



An Agile Workforce

On Day 2 of the Human Resources Director Retreat, panellists discussed how they are looking to improve workforce productivity. **Mary-Anne Baldwin** reports

According to **Mark Spelman** at The World Economic Forum, we're fast approaching an era that demands a new kind of workforce. The challenge for HRDs is to understand how to acquire the necessary skills and knowledge before it's too late.

Mark, who is a Member of the Executive Committee at The World Economic Forum and Co-Head of its Future of the Internet Initiative, told attendees at the recent Criticaleye [Human Resources Directors Retreat 2016](#), that investment into R&D has been flat in most sectors across Europe for the past eight years.

"The result is that there is a productivity gap between Europe and North America

of about 15 per cent," he explained. "In the business world we really need to think about what we're doing with regard to our workforce and productivity. If you're not able to drive up productivity, what does that mean long term for wages and growth?"

Agile Minds

The issue of productivity is intrinsically linked to the impact of technology on the workforce, as **Charlie Wagstaff**, Managing Director at Criticaleye noted: "Those who don't move fast and adapt their workforce will doubtlessly suffer from a lack of productivity and competitive advantage. "Freedom through technology... will require far more collaboration and

cohesive ways of working that will fundamentally challenge current culture and organisational structures."

Gary Kildare, Chief HR Officer at IBM Corporation Europe, highlighted: "There will be one million unfilled ICT roles by 2040... Yet, up to 40 per cent of EU citizens have low, or no, IT skills. Where we want to go, they may not be able to follow."

During the course of the discussion, the audience heard from two very different business leaders, **Susanna Dinnage**, Executive Vice President and Managing Director for Discovery Networks UK & Ireland, and **Michael Farry**, People Director at snack >



company Graze, about how they're creating a workforce for tomorrow.

Like many established businesses, Discovery Channel can feel the heat of a burning platform below its feet. While demand for TV entertainment isn't falling, it is shifting to different viewing mediums – such as tablets and smart phones.

Yet, as **Susanna** explained, her greatest concern is her staff: "Business issues don't tend to keep me awake at night; if anything it's people issues. It's so important to get that right and out of the way so that we can focus on the business."

As the company adapts to meet its ever-changing consumer demands, **Susanna** explained that "you need people to come in who are very comfortable with being uncomfortable". For Discovery, this entails welcoming more millennials who, as digital natives, can provide greater insight into how media is being consumed in today's multi-tech environment.

CORPORATES ADOPTING AGILE

Many big businesses are recognising the benefits to be found in agile working. Sam Bunting, Partner at PA Consulting Group, explains: "I talk to most of the leading banks in the world on a monthly basis and literally all of them are rolling out agile to some degree. These include the likes of HSBC, Citigroup, Barclays and Deutsche Bank. One of the top five global banks is rolling out agile across its entire organisation from the CEO down. It's changing the way it does finance, the way it does internal audits, everything."

To read more about agile, click [here](#)

“The mix in our workforce is changing dramatically as we shift into multichannel”

As a fast-moving consumer goods company heavily rooted in tech, Graze already benefits from big data and staff who are able to crunch it.

"We receive about 15,000 ratings an hour from our consumers – they really want to give us the data," said **Michael**, Graze's People Director. "The ability to understand the customer journey both online and offline really gives us the edge."

However, Graze is on a journey of its own. Having recently formed partnerships with large supermarkets, and being in the midst of developing a new online customer offering, it understands that in order to reach its potential and keep growing, it must reshape and expand its skills base.

"The mix in our workforce is changing dramatically as we shift into multichannel," **Michael** explained. "We also recognise the culture of the business needs to change."

The leaders at Graze have used agile working to address this issue, creating cross-functional teams that merge customer service staff with product developers. It's allowed the company

to upskill its staff with new ways of thinking and the ability to better understand customers' needs.

"Agile has ushered in a new way of thinking to our business," said **Michael**. "It's team building, story forming and culture building."

With all of this in mind, the role of the HRD has arguably never been more important; they must prepare for change and the discomfort this brings.

As **Gary** at IBM noted: "Every business has its own rhythm, getting it to move to another one is like watching your parents dance to your favourite music. It's not a pretty sight."

Yet he left the audience with some advice: "Focus on your consumer, not who you used to be as a business. Don't fixate on the product either, but on what role it plays in the consumer's life." ■

Featuring Commentary From:



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