



# Springboard to the Future Newsletter

## Helping managers tune misfiring teams

January 2023

### The Background

2022 was a challenging year for business with the downward economic trends and decreased stability in a rapidly changing world reverberating from the shocks of the COVID pandemic and the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Many businesses struggled to survive in the face of high energy costs and optimism has been hard to find.

We have seen businesses, large and small, address the challenge of remote working and WFH productivity while dealing with mass resignations and retirements. There has been a shortage of skilled employees (and managers) to cope with both the everyday needs, and those required to adapt to the business transformation as AI becomes increasingly widespread.

### Trends

**1/3<sup>rd</sup> of 100 top CEOs from around the world said talent recruitment and retention was their biggest challenge by far, while just 10% mentioned economic uncertainty and instability, and inflation/stagflation. "Rise of the "corporate nomad". HBR 2022.** The impact of the "Great Resignation" may have been tempered by the economic downturn but the "war for talent" continues. Businesses, large and small, are facing skills gaps and shortages that makes it increasingly difficult to attract and retain the "right" talent.

**"Actively disengaged" employees now make up 18% of the workforce, up from 16% in 2021, while the remaining 50% are resorting to "quiet quitting". Gallup survey 2022.** Young millennials and Generation Z workers under 35 years old are disengaging from work in much higher numbers than older colleagues, while more women reported feeling disengaged than men.

**70% of employees felt that flexible working made a job more attractive. What employees expect in 2021: Engaging talent in the shadow of COVID, 2021 IBM.** Flexibility in the workplace is at the top of the agenda for many people and it will increase in importance as the economy picks up. Hybrid working has been adopted with varying degrees of success.

**A study of 3,500 leaders and managers across the UK, found that almost three quarters believed that leadership was lacking throughout the pandemic. ILM and City & Guilds Group Survey.** The pandemic years were a great test of leadership. Businesses are now faced with an even greater challenge as they adapt to the new ways of working. The key groups are the junior and middle managers who are squeezed by the direction from senior executives and the need to meet the expectations of their team members.

**Recent research revealed that only 12% of firms have advanced their AI maturity enough to achieve superior growth and business transformation. The Art of AI Maturity, 2022 Accenture.** AI has finally come out of the shadows and is having a profound effect on the early adopters. It is assessed that the number of AI Achievers will double by 2024 taking it mainstream, after which it is expected to be adopted exponentially.

## Talking Points

**During the last year we have watched the battle lines being drawn over the issue of flexible working.** In the blue corner are the younger generations who put significant emphasis on flexible working as a key requirement of employment. This is understandable as many of them joined the workforce during the pandemic and want to continue to enjoy greater autonomy over their working lives.

In the red corner are the senior executives, including James Dyson (Dyson) and Jamie Dimon (JPMorgan) who want to get back to the pre-pandemic model with everybody back in the office. Google and Apple have taken the same stance while Lord Alan Sugar (The Apprentice) took a typically outspoken view of the work ethic of those who choose to work from home. This again is no surprise; all these individuals learnt their trades in the office culture. It is what they know and it is the system in which they became successful.

The development of flexible working is being clouded by the emphasis on WFH which is a sub-optimal solution for many people. The office is still the focus for company culture, provides the collaborative space, technical equipment, training ground for the young and the social environment.

Flexible working has many benefits which include attracting talent, improving engagement and job satisfaction and increased well-being and retention. All of which should add up to increased individual productivity. It should be embraced alongside AI and digital transformation but there is no simple template; it is more complicated than centralised working. Businesses need to develop their own model of flexible working that meets the needs of the leadership, the team and the individual. Those that don't will almost certainly fall behind.

**The collapse of public sector productivity** (it fell 1.3pc in the three months to September 2022 – compared with the previous quarter, according to the Office for National Statistics) shines a light on what happens when insufficient thought is given to flexible working. In this case, it appears that the WFH model adopted during the lockdowns have just been left to run rather than the conscious development of flexible working models. In short the public sector has succumbed to what we would term “the horrible hybrid”.

The move from a centralised/traditional working model to a flexible model requires considerable effort. The distributed nature of work has means that culture, communications and performance metrics all take on greater importance. It requires an intentional culture change driven by the leadership rather than just a change in hours and location. That requires leaders with the vision for change and managers that are prepared to meet these challenges.

## Springboard to the Future

The concept for **Springboard to the Future** took shape during lockdown as Glen and I engaged with the problem of reintegrating teams as the first lockdown ended. This led us to support businesses as they took their first tentative steps towards hybrid work. Now we have evolved further with our mission to help managers tune their misfiring teams. Managers are the squeezed jam in the sandwich between the demands of their executives and the expectations of their teams. Much maligned and often derided, it is the managers who get things done, who turn the vision into reality.

If you want to start a conversation, you can either email [gmh@springboardttf.com](mailto:gmh@springboardttf.com) or [fs@springboardttf.com](mailto:fs@springboardttf.com) or visit the website [springboardttf.com](http://springboardttf.com) for further details.