

## **Build a High Performance Culture and All will be Successful**

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In the last five years, we've seen a shift in attitudes towards flexible working. Research by the Workforce Institute shows a modern workplace divided against itself. Much has stemmed from globalisation of business and a younger workforce that has grown up with an always-on mentality.

In Europe, international trade now accounts for 20% of GDP and this is increasing. If a business expands internationally, this means different time zones extending the day, and it must adjust the way it supports employees who work in that environment.

As individuals, we know the technology exists to allow us to work efficiently and so we're less inclined to work for organisations unwilling to invest in supporting our work environment. Often this is becoming a key factor in selecting an employer alongside traditional factors such as salary and career potential. Technology means we can work remotely so our "potential employer opportunity" is wider than ever before.

Digital natives are not the only people looking for mobility and flexible work patterns. Digital immigrants, anyone born before 1990, a huge number of us, want it too. At home, we're fully set up to interact globally from a wireless device with video calls day and night to anywhere.

Increasingly, we're less and less willing to step back in time at work. For those entering the workplace for the first time, we might even find ourselves in the negative situation of having to train our new starters to take a step back in time with their workplace technology and work inefficiently!

### **When skies trump Skypes**

Technology has removed much of the need to travel, and collaboration tools such as Skype have enabled this. As innovation continues we can literally roll from bed to office, from London to New York in the swipe of a screen with no loss of time and no travel expenses, but there is a growing social cost.

There still is no “cloud fix” for time differences or interpersonal relationships. As digital lifestyles mature, many of us are looking a little closer at the impact of the “always-on culture”. For every great gift, there’s always a cost – this time it’s the Always-On Cost. Technology has started to tear out the very cultural nuances that make the world, home and workplace an interesting, fun and engaging place to be.

Addicted to the thrill of the message, we’re in danger of ignoring the real world. Work is creeping into home life and home life into work. Great when moderated and means the best of both worlds, but not when it means no clear boundaries, and both are suffering.

Without boundaries, there is no escape from business even during downtime, especially when operating in multiple time zones. Research shows people keep their mobile within arm’s reach for more than 90% of the time – day and night. The blue light of mobile phone displays has been shown to significantly impact sleep at night.

## **The offline generation**

Interestingly, the generation that is now rising as teenagers is starting to shun social media as we know it today. The fast, always-on world that most have become so dependent on is starting to change again.

We’re approaching natural digital detoxification. Our children want to talk to each other, maybe via a wireless headset, but they want to talk. They want to interact, meet people face-to-face and they want to experience the world as it is, not as created on social media. For a short-term detox, and on vacations, I turn mobile data off to avoid distractions.

## **Back to the future**

The internet doesn’t thrill children as it thrills us. They use it like we used a telephone as a child, a quick and easy way to get and share information. The thought of self-induced isolation for work, rest and play will likely end with Millennials.

We’re seeing this in the workplace. Once great businesses have failed by believing technology can

remove the personal touch. It cannot, even less so in a global business where the sum of the whole is a network of local teams with local ways of working and communicating. Virtual working is great, but only when balanced with in-person meetings.

## **Culture club**

If you remove the “culture” of any group, you lose the sense of belonging. The psychology of people means there needs to be a physical meeting of minds, shared experiences, and almost tribe mentality for business success.

Nuance is lost without the human touch. Instances of white-collar crime are up. If you don’t belong you can easily become disengaged and feral, you learn that you can get away with an awful lot.

Depression and feelings of isolation are common as people struggle to meet the expectations of colleagues they wouldn’t know if they met in the street. Performance drops without the motivation, knowledge sharing and skills of others. None of this is good for business.

We need to rebuild the clubhouse feel of work; where people come together for a common cause – to win. What works is a business culture that takes the best of all worlds, physical and virtual, analogue and digital, and blends these.

When England netball won Commonwealth Gold, this success was unanimously attributed to the team culture and combined passion to win. The same was said when GB women’s hockey took Gold at the Olympics. Both successes were down to training, working, wanting and winning together.

Many at NGA HR work from home or at client sites. The sense of belonging can be difficult to maintain, even with mobile workplace technology. To maintain our ‘tribe’ mentality, we have team meetings and socials. The proven results far outweigh any costs.

## **Global business culture**

A recent employee Pulse Survey at NGA HR showed the resounding reason why people enjoy working here, and why they stay – the people and team culture. However, ask anyone and few actually work in the same country as their team, so why did we see this result?

Mobility – location and job function. We have offices in 35 countries and people with nearly 200 supporting clients. We have apprentices from school and colleagues in their 70s working side by side.

Many people take “workplace sabbaticals” to overseas office locations. This not only enables the business to keep its best talent, but it also keeps everyone fresh and engaged and excited. A sense of newness without needing to move on.

A melting pot of opportunities and potential disasters, if not managed carefully!

## **Appreciating differences**

It’s this melting pot that forms the foundation of our culture. A diverse mix of nationalities, ages and work experiences and with this comes huge opportunities for personal growth, but also disparities in the way we interact with each other – professionally and personally.

A recent HBR survey found diverse teams are the most successful and we see this. This also helps remind us that the world hasn’t shrunk into a screen but is still alive with a vast mix of cultures, religions and lifestyles, and differences in the ways of working and communicating, vital for any business with a multinational client base.

Email is a great way to get communication badly wrong. Where it might be acceptable for some to send one-word responses, or to not respond at all, for others email is a letter without the postal system and should be responded to as such.

In some countries, religion features higher than in others. Hierarchy is still expected and followed in some, and in others, great strides are still to be taken towards equality. What’s considered respectful in

one country is not in another and by one person not by another. One person's humour is another's insult. It's for these reasons human-to-human contact is essential, to understand differences and embrace them. These differences are easily lost in the virtual business world of social media and email.

## **Plan your own digital journey**

This need to balance virtual with physical travel leads us back to technology. Much can be achieved virtually, and business travel well planned, but it must be balanced. It's easy to forget why we work – so we can live well.

Too often we fall into the trap that 'the longer I work the greater respect I gain.' 'The more I labour the greater my output.' We're as much to blame as our managers for this and too often it stems from the culture of the business. First in, last out wins the race, but this is rarely the case. People, like machines, only have infinite capacity until they break down and if people fail, so too will the business.

Re-energising, reengaging and refocusing is vital for employers and employees.

## **Smart technology makes smart people**

Smart working, using the technologies we already have, enables personal and professional efficiencies and I'm seeing amazing developments in our NGA HR Innovation Hub in Granada, Spain, with new ways of working that challenge the ways we approach business success.

No longer is the focus on working from home but on collaboration. To work well there must be a business culture that looks, listens and learns from each other. Collaboration doesn't just been virtually, but physically.

Put down devices occasionally and connect person-to-person. It is amazing how efficient a face-to-face meeting can be. Yes, the roundtrip travel was 12 hours at a total cost of £1,200, but the actual time and cost to success can be 50 times faster than a series of misinterpreted emails and broken Skype calls. This is especially so with new teams and client relationships.

## The future of work is one that matches, not replaces, people with digital

The future of work that I envisage is one that uses technology as the enabler and people to deliver success. Companies that invest in employee engagement strategies and build solid international cultures will achieve overall and long-term business success.

Technology in the workplace is a necessity in today's international business but so too is encouraging the switch-off for the sake of employee well-being. Your business is only as healthy as the people within it.

From a blog I recently published with Workforce Institute - Europe

*The post "Build a High-Performance Culture and All will be Successful" was first published by Simon Porter here <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/build-high-performance-culture-all-successful-simon-porter/>*

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