (the investor who The Big Short was based on). To others a contrarian is a troublemaker, someone who challenges you and disagrees out of stubbornness, arrogance, or bloody- mindedness. There's a tendency to view contrarians as innately confrontational, however, this does not fully grasp the contrarian mindset.

It is this misunderstanding and misrepresentation that leads so few organisations to actively seek out contrarians when hiring, and why the value of the contrarians they do have lurking around seldom benefits the business – who wants a confrontational colleague on their team? Rather few, it seems.

Some think that creatives are contrarians, but I'd challenge that. Most creatives take direction from corporates (i.e., leaders and the board) without pushing back or challenging assumptions). They work in a systematic way that follows fairly standard processes. It's only contrarians who can shake things up for either of them. Corporates feel threatened and annoyed by a contrarian's questioning, yet without that type of unconventional energy, don't wonder if you're not truly innovating.

We all know the story: throughout history, organisations and institutions have been built by people with a unitary vision and a shared purpose, led by people who could establish this – corporates and creatives together. When we look to the great organisations of the past, this is what we often think about; they had a commitment to an idea, the steadfast pursuit of an ideal, and the absence of doubt. Great companies back then had great cultures, ones where people were aligned and wholeheartedly "all in.".

That's a nice story, suitable for a historical epic or a series on Netflix, but it is a rather simplistic way to consider culture and organisations. Almost all organisations – past, present, and future – comprise people who follow the script, toe the line, and accept the company narrative.

This is where contrarians come in. Whereas many still think that history is made by great leaders, who craft great stories, true change agents are a tiny minority who opt to go against the grain and challenge why "the way we do it around here" has ended up a kind of organisational holy grail. They are the ones asking why things have to be a certain way, or asking why best practice for one means best practice for all.

Leaders might not always say this out loud, but the really great ones tend either to be contrarians themselves (such as Gandhi), or expertly capture the value that contrarians offer. Who other than Steve Jobs would think a black and white TV ad that features Gandhi might just be the best way to sell computers?

Understanding contrarians

Throughout the history of innovation, one single fact has held true, again and again. The most powerful agents of change and renewal have never been those who most embraced the existing company culture, but have rather been those who have dared to question the very same. Neither Spencer Silver nor Arthur Fry were what you'd call "true believers" when it came to 3M, yet they created the PostIt note. Steve Jobs, for all his personal flaws, resisted almost all notions of "proper business logic" that permeated his time(s). Few CEOs in fashion would agree with Patagonia's Yvon Chouinard who encourages customers not to buy more clothes from them just for the sake of it. Please, the environmentalist begs, use one of our repair kits, or send whatever you can't fix back to us so we can do it for you.

Whilst it is not something that we tend to emphasise in business books, the people who produce great innovation and enact great change are quite often a bit difficult, a tad ornery, and somewhat idiosyncratic. They are often allowed to be so because someone has recognised that despite being less than easy to work with, they can generate huge value by way of being contrarian. Often, contrarians get labelled as narcissists, perfectionists, or lone rangers who aren't collaborative. According to statistics, there will be some who do indeed tick those boxes, but generally, they're not. They're simply wired differently to most of us.

I'd argue this is why most organisations treat contrarians not too unlike viruses entering a healthy system. Rather than seeing them as important contributors, they are treated as something to be tamed or simply eliminated. The short sightedness of this should be obvious, but still needs to be voiced. Any culture, any society, and any organisation requires both a quantum of solace and a modicum of contrarianism. Without the former, chaos will reign. Without the latter, conservatism will.

Contrarians aren't always pleasant, but neither are personal trainers. Both push you to go beyond what is comfortable, which is sometimes painful, as all growth is. You can choose to ignore them but at your peril, as you'll simply stay as you are.

The contrarian mindset isn't always easy to wrap your head around. Contrarians are curious characters, particularly as they keep enquiring into assumptions and ideas far beyond most. Where few are comfortable to keep asking questions, contrarians have just started. Their questioning is not personal, it's part of who they are, and how they have come to experience the world. Contrarians are also courageous: they've forged a comfort with the discomfort of being seen as difficult, and still keep on pushing for – or outright fighting for – what they believe is right. This is because contrarians have something that many corporates and creatives lack, namely conviction. Although this will not always endear them to their peers, managers and bosses, they are valuable precisely because they won't negotiate over the things they truly believe in. Lastly, contrarians have character, a kind of factor X that is difficult to theorise. Corporates will bend, creatives will find new forms of expression, but contrarians rarely slot into frameworks they don't buy into.

As things stand, you are likely to have contrarians on the payroll already, yet you are getting little to no value added from them at the moment. Organisations are notoriously bad at harnessing the potential of contrarian thinking and often view it as disruptive and unhelpful. The first step to unlocking the potential of contrarian thinking is to create an organisational culture where risk-taking and diversity of thought is not only encouraged but rewarded. Leaders need to both formally and informally acknowledge the value of contrarians and reward them for their ideas. Furthermore, leaders should actively seek out contrarians' perspectives on important decisions and be prepared to make time to understand and analyse the differences between the majority opinion and the minority view.

One of the companies I work with on all things innovation-related is a major, publicly listed Nordic corporation in real estate. Their CEO is a humble and open person, who has often stated that he is rarely challenged by the people that work there – which includes a decent number of smart creatives. He cherishes the times when his company takes in students and interns for summer jobs. In fact, he makes a point of having lunch with them, so he can listen to their ideas. During one such lunch, an intern stated that they didn't get why there wasn't an easy-to-use online portal for the company's rentals. After hearing this, the CEO went to his executive team to find an answer. He was told that it had never been requested, and was far too complex to build easily. Out of curiosity, the CEO created a stealth team with the summer intern and some technicians from IT just to see what was possible. They got given just a few weeks to create a proof of concept, and what do you know, they'd already got a fully functional prototype site up, as well as a tsunami of interested sign-ups.

How contrarians help creatives

Some will still assume that creatives are, by their very nature, contrarians. This is an understandable, yet quite critically flawed assumption. Creatives tend to work from a pattern, a school, a design language. They are excellent at giving ideas shine, spin, and style, but their core skill is very, very rarely to challenge, but to beautify.

True contrarians are the key agents in making creatives challenge their current worldview. They're the kinds of thinkers who will not accept any of the ideas that your ad agency thought were "ground-breaking", as true and given.

Instead, I see a contrarian as a kind of creativity coach who helps creatives to break with their frameworks. In his work with the alternative rock'n'roll magazine , Ray Gun, graphic designer David Carson broke all rules of typography when trying to make an incredibly boring interview with Bryan Ferry more engaging (and to make a point about celebrity full stop). He set the whole interview in the font Zapf Dingbats (a set of graphic symbols that have no way of being connected to letters of the alphabet or even interpreted with any consistency). Why? Because he wanted to experiment and see what it would be like to break a traditional framework. The artist Tracey Emin's "My Bed" could not be more contrarian, whilst at the same time being as objective as objective can be. Sometimes, what scares us most is facing reality.

In an organisation with lots of creatives but few contrarians, you'll see creative work, but it will increasingly hew towards what's safe and already known. Over time, it will stagnate into a known language, crystallised forms, with little to give it energy or new form. With a few contrarians in the mix, creatives are empowered to experiment more and test things, and less wedded to design systems,

> **"**
>
> **There is a great likelihood that right now, there are contrarians in your organisation who are ready to challenge your strategy, your business model, your ways of doing business.**

and making things beautiful. The character of contrarians rubs off, as does their courage. For creatives this is a boon, if at times a challenging one.

How contrarians help corporates

Whilst the relationship between creatives and contrarians might be an understandable one – creatives have a touch of contrarians in them, after all – the collaboration between corporates and contrarians can be more fraught. At the same time, corporates need contrarians even more than creatives do.

Contrarians aid corporates by suggesting new avenues for thought, but challenging existing assumptions, and, maybe most importantly of all, by pushing for new forms of strategic thinking. Consider the case of an ecosystems run business. The old corporate logic was never to allow anyone to potentially benefit from the relationships you had paid dearly to establish. Then Apple and Amazon changed the game, with the contrarian logic of allowing

others to benefit from a captured audience – for a price.

There is a great likelihood that right now, there are contrarians in your organisation who are ready to challenge your strategy, your business model, your ways of doing business. It is also very likely that they haven't gotten the attention and the airtime they require, simply because the narrative works against them.

When Ray Kroc suggested that a fast-food chain's major value might lie in the real estate it held and/or controlled, few people agreed with him. He persisted and built McDonald's into a behemoth. When we think about milk, we think about something traditional and staid, but not if you're Oatley, the Swedish company. Granted they have not always been as contrarian in their marketing, but today they have gone full on contrarian and made anti-brand campaigns their thing. In Copenhagen, they've covered most transport hubs with a campaign that calls their own

marketing "spam", and actively encourages people not to sign up to their newsletter. As for their website, it deliberately breaks almost every best digital practice that you'll find. The result? A huge increase in brand awareness and levels of engagement that would be hard to measure fully. Courageous character matters.

Contrarians tend not to be great builders. Instead, they are great challengers of the status quo, the kind of people who wonder if a taxi company actually needs to own cars (Uber). Left to their own devices, contrarians can steer even the greatest company into the wall – lest we forget what happened to WeWork. – so we must be aware that the art of corporate collaboration with contrarians lies in recognising the power of alternate ways of seeing things, whilst not letting them completely run wild. Once again, the power of both/and thinking is important for contemporary strategy so it balances corporate logic and contrarian craziness.

Building a better mix

I imagine your organisation already has all the corporates it needs. To complement these, you want a hefty number of creatives to bring an aura of newness and forward thinking to your current offerings. The critical aspect will be the way you either embrace or shut out contrarians. If you hire for "cultural fit", you may be doing damage to your company without even realising it. And, if you ostracise those who do not live up to an arbitrary standard of "cultural fit", you may well be denying your company one of its most important developmental inputs.If you hire just to keep the culture "as is", you are denying your organisation what it needs to grow.

On their own, contrarians will never end up creating all that much. They are too difficult, too confrontational, and not inclined to enjoy the slow, long slog of producing things. They are, in their way, like salt. No one would enjoy a meal which is mostly made of salt. That said, few of us would enjoy a meal without salt either, and far too often one comes across food with too little salt than slightly too much. Contrarians are like the salt of your organisation. They bring out the best in the creatives, and they push the corporates out of their comfort zone.

So should you hire contrarians? Yes, yes you should. Not because of their contrarian attitude, but due to the ways they can help your organisation be all it can be. You need your corporates, for their organised, structured way of working you need to be functional. You also need your creatives to make you look good, sound great, and grow your brand awareness.

None the less, you also need contrarians, and you need to know how to take care of them.

There will be contrarians in your organisation already, unless they've been cowed into silence or drained by endless attempts to tame and change them.

You need to understand your employee mix – who is a corporate, who is a creative, and who just might be a contrarian. Having solid, hard workers should never be underestimated, nor should creatives. Yet the ideal mix for organisations wanting to innovate and grow is to make sure that you have enough contrarians, so everyone shines and can be who they are by nature.

SCALING CULTURES WITHOUT BREAKING THEM.

Frontier Economics is a consultancy that specialises in the fields of competition policy, Regulation, dispute support, public policy, and business strategy. Founded in 1999, with just a few economists in a tiny London office, they now have almost five hundred staff and seven offices across Europe. Offering economic advisory across major strategic, regulatory and policy issues, their clients are diverse and include global organisations, regulatory agencies, and government departments. Sector agnostic, Frontier, is known for its work in energy, technology and digital, telecoms, financial services, retail, transport, water, health, and education.

We asked Frontier's Managing Director, Phil Burns, to share his experience about scaling their business internationally without breaking their core culture.

How we broke the norm

When I describe myself as an entrepreneur, I can tell that most people are thinking, "An economist who's an entrepreneur? Really?" which makes me smile because they're right, economics is often seen as a rather dry academic field, the "dismal science.". But as founders back in 1999 when Frontier began, we were.

In those early days, we realised that we had a bunch of economic skills that were highly marketable in a world that was quite staid and academic, and far from service driven or commercially minded. We thought this created a wonderful opportunity. When you think about the decisions that government agencies make around whether to let a merger go through, or what happens in the water sector over price controls, for example, these matter massively to an organisation's bottom line and strategic direction. So, we worked entrepreneurially to provide economic advice and support that was tailored to a client's problems, communicated with clarity, so it could be easily translated into the client's decision-making.

Phil Burns

We prided ourselves on blending very high-quality economic analysis with this level of client care. In terms of the offering to clients, this was how we broke the norm in our particular field. Today almost all the consultancies in the markets we work in have upped their game, so we must of course stay ahead of that and also find new ways to differentiate ourselves from our rivals.

Dealing with abandonment issues

Throughout the 1990s we saw the collapse, break-up, and failed sales of many professional service firms, which some of us as founders personally experienced. Because many founders focused on sale rather than sustainability, and ran their business as an autocracy, staff felt abandoned when decisions were made that affected their livelihoods and careers, with zero say about how they felt about a merger or an acquisition.

It was not pleasant for those of us hit by this kind of leadership that takes its core assets for granted, but it's why we were hell-bent on making sure Frontier was different. Major energy went into thinking how we could grow into a sustainable and high-performing company where we could all flourish.

Merging siloes and devolving leadership

The original four directors each had a particular specialism and we managed our clients as we saw fit. At the beginning we mainly worked independently of each other, head down ploughing the furrows, yet we trusted one another to plough away for the benefit of the whole firm. Culture was not something we sat down and built a strategy for but came from how we worked day to day.

The somewhat independent way we worked for the first year or so meant devolved leadership was there from the off. However, with that came a centralised form of leadership too. Each week, we got together in the pub opposite our office for an exec meeting. This kept us connected with one another and was how we forged a sense of mutual understanding around the direction

of the firm.

As we thought about the business at large and our vision for it, we began investing time in working out how we would develop as an entity and what the right governance measures might be. We knew from experience that if we didn't establish our cultural roots, there would be fragility.

Why we said no to external investment

The two key ingredients to our culture successfully scaling were clear from the start: first, every employee would be a shareholder. This meant saying no to external investment and the external shareholders that always come with it. This has built a strong sense of affiliation in the firm, and a sense of shared endeavour and commitment.

The second ingredient was clarifying our values. We didn't do this through an agency coming in to "do" our branding and tell us which values would sound good: we did this as founders based on who we were and why those values mattered so much to us.

We identified that being open, interesting, profitable, and fun were what drove all of us and as simple as they sound, they just worked because we know how and what they feel like in the business day to day. Whilst some might challenge us on economics being fun, we had a blast from the off and to this day, nothing's changed.

Values as a market edge

Frontier's values and culture encourage everyone to bring their whole self to work. By not having a structure that equates being successful with knowing how to play a political game to climb the corporate ladder, we can just get on with our jobs. Our culture requires us to be engaged and entrepreneurial; to ensure that all parts of the firm strive to achieve their full potential; and that each part makes a strong contribution to

promoting our culture internally and enhancing our reputation and brand externally. This is how our culture has become a competitive strength: we focus on what matters and reject anything that doesn't.

We converted our values into a practical reality to live by. This is why we devolve significant leadership power into our practices, offices, and business management teams. We believe this encourages personal responsibility, entrepreneurialism, innovation, creativity, collaboration, teamwork, and respect. It can also create some inevitable confusion and messiness because we operate in a trust-based framework rather than a transaction-based model. So, especially for new joiners, this can take some time to navigate, but that can also be a positive learning experience.

Our central leadership ensures that our devolved leadership aligns with our values and purpose, and ensures the enablers are in place to build long-term sustainability so that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts.

Critically we saw growth as a function of how successful we were in living our values in building a strong culture, brand, and reputation. We never set a growth target – we felt that we would get the growth we deserved, and that we would trust ourselves to manage our business smartly to adapt ourselves for the growth we thought we might be able to achieve.

Seeing organisations as dynamic living organisms

This sense of growth - and success more widely - emerging naturally from the fundamentals of the business and the marketplace, and not something to be forced chimes with a broader view I take of our organisational design. And this is to think of a firm like ours as a dynamic living organism rather than an organisation to be led via rules, processes, power centres and

command and control.

I see the task of leaders as to nourish the healthy development of this living, evolving organism, so it flourishes and is high performing. But this doesn't mean that we can simply let everyone do what they want. That would most likely lead to a chaotic, dysfunctional, and unsuccessful business. Equally, for our business to develop in a healthy way, we should avoid veering towards the other end of the spectrum. As a self-managing company, we try to avoid swinging between each extreme in the following ways:

One – Ditch comfort blankets

We definitely do not want to cover everyone in a bureaucratic comfort blanket of rules to control the risks that can arise with devolved leadership and self-management.

This way of working comes from leaders and managers who fall into three camps: those who simply like to impose rules for rules' sake; those who would like rules imposed on other people but not themselves; and those who quite happily accept the comfort of rules imposed upon them. For all these people, rules create a superficial safety (or power), but they kill curiosity, innovation, and creativity. Unnecessary rules undermine accountability for people to act in the firm's best interests and create bloated management structures where rule-makers and rule-monitors inexorably increase overheads. You end up with managers who manage management and ultimately stand in the way of sustainable development.

Two – Resist hierarchies

Another comfort blanket is the call for superfluous clarity within internal structures. This we reject as it leads to hierarchical management systems, and a demarcation between practices, offices, and business management teams which undermine

cross-cutting partnerships and organic cultural growth.

Three – Stamp out group think

We do our best not to indulge another strong human instinct: the need to mix with like minded people. That undermines diversity and inclusion, innovation, builds group think and echo chambers, and puts a barrier in front of value-adding cross-practice/cross-office partnerships and partnerships between economists and BMT staff.

The underlying conscious and subconscious motivations that underpin these forces are extremely strong; indeed, they are hard wired within all of us to lesser or greater degrees. The role that both the central and devolved leadership plays is to "hold the space" and resist these forces. If you don't, then safety nets can evolve into a tangled mess that, over time, run the risk of strangling an organisation. Whilst this way of seeing scalable organisational design, and the culture that supports it, was something that grew naturally in Frontier, I was rather pleased to know a leading academic called Frédéric Laloux felt the same. His book Reinventing Organizations: A Guide to Creating Organizations Inspired by the Next Stage of Human Consciousness may sound grandiose but it's a must-read for all leaders interested in how to scale without becoming overly-regulated and getting bogged down in policies.

Growing pains when scaling culture

All that said, our experience, of scaling our culture as we grew without breaking it, has not been without its bumps. There was a degree of discomfort we had to get comfortable with along the way.

When we were relatively smaller, with 50 to 100 people, we scaled our culture by role modelling and being hands-on as directors. We don't run a kind of consulting business where we just fly in a director to have a few words of wisdom with our client and then fly them out again. We remain heavily involved in the coalface. So, through our directors' project work, our ethos, culture, and brand were laid down and communicated through daily, hand-in-hand engagement with junior staff.

As we grow, it is harder for that direct connection with all staff to be maintained, and this can weaken the communication and living of our culture to all. So, we've worked to build stronger cross-cutting networks around the firm that can allow our culture and values to be lived and experienced widely. When feedback via staff surveys suggests we might not be doing that as well as we could, a degree of humility is essential in tackling the good and the bad. Our values have stayed constant but as the business has grown by around 15% per year, how we have lived them operationally has evolved – which has kept us in a constant state of healthy adjustment, forcing us to face into the inevitable tensions and trade-offs that arise.

As we grow further, the importance of a strong cadre of leaders who not only have the full set of skills that make them excellent economics consultants, but also the deep levels of emotional intelligence that equip them for the challenges of leading a company like ours becomes ever more relevant and critical to our future success.

Scaling globally by behaving locally

When we open new offices, we expect that our leadership fosters both an authentic local culture that respects the local environment, clients and people, and also strongly connects to the whole-firm culture. It's not an either/or: we don't want cookie- cutter offices but nor do we want a local office culture that is so dominant it becomes a silo. It's the job of the leaders in those offices to hit both those objectives.

An entrepreneurial delegation of responsibility offers people an opportunity to consider how they'd bring a German, Spanish, or French mindset to the organisation whilst retaining connection to the whole firm culture. Happily, this cultural freedom has meant every office that we've opened has been successful.

Avoiding a rescue culture

Giving responsibility to people for the task that they own, helps us see if they've delivered what they've promised, and if they haven't, then we explore why not without care and open reflection that avoids a culture of blame, hiding, and rescue. It's a case of allowing a business to flourish by empowering people with supported learning by doing, without judgement and that respects our values.

Obviously, we have arrangements in place to try to avoid situations where big mistakes happen too late in the day: the way the projects are set up, the access staff has to colleagues and senior staff; the collaborative environment that has been created; and the ongoing QA we put in place are all critical ingredients. Because Frontier doesn't have external shareholders or organisational politics, the culture of collaboration has developed organically and strongly supports the high-quality work that is being done.

What we have learnt is that the worst thing in the world would be if we clamp down, micromanage, or give poor feedback that leads to a culture that shames and blames. That pushes people into being risk averse,

> **Our experience, of scaling our culture as we grew without breaking it, has not been without its bumps. There was a degree of discomfort we had to get comfortable with along the way.**

anti-learning, and undermines the values that we know has fostered our success.

So, where does the buck stop?

There are several answers to this question, as you'd expect, given the type of firm we are. To those to whom responsibility is devolved, we expect that this will be executed in the service of the firm as a whole. These responsibilities will vary across practices, offices, BMTs, and for each cohort of staff. We don't have detailed KPIs and balanced scorecards to monitor performance, but we do have mutually reinforcing discipline facilitated through open communication, feedback channels and performance reviews, with central leadership playing an important role in this process. And the central leadership itself is accountable to the wider group of Directors, our Board and our shareholders (our staff) for ensuring that our business runs smoothly day-to-day, and for creating the enabling conditions under which opportunities are optimised, risks managed, our culture and brand enhanced, to fulfil our potential and support our medium-term sustainability.

What about the money?

It's no accident that profitability is one of our values, and as a self-owned business, virtually all our profit ends up back in the bank accounts of our staff. The fairness of the division of the spoils is a critical driver of sustainability, one we work hard to get right. I saw the cost of getting it wrong time and time again with professional service firms in the 1990s and early noughties. Many

consultancies grew and then broke apart because their remuneration model ended up completely out of sync with the underlying value generators. And it was quite easy for those divisions to break off because the consultancies were run as silos so there was already no deep sense of connectivity to the whole.

At its best, culture embraces and aligns with the commercial realities of the markets we operate in. To attempt to disconnect the two is to invite trouble.

Look to the past when building the future

When you forget that as leaders your role is to make the business greater than the sum of the parts then you miss some great opportunities. Even worse – as history has taught us – if leaders see it only as a set of parts that can be functionally and transactionally moved about as they see fit, then the business will operate on very shaky foundations.

Sustainability requires a sense of shared purpose, with the governance, operational and behavioural elements aligned to that purpose. With this alignment, the inevitable tensions, and disagreements around "how" that purpose can be best fulfilled can be capable of being accommodated and addressed. Without that alignment however, the organism becomes dysfunctional and prone to breakdown. As such, success is not guaranteed: growth, expansion, changes in the market, and big shocks (like covid) require us to continually sense where the alignment is and where it is

COHESIVE CULTURES IN GLOBAL TEAMS.

Paul Mullins speaks to Kate Hodsdon.

Paul Mullins is an Executive Director at The IN Group and Investigo. Joining as a graduate recruitment consultant in 2010, Mullins now leads Investigo's US business and our global consultancy, strategy, and private equity business. Splitting time between the UK and our offices in San Diego, New York, Miami, and Philadelphia, Mullins has built recruitment teams in different specialisms and internationally. Mullins shares his personal reflections on how values shape culture, and culture shapes commercial growth.

Starting points

Over the last thirteen years, I've seen leadership trends ebb and shift, and seen firsthand the impact of culture on international growth. For me, having a set of values that binds an organisation or a team together cannot be underestimated. Leaders who invest time and genuine care when developing those values is fundamental to the culture that follows. Simple as this sounds, it isn't always simple to put into action when growing rapidly and expanding internationally.

When I discovered Erin Meyer's research on cultural relativity it made me stop and think. I agree that culture is always relative, and we can never know if the way we intend to be seen, will be the way we are actually seen by others. At the same, before an organisation can begin determining their values, or mapping how those values might drive its cultural evolution; there's a basic starting point that I believe is often over-looked, yet is universal to us all. Above and beyond all other values is respect, because without it our fundamental human needs cannot be met.

Respect – the universal principle

Our need for respect is fundamental to being human. The definition of respect that I like most is "to accept the importance of someone's rights or customs and to do nothing that would harm them or cause offence". To me, respect preempts qualities such as compassion, kindness, and care, because it starts with our universal right to be as we are as an individual. Full stop. When I accept someone's basic human right to be themself, with the uniqueness that they bring, it is a given I strive to be kind, compassionate, open-minded, and patient, etc.

Cultural nuances when reading others

I cannot place enough importance on respect when trying to read others. Whether in a personal relationship on a first date, or as a leader, manager, or fellow colleague, trying your best to read others means accepting there is no "right" interpretation of a situation. Respect leads to shared interactions being valued as subjective, deeply personal, and nuanced, which both requires and empowers a sense of genuineness.

Meyer's thoughts on cultural relativity as a shared experience of hearing and seeing others as individuals and as a collective, I believe is critical to this. It may be that I feel as if I've read someone and understood where they're coming from, and yet someone else who's sharing that same experience, may read the situation completely differently. It comes back to what Stephen R. Covey famously wrote in The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People: Powerful Lessons in Personal Change: "How you treat the one reveals how you regard the many, because everyone is ultimately a one." This is how I've witnessed cultures that grow person to person, and then go on to support an organisation.

Being aware of intersubjectivity when reading others

Intersubjectivity is the appreciation that in any social encounter we bring conscious and unconscious biases as two people, or subjects. When respect and empathy underpin our interaction then we can explore what's happening between us without feeling a need to objectively find who is "right" and who is "wrong". So, when I talk about reading people, I don't mean assessing what you personally experience there and then; it starts before that as a direct result of the environment which you set to ensure everyone feels safe enough to be open.

When difficult conversations are needed in business, reading someone doesn't mean taking the high ground and coercing someone into responding so your preconceived belief is vindicated. It is the opposite. In an environment where honesty is respected and there is no fear of judgement, reading people is something that we can all do. It is not a technical skill but rather a way of connecting embodied by humanity, compassion, and authenticity. As we can easily fall into fear-driven defensiveness, reading others takes concerted effort, humility, and practice, because there's a comfort in familiarity and often an initial discomfort in what's not.

Authenticity – easy to talk about, harder to live by

I tried to find out how many organisations state that authenticity is one of their values. I gave up after finding percentages varied so massively it was futile. Suffice to say, most companies will have in their corporate message somewhere that empowering their people is central to their culture. At The IN Group we too have authenticity front and centre of ours, in case you wondered. This didn't come from a branding exercise, but rather from a survey about how our people felt about working with us. Various words were used, but the essence of authenticity cropped up time and time again.

The reason I believe it did, is because our need to be ourselves and not hide who we are, is something that anyone, anywhere, and at any stage in their life, values when they feel it. Authenticity to me is about being free to be human. It encompasses our faults, fears, and fragilities, as well as our strengths and a feeling of pride and contented acceptance in who we are.

In my personal experience working within Europe and the US, I have not found a single person who does not appreciate that they can show up as they are and with all the differences they bring still be part of a shared vision and key part of how that translates into culture.

If I sound a little idealistic here then forgive me. I am not disregarding that some cultures might lean towards humility, a respect for authority, or constraint over authenticity, and is why respect always drives cultural harmony. Nevertheless, feeling that your fundamental goodness and goodwill is respected and accepted on a human-to human level, I stand by as the universal glues that holds together our need to connect and feel belonging in our tribe.

Without a measurement system, values are meaningless

As a complement to Investigo's values, I developed the C.I.A., which stands for commitment, intensity, and attitude. These felt apt for a high-performance sales culture, and offered a mode of measurement that was fair, easily understood, and that sales consultants anywhere seemed to naturally demonstrate. As such they have bound us together as we've grown our team and entered new territories.

Commitment asks for a mutual accountability. Intensity reflects the dynamic pace that sales demands. And attitude is a demonstrable way of working that helps to reduce the toxicity that hyper-competitiveness can spread in sales teams. What I like about each of these is the way that they support both continuous improvement and high-performance.

Sales is a high-commitment and high-intensity world. It requires commitment to ride the many ups and downs within sales; integrity so you think beyond the next deal and seek to develop long-lasting, mutually beneficial relationships. Essential to both is an awareness of your attitude when balancing both. Someone may be Italian, English,

Paul Mullins

American, or Mexican, but C.I.A.'s values seem to be inherent in any sales culture, from my experience of them at Investigo, and with clients.

Why we need culture carriers

Once you have leaders who serve as C.I.A. "culture carriers", regardless of where they are, they carry your values in a way that contains your core culture whilst allowing for divergent interpretations to be held. Culture carriers take care that the right goals, commitment and attitude are communicated in Monday morning weeklies, one-to-ones, quarterly leadership reviews, and up into annual performance appraisals. This helps me as a leader of international teams notice how our values are playing out day-to-day. In our New York office, for example, some of our people commute from Rhode Island and need flexibility with the hours they work so they can avoid a hellish commute.

In our San Diego office, our team are up and working early so they can leave to work out or go for a run.

Commitment is not proven by the hours someone works, but how their contribution serves the team as a whole, Similarly, accepting various lifestyles supports the intensity and pace someone maintain, as well as the attitude a person shows towards their work and that of their colleagues accordingly. When there is no need to hide or defend cultural differences, so trust can blossom over the need for a cookie-cut culture.

What this means in real life

In one-to-ones, a C.I.A. commitment is not something I measure through someone's pipeline. Nor is intensity through a competitiveness to win new business, or long hours a reflection of your attitude about success. These pitch people against each other and don't show me that my team are truly living by our values.

Through genuine conversations, that start with how you feel about you, then how you feel about you and me, and onto how you feel about others in your team, so early signs of blockers and opportunities come to light. Authenticity is meaningful as a value when it's demonstrated. I care more about seeing someone trying to do a good job, trying to be a good person, and trying to do good by their clients. Any areas of struggle, we work through with training, mentoring, coaching and development. It's a case of being OK with meeting halfway and remembering that respect and trust enable the cultural relativity that collectively drive a team's collective performance.
Through genuine conversations, that start with how you feel about you, then how you feel about you and me, and onto how you feel about others in your team, so early signs

of blockers and opportunities come to light. Authenticity is meaningful as a value when it's demonstrated. I care more about seeing someone trying to do a good job, trying to be a good person, and trying to do good by their clients. Any areas of struggle, we work through with training, mentoring, coaching and development. It's a case of being OK with meeting halfway and remembering that respect and trust enable the cultural relativity that collectively drive a team's collective performance.

Good starts, bad middles and happy endings

A friend of mine recently talked about working with a successful, fast growing organisation in the Nordics. The benefits of the experience they brought was undeniable. A first meeting was set up and my friend walked through their initial growth ideas for the company's founders on Zoom. The founders listened intently, and my friend ended the same way as always, which invited completely honest feedback. Complete honesty to my English friend pitching versus what complete honesty to their Nordic client meant was interpreted somewhat differently.

As round two opened on Zoom, my friend was thanked for their time researching opportunities and the depth of strategic thinking that they'd clearly put in. However, one by one, every other idea was pretty much dismissed as wrong. A little taken aback at the directness of the feedback received, my friend was worried that they had missed the mark and the opportunity to work together had vanished in thin air. Yet, in reality, the opposite was true.

What happened was the Nordic founders felt so happy to be being offered a chance to be "completely honest and direct" that they accepted the invitation and did just that. Unbeknownst to my friend was that far

larger international agencies involved in the pitch didn't offer that, or give the founders time to reflect before sending regular chaser emails about setting up a second meeting.

After their second meeting online, where feedback was questioned and challenged by their client, after fifteen minutes my friend described the relied that they didn't have to woo their potential new client with lunch or dinner later.

What the invitation to be honest meant – which their client took as a sign of true respect and partnership – was a rapid move into a productive, solution-focused conversation where both could be open, and share valuable insights from the inside out, and the outside in..

The result was a long-standing partnership that went on to bring huge success for the founders and the growth of one business into a group. Their respectful appreciation that what worked in one country, might not work in exactly the same way for theirs didn't mean binning the strategy; it meant leaning in, with both sides asking lots of clarifying questions, and agreeing that by breaking up big pieces of the project into smaller ones, they could explore new ways of working that weren't dependent on one way being assumed right or wrong from the off, but that could be tested and objectively evaluated as they grew.

This was achieved by sharing the thinking behind ideas, and explaining the rationale with a large dose of emotional intelligence and open-mindedness to respect cultural norms that enabled change. That first session felt like a lightning bolt to the Nordic founders, rather than a polite knock at the door. And to my friend, their invitation to knock at the door, felt like a lightning bolt.

Where communication can stop and start is perfectly illustrated with that story. It started so well – let's all be honest and share ideas! But then could have stopped with a sense of both feeling that was nonsense, and said for show. My friend could have pulled back thinking, "Well, that wasn't quite what I meant by direct, that was just rude!" And the client could have thought, "Well, you asked us to be completely honest, which we respected and so were, unless you didn't actually mean that?"

There is no me, you, or us without communication

Meeting people where they are and how they are comes down to communication. How honest you can be will based on many variables. Were you encouraged to speak up at home? Are you more introverted or extraverted? Are you new to a team and still finding your place, or are you experienced in a senior position, and know what's expected of you as a leader?

It feels so obvious to state, but with international growth on almost every organisation's agenda, instilling basic respect for our differences is an essential for leaders planning for growth. Consulting with your Chief People Officers or HR Director offers vital insights when considering the ways in which your values can remain congruent yet flexible enough to allow for cultural variables in their interpretation.

People aren't objects: they're dynamic, complex, unique, and subjects of their environment. The same message might need fifty subtle variations for it to land well. This has never been more true today where local is not local, it's always global.

HOW TO CLIMB A MOUNTAIN: THE KEY TO CORPORATE RESILIENCE.

Martin Hewitt in conversation with Nick Baxter. Written by Alex Voskou.

Martin Hewitt is team leader and founder of Adaptive Grand Slam (AGS). He served eight years as a commissioned officer with the Parachute Regiment, working on operations and training exercises in the Middle East, Africa, Europe, and North America. Martin was injured whilst leading his men in combat in Afghanistan. These injuries paralysed his right arm and ended his military career.

Resilience /rɪˈzɪlɪəns/ *The capacity to withstand or recover from difficulties; toughness.*

When I think about the word 'resilience,' I realise it's been possibly the single most important trait I've needed for everything I've done in my career, whether in the Parachute Regiment, skiing on the development team for Great Britain, or running my own challenge events business. I also realise that many of the lessons I've learned along the way are just as applicable to the corporate world. Whether you're starting out, scaling up, or adapting your business to grow in a challenging environment, here are the key lessons I've picked up on how to build a resilient organisation.

Adapt

I was injured in Helmand Province, Afghanistan in 2007, losing the use of my right arm. When it became clear, after 13 operations, months of rehabilitation and doctors' advice, that I wasn't going to be able to continue my career in the military, I needed to redefine my purpose.

CREDIT - MARTIN HEWITT

What do you do? Do you just become bitter and twisted? Or do you put your energy into something else that's hopefully more constructive? The military's transition process helps you understand what transferrable skills you have. I'd been to university beforehand. I realised my experience and character traits could lend themselves pretty well to civilian life and hopefully, achieving success commercially in one way or another.

Knowing I thrive in a team environment with changing risks, I realised that I wanted to get involved in something that was going to enable me to be in that space again, and have a position of responsibility. This led me to setting up Adaptive Grand Slam, organising physical challenge events which include climbing the highest mountains in the world and walking to the North and South Poles.

As I've learned since moving into the corporate world, something might happen on your organisation's journey that means you have to change the way you work, the way you think, the way you provide a service. COVID did that for many organisations. With tough economic times on the horizon, we'll need to continue adapting. Understand the challenges your clients will be facing, know what it is about your offering that will help them meet these challenges, and change your offering to continue to be relevant.

Support

Resilience doesn't come from leaving your people to figure out their problems on their own. It comes from ensuring they've got the support structure in place to help them overcome their challenges. In the military, you're doing something that's very dangerous, with all manner of psychological, moral and ethical challenges. Your commanding officers have a responsibility to provide leadership, mentoring, and emotional support, and therefore need a high level of emotional intelligence.

As well as the leadership command team, non-commissioned officers, medical team, regimental medical officer and psychologists, you've got a careers management officer who's been through the ranks and achieved a lot in their career. The Padre, who's not part of the land management system or in command of anybody directly, provides an independent, non-judgmental ear for anyone who wants to share their concerns and challenges.

Giving your people independent support outlets who they can approach without fear of judgement is crucial to building a resilient organisation where everyone knows that they're not alone. It also shows your people that you really care about them and, even more importantly, are willing to go through those challenges with them.

Lead

There are some industries where people may be promoted to leadership roles for hitting sales targets or being with the company for a certain length of time. While both of these avenues indicate some form of achievement, neither of them necessarily makes a good leader. It's common for people to be promoted to a leadership role and then feel they're not getting anything done, because they're spending all their time managing other people's workloads. But leading is actually a job in itself.

All officers in the military are in some form of full time training for around two years before they're expected to lead people for the first time. That includes a year of leadership training at Sandhurst and possibly a few months at the infantry battle school in Brecon to learn about different tactics and weapons systems. You have to prove yourself before you get leadership responsibility, which is very different to most careers outside of the army.

Since leaving the army, I've realised how privileged we were to have that level of training and the opportunity to learn our trade before we were expected to deliver for real. Train your budding leaders in leadership skills, educate them on the different leadership styles, and help them understand which ones will work for them. Provide scenario-based training to prepare them for the situations

they'll face. Teach them some of the softer skills and how to lead lots of different people in demanding situations. Offer a management pathway which teaches your people an entirely different set of skills.

Unite

In any strong team, people need to be there for each other. An organisation will often have people from different parts of society joining for different reasons, and you need to give them a united sense of purpose. When your team are genuinely working towards a common goal, this brings a culture of high performance and real in-depth relationships.

There remain a lot of misconceptions about the military – that it's an organisation of robots that just do as they're told every day. In reality, you've got to inspire people to follow you as a leader. Team members need to understand that leaders aren't just trying to make everyone's life difficult. Everyone in the team has a responsibility to support the leadership team in achieving their objectives. Emphasise that to your people from day one and throughout their careers with you so that they want the team, and everyone in it, to succeed.

At Adaptive Grand Slam we work with groups of people from completely different walks of life with completely different physical or psychological injuries, and completely

> ## "
> ### It's so important to give people the opportunity to develop and put the resources in place to enable them to do that. We have a responsibility to try and understand what they're thinking, why they're behaving the way they are or why they're not performing, and then address it.

different stories to tell. At least half of them genuinely don't think they will be able to complete their expedition. But through a strong process and the right support, we encourage them to get there. And that's incredibly rewarding.

Upskill

When organisations don't have the right people in the right place to make the right decisions, this can slow down everything from recruitment processes to new product launches and advertising campaigns.

Process is a big part of everything you do in the military. Everybody is trained to understand the roles and responsibilities of somebody that's one step away from them in their chain of command, so whenever something goes wrong or plans need to change, process kicks in. As a commander, you're trained to know exactly what you have to do in your job. But you will also understand the techniques the person above you is using. You will understand what we call the picture. It's how you're utilising all the different assets that are available in that environment.

There's a duty of responsibility on leaders in every organisation to ensure that their people are capable and skilled to be able to step up when they need to, at all levels. The business environment changes and priorities change with it. When the basics are ingrained in every member of your team, your processes become second nature. That gives you the bandwidth and the flexibility to adapt and change your plan.

Some people are naturally better at certain things than others. But if someone is willing to work hard, listen, learn, and has a genuine desire to improve, you need to work with those people to help improve their ability. If someone hasn't got that, it's very hard to teach it. Make this willingness to learn a part of your culture.

Empathise

When you've left the military and see people getting stressed at work, it can seem quite trivial after what you've experienced in the past. But I think life experience teaches you to look at things from other people's perspective. I now realise that not everyone has been fortunate enough to receive the training that I've received in the military and you don't quite know what kind of pressures other people have gone through in life.

It's so important to give people the opportunity to develop and put the resources in place to enable them to do that. We have a responsibility to try and understand what they're thinking, why they're behaving the way they are or why they're not performing, and then address it.

If somebody is experiencing things externally to their work environment that are affecting their attitude and their mindset – they might be going through some difficulties at home, or a period of change, challenge, or loss – that's when we need to demonstrate empathy. But there are timelines on these things and there are minimum performance standards that we need to accept, because frankly, you've got to be aligned with each other to get the job done.

Conclusion: keep on reaching out

As an organisation, I'm not sure you can ever reach the top of your mountain. There will always be another mountain to climb and the landscape will keep on shifting beneath your feet. By being ready to adapt, giving your people and your leaders the support and skills they need, and ensuring everyone is united towards achieving a common goal, you can build the organisational resilience to get your business to the top of its current peak, plant your flag, and prepare to scale the next one.

WHY BRILLIANT PEOPLE FAIL BRILLIANTLY.

Kate Hodsdon speaks to Lionel Hill and Ian Bromwich.

When we think of failure, most of us would prefer to avoid it. From exams to driving tests, and interviews to promotions, success is the goal. When it comes to innovation, failing is not always a bad thing, as we learnt in our interviews with two transformation leaders.

Lionel Hill is the Global Chief Technology Officer at the private equity firm Permira. Prior to joining Permira, Lionel worked for Revantage Europe, a Blackstone company, as Europe CTO for three years. Prior to that he spent six years with CBRE and 10 years with UBS in technology roles.

Lionel Hill

How do you view failure within the context of innovation?

It's hard to imagine a scenario where you can have a genuine ground-breaking innovation without failure having been part of that story to some extent. Far from being undesirable or something to try to avoid, failure should be accepted as inevitable in the process of innovation.

When managed properly, failure is an opportunity to learn something new, but the key is to recognise what's failed and to do so quickly. Think about scientists: they won't necessarily learn something from a successful experiment, other than that their initial hypothesis wasn't flawed. However, during an experiment, when something fails and you realise you've got something wrong, you can take failure as a concrete piece of information that shapes what you do next. With technological innovation, you must look at it in the same way.

Failure is cast iron proof that you've got something fundamentally wrong, or that there are a set of circumstances that you need to rethink before moving on.

Do you think the 'fail fast, fail often' mindset that's embedded in start-ups translates to established organisations, or publicly traded companies?

It is absolutely something that's applicable to a corporate mindset, but there's context that needs adding to it to be relevant.

I would say there are three pieces to that mindset: one, fail fast. Two, fail cheaply, because who wants an expensive failure on their hands? And third, never fail to learn. Whatever they are, these failures must be lean and quick, not huge existential failures. Learn from them, then move on, and don't repeat the same thing over and over again.

How you relate to failure should be relative to where you are in your innovation cycle. Central to this is knowing who you are, and what you're supposed to be doing as an organisation.

How have you navigated the organisational context when innovating?

Most of my experience has been within financial services organisations and they have a particular context that is important to understand. There's a significant operational element in FS where excellence and doing things efficiently are a given (or should be). Yet, fundamentally, financial services as a business is all about risk taking. If somebody has a particular attitude to risk on one side of a transaction, and they're trading that risk with someone else with a different attitude, then that creates a market. That's why FS organisations are well versed with risk-taking. But that's just one element of the context.

Understanding an organisation's tolerance for innovation risk and how this tolerance can change over time is important. It's possible to increase a firm's tolerance for innovation risk by being mindful of two things.

The first is to take small risks to begin with, not huge, existential risks that can topple a service line or entire growth strategy if they go wrong. Smaller risks don't matter if they fail, provided you learn from them. The second thing is to build up a successful innovation track record, little by little, as a team within your organisation.

How does this alter the attitude to technological risk? It's logical: if you take a small risk, and it's a win somehow, maybe next time you'll have permission to take a slightly bigger risk, and a slightly bigger one after that, as the cycle of innovation develops.

Pivotal to this approach is to always remain within the context of something that's permissible and doesn't risk jeopardising the firm as a whole.

"Culture" is a highly disputed notion. How do you appreciate the meaning of culture as it relates to innovation?

Culture is often created from the top down. As a leader, you can define the culture, but you also have to live it, bring it to life, and do it in a way such that everyone else recognises that you walk the walk as a leader. This is also true in the context of risk-taking within innovation.

An environment where there's complete transparency and honesty is fundamental to this. When something goes wrong, you must make sure very quickly that everyone is informed and aware of it. This ties back to '"failing fast"'.

If a culture doesn't encourage transparency and there's a fear of speaking up early on, you'll fail slowly, incur greater costs and damage cultural trust when innovating next time.

The second fundamental part is, if you're always going to attempt to learn from failing, you need to have a culture whereby risk is tolerated. When honesty underpins this, and everyone knows when something goes wrong, then you can quickly flip into analysis and ask openly, '"So why did this fail? What went wrong here?"' but without blaming, shaming or passing the buck. This objective analysis will then serve to simply inform that something will be different going forward. This approach protects an innovative culture.

Is continually failing good for culture and morale?

I believe it is when it's contextually positioned within the right frame. You have to set what the boundaries are, what the risk is that you'll be willing to tolerate, and then you need transparency and honesty about where you are in your innovation journey and how close you're getting to that point.

When each failure can be seen as a step towards reaching an ultimate objective, then this is the ideal state to aim for. This allows innovation to switch from being an emotional conversation to a commercial one. Knowing in advance at what point you're prepared to keep pivoting, push on, or call it a day is the role of the leader in this process.

Would you say this relationship with risk-taking is somehow easier for people working in private equity and financial services?

Yes, I believe risk-taking is part of our commercial DNA. And there are lots of things any technology leader can learn from how asset managers spread and manage their risks across their portfolios.

For example, if you were to consider your roadmap or project list as a portfolio of technology innovations, then you could classify them in terms of how risky they are.

So, some are quite low risk, well documented and likely to succeed – and you need quite a few of those in your portfolio. Then you'll need some that are a bit risky, but more innovative (just not too many of those). And finally, you need a couple of wild cards that could win big, but if they don't, what you lose is manageable.

I think of it as a hierarchy of innovation needs: at the bottom are the absolute basics of operational infrastructure which must be robust, but their evolution shouldn't risk disrupting an entire organisation when replaced or developed. In the middle sits efficiency or optimisation, where the gains are modest but highly predictable. And at the top of an innovation strategy is business transformation – higher risk but also higher reward. I recently heard someone describe these three types of investment as: Fear – the things you must do; Fact – the things that you understand well; and Faith – the things that you believe will make a big difference to your business.

As a business leadership group, then, the thought process becomes ensuring that you have the right balance across the different types of investment - Fear, Fact and Faith. And to optimise this, it's all about knowing your innovation context and creating the right culture where failure is never failure, but is learning as you grow.

Ian Bromwich

Ian Bromwich is the Managing Director and UK CIO for HSBC UK, technology investor and advisory CTO. He has spent his entire career in technology, and mainly in financial services for firms including Egg, Alliance & Leicester, Lloyds, Barclays and RSA Insurance Group PLC. Prior to that he founded and ran a start-up at the earliest days of the internet in 1996, which he sold to Morse PLC, a FTSE 250 company.

The venture capitalist Mark Suster said the tech start-up mantra of "fail fast, fail often" should be replaced with "launch and learn" or "adjust and pivot". What do you think about that?

I agree. Better is "adapt and learn" as "fail fast, fail often" indicates that failure is bad. But thinking about failure from an innovation or growth perspective, it's a learning opportunity to explore what went wrong. How do we scale? Where do we need to improve? When we launched our start-up in 1996 – Hughes Rae Ltd – we were at the forefront of a whole raft of technologies, such as mainframe

integrations to the browser, app server set ups, and content management systems; we were learning every day, because we had to. Everything back then was new, and there weren't the tech ecosystems that we have today.

Egg was ground-breaking when it launched the first ever online credit card in September 1999. When you joined them in 2002, your start-up had built Egg's tech infrastructure. How did you take your learnings from your start-up into a fast-growing, regulated financial services business?

Having been a CTO until this point, they knew I was strong on strategy and delivery. From the off they had experience of my, approach, mindset and endless curiosity. So when I took on a leadership role in IT operations for them, there was no need to change – Egg was a start-up itself.

After Egg I joined Alliance & Leicester and saw how a traditional bank viewed innovators: we were seen as weird, and shut away in a back office with little interaction with the rest of the business. That kind of environment for an innovator was a shock. I moved from creativity and experimentation to answering questions such as "why Why do you want to take that risk? How are you going to mitigate it? What outcomes can we expect?" I was bombarded with dozens of governance questions before we could begin anything, which didn't necessarily kill innovation, but it slowed everything down.

We were used to doing lots of small tests and pivots a day, tweaking tech and learning along the way. Tesla wasn't designed and built and then worked straight away – it's been a continuous learning ecosystem and shows real-time innovation based on customer feedback. Feedback doesn't spell failure if you are always learning and adjusting to it.

How did the tightening of corporate governance and risk mitigation following the 2008 crash impact innovation in financial institutions?
The banking crisis kind of killed FS innovation. It's why I moved into insurance, as the global CTO for RSA. Little did I know then that insurance is on average ten years behind banking in terms of innovation and one of the hardest sectors in which to drive change – unsurprisingly they are incredibly risk averse.

"

Thinking about failure from an innovation or growth perspective, it's a learning opportunity to explore what went wrong. How do we scale? Where do we need to improve?

Tell us about an innovation that failed, and what you learnt from it?

It was in the early days of mobile technology and involved the Nokia phones that used to slide down – the Nokia Matrix 8810 phone for anyone who remembers. I was on a panel hosted by Jeremy Paxman with someone from the telecoms company 3, and a sales director from Morse (the company who had just bought my start-up).

I was asked what I thought about the future of mobile – the rest of the panel talked about wireless access protocols, which was how they used to get the internet on phones then. They said that phone marked a huge leap for mobile technology and I said with full confidence: "No, it's not. The loading speed is too slow, the screen is too small, and the user-interface too basic to get the internet to run on my phone."

They all disagreed, but mobile was an innovation that wasn't ready or mature enough until Steve Jobs came along, focused obsessively on design, and reimagined the entire user experience. His obsession with customer-orientated design for the iPhone left Nokia, Blackberry and Motorola nigh dead.

What systems and processes support innovation?

AA test and learn mindset that starts small, develops quickly, and removes blockers step by step, rather than shooting for the moon as so many people think innovation has to be.

I call this a steal thread approach. Don't try to build an entire product. For example, if we're working with software, and seven systems need to integrate, don't try and get all seven at once. Start with one, then two, then three and see at that point, how you might improve the system before you get to seven. It keeps failures low,

quick to resolve and with immediate insights that lead to learning.

Imagine you want to be a new quant trading platform that's the first in the market; one question I ask myself when pitching new innovations is – would I put my own money into this? If not, why pitch it to a board as a shiny idea? This is where non-emotive comparisons to your competitors are essential in innovation.

To do that, look at data and reporting. A review on UX in banking just came out and benchmarks the performance of apps against each other. If I see that one of our apps is ranking 7/10, then I'd ask the board if we could work on getting to a 9/10, as opposed to investing in a new app or service line. This is where you see if an organisation really does have an innovation culture that's committed to continuous improvement, or not.

How important is understanding where a business is in terms of its innovation cycle?

There's not a straight answer, and I think I think for certain areas like UX, digital and open banking then you must continually evolve and innovate. On the other hand, if you're replacing a core CRM system and you want to move to a state-of-the-art one, you need it to work seamlessly from day one; but once it does, it's pretty much done (unless something breaks!).

Innovation cycles depend heavily on knowing who you're serving. Building a digital experience for teenagers means obsessive focus on UX and UI, and speed of load times: to teenagers, if your app isn't working in about three seconds, they're gone, and it's deleted. Design simplicity is key there.

I often wonder what a banking app would be if it were designed by Apple. I imagine they'd cut

80% of the features that most banking apps have, and focus on the 20% that most of us use 99% of the time.

Less is best with UX but all too often feature creeping takes over and apps eventually become bulky and harder to use, and user adoption drops rapidly.

How does culture support innovation, in real terms, day to day?

Having an openness around innovation and not just for those at the top. That can lead to fear, which and silos which fundamentally dampen creative problem solving –– which is what innovation is.

I had a graduate, who had been with us for just six months, who came to me with two great ideas. They were really well thought through.

Technically, she was five levels down the management ladder. But with innovation, that's ideal: you get fresh ideas and perspectives, that come directly from the next generation of users.

An inquisitive mindset towards innovation comes directly from an open culture, that any company, of any size, and in any sector, can and should foster.

WHY TRANSFORMATION FLIES OR DIES.

Written by Kate Hodsdon, in conversation with Ketan Patel.

Ketan Patel has spent twenty-five years leading technology at board level within the consumer and private equity verticals, from luxury retailers through to global FTSE PLCs such as Sainsburys and Marks and Spencer. With a successful track-record in both leading commercial teams along technology organisations and expediting technology-enabled change within fast-paced, dynamic, and complex landscapes, Ketan has the insight and experience in why transformation either flies, or dies.

Innovation is messy because it involves people

The creation of an innovation culture is hard, not because the strategy itself is necessarily complex, but because of our human relationship to change, and what it brings on a personal level.

When we look at evolution, humans are wired to be creative and out-reaching which enables us to connect with others, and grow together. This I see as a non-prescriptive change: it's intrinsic, mission rich, and grown from a personal vision.

Of course, some of the factors behind these stem from external drivers, like family, culture, religion, the media, and so forth. They bring with them a moral obligation with personal repercussions. Fundamentally we've learnt from studies that these are tribal, and link to an implicit fear of rejection from our tribe. When we're faced with the dilemma of living up to these expectations, by morphing who we are into someone that we intuitively know we are not, we have a choice about whether we embark on that journey, or stay as we are.

This level of autonomy and personal choice is rarely the case at work. When you're part of a corporate entity, choosing to change is often out of your control. Primarily adaptation and change are driven by innovation of some kind.

Ketan Patel

I want change but don't make me change anything

What I've seen as a CIO leading change and transformation, is that they often stir up a deep fear in people which is tied to our human need for belonging and security.

There are always challenges around staff adopting change at the pace that we need them to. A common theme I've seen is that people react in three ways: they either opt to stay as they are and resent change, withdraw but follow begrudgingly, or grow through transformation.

This is a cultural pattern with an impact that all leaders must be aware of from the start, and keep an eye on when innovating.

In my experience, every organisation undergoing change will meet friction, miss deadlines, expect twists and turns halfway through, or see their innovation goals flunk completely, which comes down to one overarching fail: a lack of clarity and direction in how the mission, vision, and purpose of transformation is communicated.

Getting these to resonate with every single person in an organisation is one of the toughest challenges for leaders today.

It's why I like to compare transformation to rowing a boat. You've got to get from A to B as smoothly as possible, or you sink. This analogy is perhaps too simplistic for some, but it's an example I've found everyone can grasp when considering any kind of change in direction implicit in innovation.

The coxswain who leads the team faces forwards as a focal point so that everyone moves their bodies to rhythm and rows in unison. But before they begin to move, the coxswain has to be crystal clear about where they need to row, how they should best position themselves, and assess who's best as the front row, and who's best as the rear row.

This is meticulously planned in advance, a fundamental investment upfront, so the team knows who's doing what, who's leading who, why that's the best plan, and critically, where they need to get to in the first place. It might sound rudimentary when we talk about the complexity of business transformation but innovation fails to engage when the mission, vision and purpose of a new direction is not clarified in basic terms everyone can grasp.

Without an end goal that feels tangible and relevant communicated from the top down, achieving one unified mindset, one clear direction and one consistent speed of change will ultimately fail – because this is the central people piece, it's always the most complicated for leaders to get right. During any point of the journey to the end goal it is imperative the whole team can see behind them and ahead and remain convinced it's the right journey.

When leaders first ask which one major challenge their people face day to day – and then openly listen to what is said – transformation starts on the right foot, and reduces the risk of an unnecessary fail.

Why CEOs must be great storytellers

Simon Sinek's TED Talk Start with Why is something that resonated with me since I first watched it, back in 2014. Sinek's '"golden circle"' has become a golden rule in branding and communications, and has reached over sixty-million views on YouTube alone. Yet I rarely find it is known about by transformation leaders.

In his talk, Sinek explains that people don't buy what you do, but rather, why you do it. To me, his explanation of this is flawless: start by explaining why you're doing something. Then how you'll be doing it, and only then, go into what this means in reality. In it, he compares the way Apple positioned selling computers, to the way Dell did. It's well worth a watch.

This is why I believe great CEOs must be great storytellers; especially when pitching buy-in for transformation.

In the simplest terms, CEOs need to outline what they are trying to achieve; why they want to achieve that specifically; what the results are going to be; and how this ultimately serves everyone's needs, including clients, staff, and shareholders, if relevant.

However, what I've come to appreciate with innovation is that only spelling out what the positives are, doesn't necessarily win people over. Acknowledging what some of the growing pains might be along the way, and the impact these could have, offers reassurance and nurtures trust in the process and helps the teams actively seek solutions to the humps in the road they are likely to encounter.

Obviously, you can't please everyone all of the time. Yet when I see CEOs tailoring their story so it is relatable to their teams, it creates a sense of unity in the vision. It's this unity that can make or break an innovation's success.

When the '"why"' is believed, the most important part of the innovation journey takes root: shepherding people through the inevitable anxiety and discomfort that change can evoke.

Only when genuine care steers transformation can the potential positives be felt. If evolving and innovating to keep a business alive and growing amidst market disruption offers longer-term job security, then leaders must explain this with kindness and patience to those who at first might not be able to see the wood for the trees.

One team. One direction. One objective.

When thinking about the delivery of their vision, leaders do best when silos are removed. Transformation involves technology but if it's only perceived by people as an IT project, an immediate disconnect will appear for those who don't understand, or have much time, for technology.

Successful transformation should have one budget, one team, and one hierarchy. When there's a gluey harmony of shared buy-in, so divisions that often come with a change agenda are greatly reduced.

Goals for each business unit must be clear. What those goals are, and the milestones to meet them are then fairly easy to agree. From here, project roles are identified, and the right tools resourced, and the necessary skillsets allocated so the transformation's focus is understood and accepted by all involved.

Without these, I see project politics fester time and time again, as people try to protect their personal agenda, team resources, and budgets – which ultimately focuses their minds in the wrong place.

When this cultural toxicity bubbles up, transformation stagnates as people lose sight of what they were trying to achieve at the outset.

No matter how good a leader you are, when you end up managing the project, rather than managing the outcome, you'll be straddling two very different camps. The result is a cultural disconnect that leads to chaotic working, self-preservation, and silos.

There is no change without behavioural change

Managing the potential conflict of behavioural change is less a science or process, and more an art that transformation leaders must cultivate. Success here doesn't come from merely analysing data, giving innovation a massive budget, or bringing in a market leading CTO. It comes from a leader's willingness to learn why humans behave as they do, which requires empathy more than anything.

Any CEO can give a shiny sell about '"our great new future"' at a company conference, but that is not enough if it sounds like a personal quest.

When leaders don't start by seeking first to listen to, and then acknowledge, the challenges their people face, and then commit to supporting and serving their needs, it'll be lonely at the top when no one buys into their vision.

The bigger the organisation, the likelier it is that this disconnect will eventually arise.

Successful transformation is when inspiration and operation are in sync

Actual operational needs must be first and foremost on a transformation agenda. Otherwise, why bother?

It is so easy for leadership teams to sit in board meetings and look at the competition, or market trends, and project what they can do to keep shareholders or investors happy. This is lethal and why innovation so often fails. It's the wrong starting point.

Leaders have to start with a tangible '"why"' when considering outcomes that offer measurable value. Again, I might sound like I am stating the obvious here, but personal opinions based on uneducated assumptions are disastrous to transformation. Asking '"stupid"' questions at the outset are fundamental to any system change (and in my experience, there's no such thing as a '"stupid"' question).

62

63

> **" When leaders don't start by seeking first to listen to, and then acknowledge, the challenges their people face, and then commit to supporting and serving their needs, it'll be lonely at the top when no one buys into their vision.**

Whether this approach is called agile working or design thinking is irrelevant. The principles behind both are essential for leaders to understand and respect.

This is why people working in UX, digital transformation, cultural change, or systems engineering almost always have one thing in common: they do not just accept a vision or an idea. They are critical thinkers who value iterative feedback loops that either prove a hypothesis has ground or not. Working this way creates open-thinking because it isn't driven by ego or stubborn attachment. It is rooted in first principles and a respect for testing and learning that's quintessential to innovation.

Now, some leaders might argue against this and refer to Henry Ford's famous quote: "If I had asked people what they wanted, they would have said faster horses" and not his then bizarre idea of a car replacing horses as the future of transportation.

To that I'd say, you're talking about an outlier, who is not your average corporate CEO.

Henry Ford had been tinkering with mechanics as a child, and trained in engineering before he began thinking about what a replacement for horses could be. He built, iterated, redesigned and rebuilt, what became the first car over a six six-year period. But he didn't even build a car at first, he spent years designing and building a prototype that was its predecessor – the quadricycle.

Even when the first quadricycle was finished, he hadn't got the measurements right, so had to hack off parts of each side to get it out of his garage in Detroit and test it on the road. Then when he did, people thought he was barking mad!

That being said, what he did have, and transformation still needs today, is a vision that ties to a real-world need.

That vision, little by little, needs to be tested in small, component parts, so that one by one they each add up to something that works and carries value. Whether big or small, an innovative idea is only successful when the innovation itself works.

It took time for people to trust in Ford's innovation. For a long time, he was seen as rather odd by those around him. Culturally, he didn't have the smoothest path to adoption.

It reminds me of self-driving cars today – there's potential there – but we're far from having a car that people trust, has a viable path to market. Still the idea carries weight and is a start even if it has years of iteration, testing, and pivots ahead. The investment will only succeed when we can buy into its actual value and earns enough trust for us to shift our deeply ingrained notions about driving.

Internal mission versus external observation

When leaders have been in an organisation for many years, and grown within it, they're likely to have a somewhat biased view of the business.

This is where having an external perspective that is non-emotional and impartial helps bring an objectivity to leaders contemplating transformation, but who are not exactly sure where to start. Interim experts are often invaluable at this stage.

A board must have a degree of humility and openness for this to work, but do well when they start such conversations early on. Walking through the vision, mission, and purpose with an honest, outside assessment of the pros and cons might kill an initial idea dead. Nonetheless, if they

save money, internal disruption, and reputational damage in the market, to me this is not a fail, it's a learning curve that can pave the way to future success. Rejecting ungrounded idealisation is crucial to innovation.

Having an external expert team who are skilled in challenging or validating the thinking behind the direction of a transformation makes business sense on every level, only if the board is prepared to listen and shift focus.

It might be their vision is too bold to reach in one leap. There might not be the budget, resourcing, or time to do everything required. However, what change experts are brilliant at doing is interpreting a big vision and breaking it down into smaller parts, which little by little can meet those goals, and lowers risk along the way.

As a PLC or firm that's raised millions in investment, at some point, they'll want an ROI. If growth for growth's sake is left to run wild, as we see so often in tech, it can ruin a company.

On the other hand, when growth-driven innovation is founded on objective goals that make commercial sense, that's where transformation has the potential to truly transform an organisation.

Getting comfortable with discomfort

Success in transformation demands a razor sharp focus on what that end goal is, whilst appreciating that in the end it may need to pivot. This is where CEO's and tech leaders often clash.

We live in a dynamic world that is ever-changing. Think about Covid. Did anyone foresee just how it would forever change the way we work? No. If they had, they'd be richer than Bezos, Musk, Gates and Zuckerberg put together.

Embracing the agile way of working fundamental to transformation brings both a pressure and ease on businesses today. If leaders can accept that only 70 or 80 percent of their vision is probably reachable over a three-, four-, or even five five-year stretch, then forecasts, timelines, product quality, and launch plans will be ready to ride the storm and jump over the bumps of a world in flux.

When the messiness of innovation becomes the norm

This requires a resilience in leadership and a means of giving your people a chance to embrace new ways of working. Did anyone use Zoom much pre-Covid? International teams maybe, but it wasn't part of day-to-day life for most of us. Had anyone heard of Whereby except freelancers and start-ups who couldn't afford a Teams or Zoom for business account? Probably not, but they sure have now.

Whilst the disruption that massive, often heart-breaking global changes like Covid brought, when you're open-minded, caring, and take hold of the reigns as a leader, you can show your people how to ride the sea of change.

You might get a headwind during troubled times – if you were Zoom, Monday.com, Slack or Miro, then the overnight move to home working resulted in a boom in demand. Or your business might have got a sidewind by being able to recruit the type of talent previously unavailable because of the need a daily commute demanded. If you did get hit by a downwind, it might have forced a slow- down in growth that proved more suited to longer-term survival.
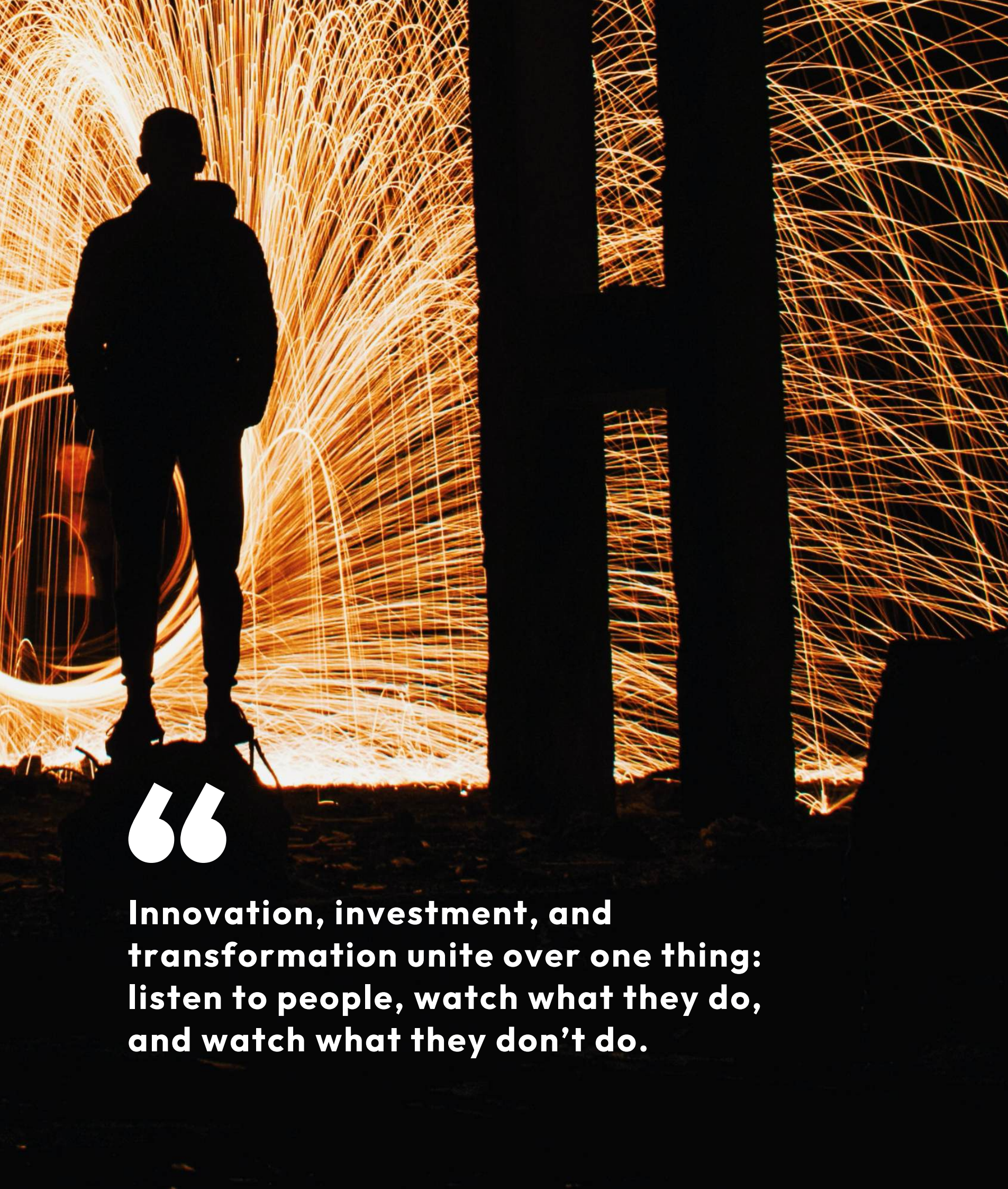
> **Innovation, investment, and transformation unite over one thing: listen to people, watch what they do, and watch what they don't do.**

However, where the huge blow that Covid brought economically to those who fell between the cracks, we can only hope that governments learn to be more agile in their policy making, and innovative in their responses. Only by learning from past failings will there be smarter decisions in the future

Where culture wins and innovation is slim
No can ever be sure they'll win, all of the time.

Sensible innovation investing often takes the shape of spread betting, which those in funds and private equity take as a given when building their portfolios. Not every investment can back a wild card, because risk needs to be mitigated, so that the overall fund sees a return. Sometimes the best investments are low on innovation but sit safely in a market where consumer behaviour and everyday culture just doesn't shift that much – such as Warren Buffet investing in chewing gum during the 2008 global crash, which became a mega-merger in the confectionary industry.

Why did he do that? As a boy, Buffet started selling Wrigley's door to door, and did better than most kids with the pocket money he earned. When asked by CNBC why he bought a 10% share of Mars so they could then buy Wrigley's, he said: "I've been conducting a 70-year taste test since I was about 7-years-old on the products … and they met the 70-year taste test."

One last thing...
Innovation, investment, and transformation unite over one thing: listen to people, watch what they do, and watch what they don't do. Use both your intuition and the reality of data to move into the space where you see growth as an opportunity that either aligns with, or moves with, culture.

BUILDING A CULTURE OF ALLIES.

Marc Lesner is a partner for Investigo's strategy and consulting team in New York and heads up the Pride subcommittee of The IN Group's DEI committee. Derek Mackenzie is an executive director for Investigo and the founder of *Campaign*, the recruitment industry's first professional network for the LGBTQ+ community.

Why is it your problem?
You're not gay, though. Why do you care? Aren't their rights recognised now?

That's just a selection of the common responses when a straight person says they want to be an ally for the LGBTQ+ community. From the outside looking in, the perception is that things have got better. In the UK and USA at least, same-sex marriages are now legal and we live in a fairly tolerant and open society where people are free to be who they want to be. Right?

Not entirely. For many people in the LGBTQ+ community, the fear of discrimination remains genuine and valid. According to Stonewall, one in five LGBT people have experienced a hate crime or incident in the last year, because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. A 2021 study by the charity found that one in ten LGBT employees felt they missed a promotion in the past year alone because of bias. Of the 5,670 Fortune 500 board positions, only 26 are held by LGBTQ+ individuals. That's 0.4%. The newly coined "lavender ceiling" refers to the barrier LGBTQ+ employees face in their careers and the low levels of C-suite inclusivity in most organisations. If a lot has been done, these stats show how much there still is to do.

Why be an ally?
Allyship's not about getting involved in a cause because you've got nothing else to do, or because it makes you feel good about yourself. Allies from outside the LGBTQ+ community, who are willing to learn about the challenges faced by underrepresented groups and give them a voice, are incredibly important to making change.

Marc Lesner, who heads up the Pride pillar of The IN Group's DEI committee, has seen first-hand the positive impact of allyship from outside the community. "The importance of that kind of allyship," he said, "cannot be underestimated. Those in underrepresented groups can voice their opinions and concerns but are they listened to and acted upon? The answer is often no when those who have the decision-making power do not form part of the underrepresented group and cannot truly put themselves in the same position. Allies who interact closely with the underrepresented group start to experience the feelings and thoughts of that group and develop a better understanding of what they may be dealing with. They can then in turn serve to make the situation real to others outside of the LGBTQ+ community."

A lot of prejudice comes from ignorance rather than malice. When you act as an ally for an underrepresented group, you're connecting that community to the "mainstream". You're increasing the wider community's understanding, which makes the underrepresented group a lot less abstract and therefore, a lot more accepted. No one's expecting you to be an expert. What you are doing is supporting people who need it and educating those who don't fully understand the issue.

Allies when permitted?

Perhaps no recent global event has illustrated the importance of allyship quite as much as the World Cup in Qatar, where same-sex relationships are illegal. There was widespread anger when FIFA banned team captains, including England's Harry Kane and Wales's Gareth Bale, from wearing the LGBT OneLove armband during matches. The German team responded with a thinly veiled dig at football's governing body, posing with their hands over their mouths for their team photo before their match with Japan – signifying the removal of their freedom of speech.

But will armbands and other gestures of defiance make any practical difference to the laws in Qatar? Are these actions more likely to antagonise than they are to educate? It feels like this was a conversation we should have had 12 years ago, before the World Cup was awarded to Qatar; that respect for human rights should have been one of the main bidding criteria. On the other hand, as much as the laws in certain countries might offend our sensibilities – and though we have a responsibility to educate – how much right do we have to tell them how to behave? Are raising awareness and educating over time more realistic and longer term solutions? These are complex questions that go a long way beyond sport.

How to build a culture of allies

Inclusion can sometimes feel like a tick-box exercise; something that you do just because so many people are talking about it. But to be effective, it needs to be embedded deep into an organisation's culture. So, how can HR leaders be LGBTQ+ allies and build a culture that works for everyone, regardless of sexual or gender orientation? How can organisations help their people break through that lavender ceiling to thrive and be happy at work?

Learn by listening

Start by listening to your people and using what you've learned to cater your policies and initiatives to their needs. Stonewall has a strategic approach that begins with listening to their lesbian, gay, bi, trans and queer employees, so they can try to understand the challenges they face at work. It offers networking groups for LGBTQ+ staff to meet, discuss their challenges and together, safely escalate issues to senior leaders to effect change. This is only possible through a robust policy-led programme that supports equal advancement and development opportunities. It's an approach that encourages dialogue and formalises feedback to the leadership, so employees know they're being taken seriously.

Employers can also guard against bias by participating in diversity and inclusion training and reflecting on their own subconscious personal prejudices that may influence their decision-making at work. Earlier this year, The IN Group provided training on the changing nature of discrimination and privilege, to help people see the world from different perspectives. The feedback from these sessions will help to inform our approach to DEI over the next year.

"

When you make something everyone's problem, that's when everyone can work together to solve it.

Give your people a voice

Your people need to know that they have the freedom to express themselves and build communities without judgement. In 1999, an Amazon employee who wanted to connect with other LGBT colleagues created an email list he called '"glamazon"' – a contraction of gay and lesbian Amazon. Today, Amazon has more than 40 glamazon chapters around the world, from Seattle to Sydney, and has participated in more than 100 Pride

celebrations across the globe this year. This goes to show how giving a voice to your people can allow a single employee to create something truly global, and truly valuable to LGBTQ+ people across the company. Glamazon is just one of many affinity groups at the company which unite communities, instigate initiatives, and increase awareness.

Unite across boundaries

When you face a siloed culture, how can you find psychological safety? Who's there for you? Who's an ally when loneliness and anxiety set in?

Our Executive Director Derek Mackenzie, a long-time advocate for LGBTQ+ rights, recently launched Campaign, an LGBTQ+ recruiters' network. In a traditionally straight, high-performance sector that's fiercely competitive, the initiative will give recruiters from the LGBTQ+ community and its allies the opportunity to share ideas, emotional support, and change-driven inclusivity strategies to improve the representation and inclusion of LGBTQ+ people across every facet of recruitment.

Derek said: "Inclusion is an inside job, so rather than fighting alone, I'm teaming up with recruiters (and forgetting we're technically competitors) to unite our community. So welcome to Campaign – recruitment's first-ever UK-based peer-to-peer LGBT+ network." Campaign's here to empower and advise

all recruitment businesses on the best ways to create a safe and inclusive workspace for their LGBTQ+ staff. It shows the strength of solidarity – and that's important in a community made up of very different people with their own individual challenges, where there isn't always the sense of camaraderie and overall acceptance that you might expect.

When it's your problem, it's everyone's problem

If all the allies for the LGBTQ+ community came from within it, this wouldn't be enough to increase awareness in the wider community or bring about the change required. It would possibly leave them feeling more marginalised than ever.

When a non-LGBTQ+ colleague openly and actively puts themselves forward as an ally, that's when things can change. In doing so, they're supporting people who might feel really isolated.

They're also increasing the wider community's understanding and tolerance; showing that people with differing sexual and gender identities shouldn't be ostracised and feared, but included and respected.

Some businesses are bringing about change in extremely creative ways. Making allyship a cultural cornerstone starts with an inclusive mindset, particularly from your leaders. Listening, talking, and uniting are all key to accelerating that change.

THE **IN** GROUP

INVESTIGO | InX | definia. CARAFFI

The IN Group offers end-to-end talent solutions that
have one objective – to unlock the power of people.
Thanks to Investigo, InX, Definia, and Caraffi, we
have you covered from talent acquisition and digital
consultancy, all the way through to scaling
high-performance, permanent teams.