

AI and leadership – getting it right

By **Juliette Alban-Metcalf**,
Chartered occupational
psychologist and CEO of
Real World Group



The use of AI in organisations is increasing exponentially, and potentially without any limits. Organisations are naturally keen to benefit from the efficiency and cost savings that AI can bring, however – as with any new innovation that is sweeping the world – there is a risk this is the ‘in’ thing to do, and may often be pushed faster than is appropriate.

People are rightly concerned about whether it genuinely makes sense to replace as many traditionally manual or human-directed activities with AI as is already happening, or is on the horizon in their sector. It is essential we all question and challenge this in our particular areas of expertise so the best AI solutions can be adopted and the worst avoided.

One area where AI is growing rapidly is in people selection and assessment. All the time, more AI-powered tools to assess someone’s personality, critical reasoning, values, motivations and many more factors are being introduced to the market. These solutions promise to effectively replace approaches that take longer to complete, are slower, more resource intensive and complex to enact. Indeed, there do seem to be many ways in which AI can improve selection and assessment for both the organisation and the individual. Confidence will grow, even among AI naysayers, if and when future longitudinal research shows that it can be proven to lead to even better ‘job-person fit’ and greater success in roles than what is used currently.

However, the latter point is absolutely key – evidence of greater effectiveness. Benefits to both organisations and candidates will be negated, and potentially reversed, if AI-powered assessments aren’t actually providing at least as equally effective data or decision making. There is also the issue, as with traditional approaches to selection and assessment, of potential adverse impact against minoritised groups. After all, we must never forget that an AI system is only as



unbiased as the humans who wrote the initial algorithms, and the data used for its learning.

One area I would argue could never be replaced with AI, or rather, should never be fully replaced by AI, is leadership assessment. This is because to assess leadership effectively one has to gather information well beyond the leader’s own self-assessment, and not enough of this essential information is captured or held electronically.

To address the first point – self-assessment – research over decades consistently shows our own perceptions of our leadership effectiveness tend to be biased. Typically, each of us has both positive and negative blind spots about our behaviour and impact. Given this, we are not well placed to accurately gauge whether we are doing enough to positively influence

those around us – our manager, colleagues, team members, other stakeholders – or indeed, if we are having a negative impact on them.

Nor are we particularly effective in assessing whether we are nurturing the type of culture in our teams that will enable our people to realise their performance potential. For example, whether we are creating a supportive environment, ensuring psychological safety and social support, maintaining wellbeing, self-confidence, resilience, and so on. Personality assessment is great for exploring many things, but leadership outcomes such as these are not one of those, so we must specifically enquire about others’ experience of our behaviour.

To address the second point – the data needed – AI, like us as humans, needs data input in order to analyse and generate

predictions. However, AI needs this to be captured electronically. The problem here is the data needed to assess truly effective leadership isn’t sufficiently gathered electronically. Some is, such as emails, messaging, videocalls, web-based phone calls, etc. But the culture organisations need – particularly in an era of increased AI adoption and the change that brings – results as much, if not more, from offline experiences of one’s leader such as feedback, conversations, off-chance meetings and chats, planned meetings, informal coaching or guidance provided, the leader’s tone, their level of genuine interest in a person, choice of language, wellbeing check-ins, and so on.

The bottom line is these offline interactions are an absolutely critical part assessing leadership capability and they cannot be effectively assessed, analysed or used to generate models by AI because AI doesn’t have access to them. Even if a company tried to introduce sophisticated and in-depth behavioural observation and analytics as a basis for assessing leader behaviour in these interactions, it is very likely that a number of adverse outcomes would emerge.

These observations and analysis would need to be extensive and intrusive in order to be of use, therefore we can predict push back from employees on the basis of privacy concerns, increased stress commensurate with increased surveillance (real or perceived), loss of key talent to places that are more ‘human’, and potentially lawsuits for wrongful use of information and the like. At the simplest level, it is very far from certain this would be in any way positively correlated with employee engagement, commitment, wellbeing or motivation, and therefore, performance.

Circling back to the start of this article, there do indeed seem to be many benefits AI can offer in selection and assessment of leadership. However, if we understand that leadership is our greatest positive leverage for improved performance in today’s increasingly challenging and complex times, we need to be firm and clear that leadership assessment is an area in which relying solely on AI would do more harm to organisations than good. ●●●●●

INSIDE:

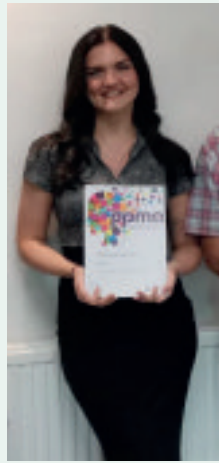


- One to Watch & Rising Star winners
- A special focus on workforce metrics



'An incredible experience'

By **Sophie Coubrough** of Brentwood BC and Rochford DC – winner of this year's PPMA One to Watch Award



I work at Brentwood BC and Rochford DC as a HR Officer following our #OneTeam transformation.

After I was sent through the information for the One to Watch programme, I immediately got excited and looked at the application form. The programme was an opportunity to network with many individuals like me across the country, gain an amazing amount of insight and put myself in a situation I've never encountered before.

The programme was brilliant, despite being something so far from my comfort zone, I engaged thoroughly in all the activities presented to us – from learning how to pace yourself and give a speech, to tasks that involved thinking on the spot and being under pressure. What I enjoyed the most was the chance to engage with others, learn their stories and all their legacies.

I loved meeting others – putting people first is the face of the profession for me and I'm so glad to have met everyone!

This year's cohort was the best experience, everyone was so kind and welcoming. The skills and guidance given will last me for the rest of my life.

The constructive feedback, techniques in telling your story and thinking on the spot... I will continue to bring this with me and allow it to influence my behaviour positively. It has given me confidence in my capabilities and recognising what I can develop further.

I know the development will extremely benefit my future, as I am recognising areas in which to implement the techniques.

One thing we covered was that 'nervousness is just excitement', and this has highly resonated with me. I am excited to progress further, let the experience benefit

my journey through my level 3 and then later down the line my level 5.

To anyone thinking about taking part – do it! Don't let anything prevent you from reaching experiences that will last a lifetime. I'm so thankful to have been involved and been a part of such a brilliant programme.

Jonathan Stephenson, Chief Executive for Brentwood BC and Rochford DC, commented: 'Sophie joined us in January 2021 as one of our corporate apprentices. She embraced the challenge many young people faced in setting out in their career at a very strange time, working remotely as well as studying, however she excelled and I was delighted when she secured a role within the People and OD Team in January this year.

'We are focussed on creating opportunities and career pathways for our employees, enabling them

to thrive and have a positive impact within the future of public services, Sophie is an excellent example of the talent we nurture at Brentwood and Rochford.'

Nichola Mann, Acting Joint Director People and Governance for Brentwood BC and Rochford DC, added: 'Sophie is an absolute asset to Brentwood and Rochford and we are extremely lucky to have her in our People and OD team.

'Watching how she has flourished and grown in confidence since joining us at the start of this year has been an absolute pleasure I know that has a lot to do with the amazing people that she works with.

'Sophie winning One to Watch is a fantastic achievement, as she has only been within HR for seven months. We know she has amazing potential to be a future HR leader and winning, I hope shows her that others do to.'



Q&A



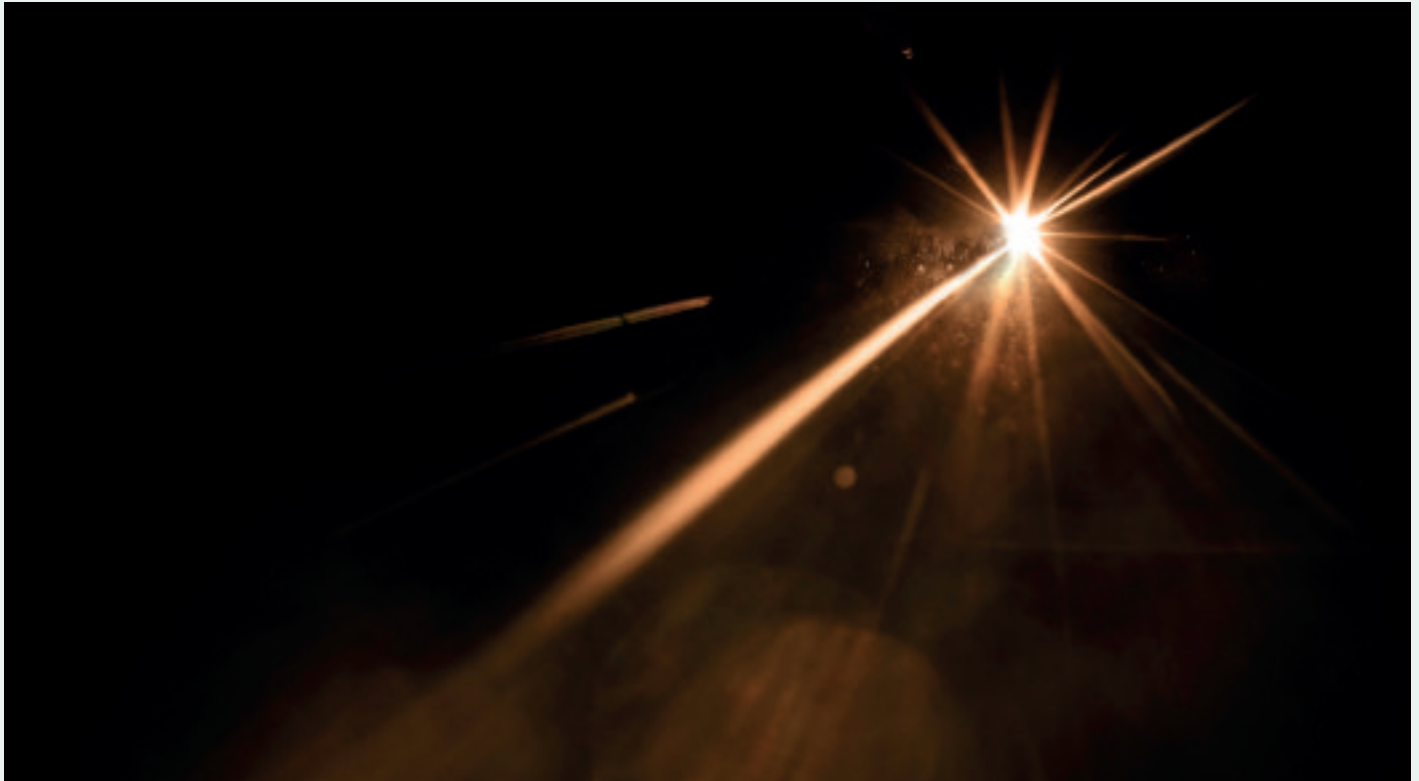
James Bird of Gloucestershire CC – winner of this year's PPMA Rising Star Award

Where are you currently working and what is your role?

I currently work for Gloucestershire CC as their Employee Relations Lead. Including our traded services partners, my team support over 400 employee relations cases a year. As a team we work hard to ensure all foreseeable risks are mitigated against for our stakeholders.

Due to the scope of the role I work closely with a number of the senior leadership team, and on behalf of Gloucestershire CC attend monthly Trade Union meetings with the Fire Brigade Union – and bi-monthly I meet with Unison, Unite and GMB representatives.

Data insights play an increasingly significant part of employee relations work and we have proactive management information and OD teams that enable us to take the learning from employee relations casework trends, internal employee networks and staff surveys to help us to improve our practice.



Why did you apply for PPMA's HR Rising Star?

I have been aware of the PPMA for some time and the excellent support, development and recognition pathways they have created across the public sector. I saw the HR Rising Star programme as a good opportunity to challenge myself and network with likeminded colleagues.

After doing some research and hearing from past winners like Neisha Porter, I felt that it would be an exciting opportunity to challenge my abilities.

My ambition is to be able to use my life and career experiences, working in Westminster

What did you learn about yourself from participating in the programme?

I am an adaptable and versatile professional and am always open to considering new ideas and approaches. The programme took me out of my comfort zone, and I discovered self-confidence is not just a prerequisite for success; it is a life skill that can help everyone succeed in any endeavour they choose to pursue.

I have always been passionate about leadership and the characteristics of influential leaders and I feel the programme helped me to recognise the leadership potential I possess.

What influence do you consider the

experience and learning you have acquired will have on your future career?


Winning the Rising Star award has re-enforced my desire to make a positive and significant impact in local government. The award and recognition has enhanced my self-belief that I am now ready to undertake more significant challenges and assume greater responsibilities within my career.

The programme honed a number of transferable skills such as problem-solving, communication, and leadership. I anticipate these will be invaluable when I move into a senior leadership role.

What is next for you?

I hope winning this award will serve as a strong foundation for my future career aspirations. I am extremely passionate about the difference compassionate, people-focused, entrepreneurialism can have on the future of the public sector.

My ambition is to be able to use my life and career experiences, working in Westminster and as a director for a SME, and now as an employee relations specialist within local government to take on greater responsibilities and make a noteworthy impact on organisational outcomes.

I am ambitious for the public sector and would like to be part of developing long-term organisational strategies that not only inspire internal stakeholders but deliver genuine prosperity for the communities that we serve. 

ORACLE

The Future Of...
Autumn Dinner Series
Your Personal Invitation

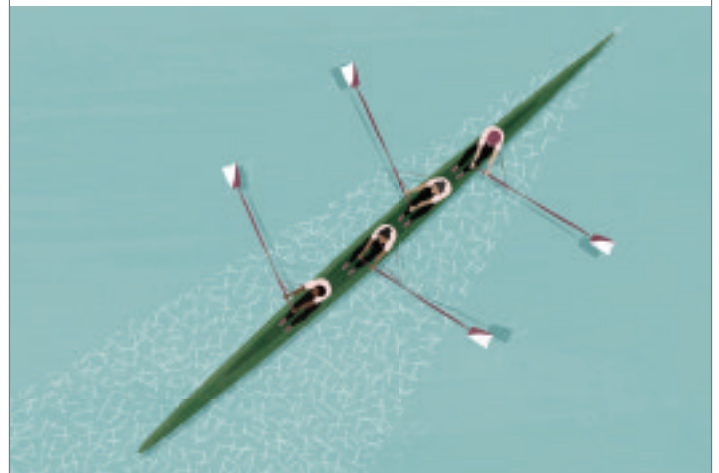
PPMA, Oracle and KPMG are delighted to be hosting a series of events designed to bring together senior leaders from across public sector to share, learn and connect.

Bristol
The Future of Workforce
SS Great Britain
5th December

Gateshead
The Future of Service Delivery
The Baltic
9th November

Birmingham
The Future of Ethics in a Digital World
Ikon Gallery
16th November

All events commencing at 6.00 pm with a 9.30 pm finish.
To reserve your place email: leatham.green@oracle.com





Digital achievers

This year Oracle was delighted to associated with *The MJ Awards*, sponsoring the Digital Innovation category. Here they focus on this year’s winner and the outstanding work that is being delivered at Stockton on Tees BC

An innovative digital approach to create quality education health and care plans (EHCPs) for children and young people saw Stockton-on-Tees BC scoop a national award.

The council beat other local authorities and public sector organisations to win the Digital Transformation award at *The MJ Achievement Awards* in June.

The award commends those using digital technology which positively changes local authority services. It is judged by influential figures from across the public and private sectors.

The council was shortlisted for the award after it worked with Invision360 to develop a new way to measure and analyse the quality of new EHCPs, a statutory document for children with complex special education, health and care needs.

The new digital tool allows Stockton-on-Tees BC’s children’s services to focus on measuring the quality of the plans. This has led to a system-wide process which improves the consistency of the plans with the aim of ensuring that those who deliver support to children and young people have the best information possible.

Councillor Lisa Evans, Stockton-on-Tees BC’s Cabinet Member for Children and Young People, said: ‘I’m delighted that the work we have done to improve the quality of EHCPs across the borough has been fully recognised.

‘We’ve worked alongside Stockton-on-Tees’ parent carer forum and Invision 360 to improve the process and ensure

quality is measured- and what we have achieved is game-changing. By embracing this new technology we can easily review information across the board which means we can spot where further improvements are needed.

‘Of course, we are not complacent and understand the challenges we face – the quality and consistency of EHCPs is a national issue but as part of our improvement journey we are working hard to address these issues.

‘I am honoured to hold this position and am incredibly proud of the hard work and commitment of the teams involved. This highly coveted award is recognition of that dedication and what we have achieved.’


Mike Greene, Chief Executive of Stockton-on-Tees BC, said: ‘This award shows that we are empowering our staff

to be ambitious, explore new ideas and embrace innovation to provide the best services we can for our residents – in this case children, young people and their families.

‘The success of this digital tool and pilot project highlights two important things. Allowing our teams to be pioneering really pays off. And by fostering a partnership approach, working closely alongside the borough’s Parent carer forum and Invision 360, we’ve been able to utilise their experience and expertise to create something which is fit for purpose for our teams. This will truly help improve outcomes for children with complex special education, health and care needs.’

Emma Zenaj, Strategic and Communication Lead at Stockton-on-Tees parent carer forum, said: ‘*Winning The MJ* award is recognition of how much work goes on behind the scenes to improve things here in Stockton-on-Tees, for children, young people and families.

‘Increasing quality of EHCPs and ensuring involvement by all, through quality assurance, is integral to this. Our children and young people deserve the best and this tool is a huge step towards achieving better outcomes for them.’

Phil Stock, Founder and CEO of Invision360, said: ‘I was absolutely delighted to see Stockton-on-Tees BC’s commitment to driving SEND improvements recognised. Winning *The MJ* Digital Transformation award is a real accolade, and thoroughly well-deserved.’ 



Embracing co-design and co-production

Transformation within councils is not a luxury – it’s a necessity, as this article explains



By Gillian Quinton,
Associate Director at
Peopletoo

At Peopletoo, we’ve always believed in innovative, people-centred solutions in public service delivery. One of the most critical facets of this vision is the emphasis on transformation. But when we talk about transformation, especially within councils, we’re not merely discussing changes in processes or technology; we’re referring to an all-encompassing shift in how councils interact with their residents and businesses and how they design and deliver services.

The world around us is rapidly evolving. Social dynamics, technological advancements, economic challenges, and rising demands require that councils do not remain static. They must adapt, innovate, and transform to meet the growing demands of their communities effectively. Traditional top-down models are becoming obsolete. They often result in services that are disconnected from the people they aim to serve. To create genuine value, councils must undergo a transformative journey, both internally and externally.

Enter co-design and co-production.

Co-design is about involving users, stakeholders, and service providers in the design process from the very start. It’s about acknowledging that people – whether they’re service users or frontline staff – have invaluable insights and knowledge that can shape more effective and user-friendly services.

Co-production, on the other hand, is the practice of producing services together. It’s not just about consultation but about genuine collaboration. It’s the shared creation of solutions and strategies, ensuring that the result is relevant, impactful, and tailored to the actual needs of the community.

By embracing co-design and co-production, councils can:

- **Foster Trust:** When communities are involved in the design and delivery of services, it cultivates trust. They see their local authorities not just as service providers but as partners working collaboratively for the community’s wellbeing.
- **Increase Efficiency:** Solutions borne out of collaboration are more attuned to real-world challenges. This results in better allocation of resources and less wasted effort on initiatives that might not resonate with the community.



• **Drive Innovation:** With diverse minds at the table, innovative ideas are more likely to emerge. Different perspectives breed creativity, leading to solutions that a singular, top-down approach might never discover.

For councils to remain relevant, effective, and trusted in today’s dynamic landscape, they must undergo transformation that goes beyond superficial change. Only that way can they create genuine value for communities.

When organisations champion co-design

and co-production, we have witnessed first hand the tangible benefits this approach offers. Projects across various councils have shown that where local authorities engage and collaborate with their staff and communities, the results are often transformative – leading to improved services, better outcomes, and strengthened community bonds.

Transformation within councils is not a luxury; it’s a necessity. And the path to genuine transformation lies in co-design and co-production. By fostering a

collaborative, inclusive, and people-centric approach, councils can navigate the challenges of the modern world, ensuring they deliver services that truly resonate with their colleagues and communities.

At Peopletoo, we remain committed to this vision, helping councils embrace the transformative power of co-design and co-production. When working ‘together’ organisations can shape a future where public services are not just delivered for the people but are designed and produced with them. 

The data behind delivery

A look at workforce metrics and how they can enable local authorities to assess the capacity of their staff to deliver



By **Steve Davies**, past president of the PPMA and current treasurer & secretary

Data has become an essential commodity in making evidence-based decision making. The ability for local authorities to measure, understand and assess the capacity of their workforces to deliver services to their communities is fundamental.

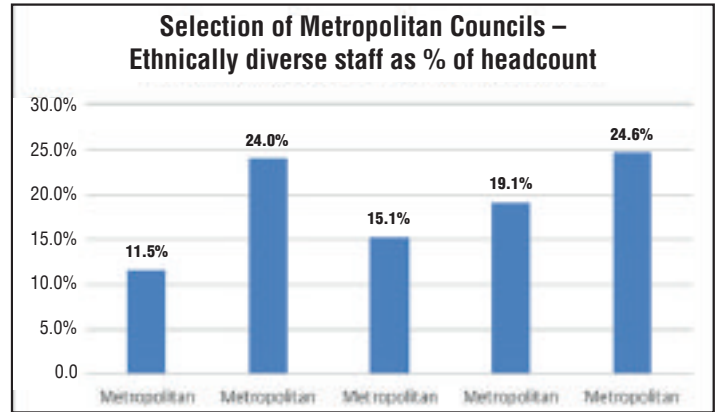
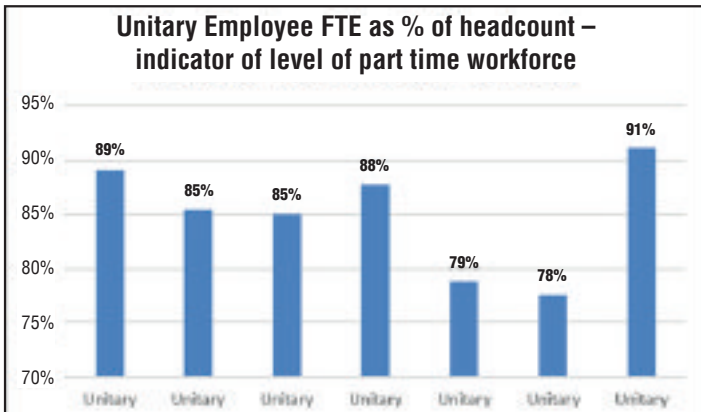
The use of workforce metrics to understand their capacity, assess performance and benchmark by comparing various metrics and characteristics against other 'similar' councils, whether it's their nearest neighbour geographically or by other definitions, will provide insights into how a local authority measures up to its peers and identify opportunities for improvement and innovation.

Discussions have taken place between the National Association of Regional Employers (NARE), the Local Government Association (LGA) and Department for

Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) to develop an approach to workforce data sharing and benchmarking across the local government sector. The vision is to develop a set of workforce metrics that all local authorities use to enable the assessment of local authority workforce capacity and benchmark against others with the aim of facilitating understanding of best practice delivery.

The London Councils HR metrics service has provided workforce metrics and pay benchmark data for many years to London boroughs, and more recently to local authorities in the South East, East of England and West Midlands regions of local government. In total more than 90 councils use the London Councils HR metrics service.

An agreed core set of workforce metrics has been developed which will be collected via the London Councils HR metrics online platform. The core set of workforce metrics cover workforce size, percentage of top tier management, gender, ethnic groups, disabled, age bands, agency and temp staff numbers. This will help to identify



The emergence of

A personal look at predictive policing – the national issue requiring a national response

By **Tom McNeil**, Assistant Police and Crime Commissioner for the West Midlands



Serious crime is, sadly, a reality of the world and the UK is no special case in this regard. Organised criminality, modern day slavery and cybercrime are major challenges of the day. Many of the longer-term solutions to crime have been recognised for generations; tackling root causes such as abusive childhoods, exclusion from high quality education and employment opportunities and a range of other triggers – unsupported mental health problems, substance misuse and poverty continue to be recognised. However, as things stand today, we still need police forces that are equipped to deal with the crime taking place right now; the crime society has failed to prevent.

Being sufficiently equipped will undoubtedly involve technological

developments and, in some cases, artificial intelligence (AI). If any such innovation is to meet the high bar of being just and deserving of public trust, ethics must be at its heart; in design, in implementation and throughout the technology's life.

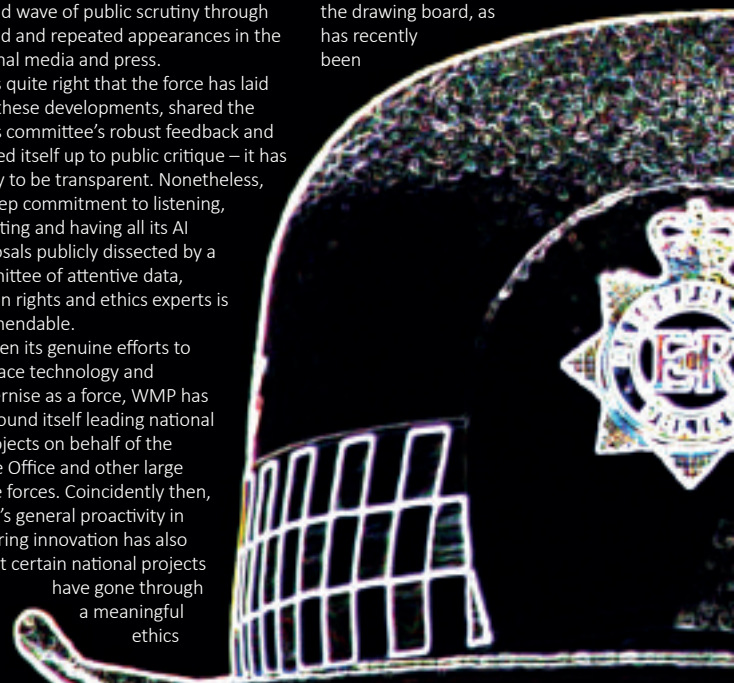
In recent months, the second largest force in England, West Midlands Police (WMP), has courageously presented to the world much of its work on AI, despite the attention that was likely to follow. The driver of this heightened transparency, was the requirement to publish and disseminate all project proposals, minutes and advice from the data ethics committee established by the West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC). In opening up about this work, it has offered sight of its controversial proposals around a youth violence prediction tool. It has publicly shared its efforts to use AI to link intelligence reports on modern day slavery; helping build a clearer picture of a complex crime that might otherwise go undetected due to seemingly disparate intelligence

reports. Plans to try and predict those individuals who might engage in serious reoffending, have also been shown to the world. As a result, WMP has undergone a second wave of public scrutiny through related and repeated appearances in the national media and press.

It is quite right that the force has laid bare these developments, shared the ethics committee's robust feedback and opened itself up to public critique – it has a duty to be transparent. Nonetheless, its deep commitment to listening, reflecting and having all its AI proposals publicly dissected by a committee of attentive data, human rights and ethics experts is commendable.

Given its genuine efforts to embrace technology and modernise as a force, WMP has also found itself leading national AI projects on behalf of the Home Office and other large police forces. Coincidentally then, WMP's general proactivity in exploring innovation has also meant certain national projects have gone through a meaningful ethics

process within the West Midlands. The reality is this ethics oversight has sometimes raised inconvenient concerns that require the data scientists go back to the drawing board, as has recently been



the overall size and scope of the workforce and is sufficient to enable broad analysis and comparison with other types of authorities and/or regions.

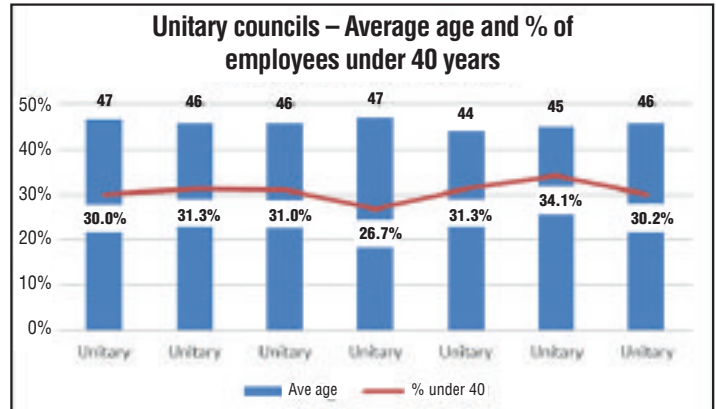
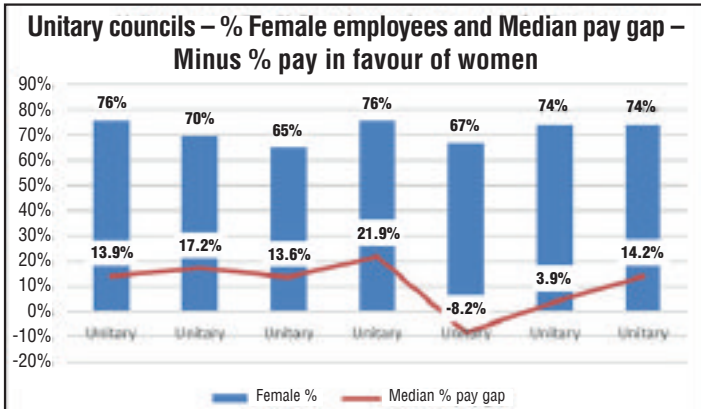
The core metrics could also potentially be combined with key information from the gender pay gap returns reported by local authorities to gov.uk.

The medium-term aim is to get all 333 local authorities in England completing the core set of workforce metrics.

For those local authorities that choose to subscribe to the full London Councils HR metrics service there is potential to tap into a much wider set of workforce metrics as well as extensive pay benchmark data on professional job families and chief officer level roles.

Outlined below are mock-ups of the type of information from the core set of workforce metrics that can be benchmarked and used.

- Steve Davies heads up the London regional employers' organisation and manages the London Councils HR metrics service



predictive policing

reported in other prominent national publications.

Key to the committee's deliberations are that it is not simply enough for AI technology to be accurate,

tested and free of racial or other bias, but its use must be proportionate and evaluated against the real-world social context. The Lammy Review, among many other influential and expert commentators, highlighted some serious concerns around institutional racism in the criminal justice system. These see certain groups and demographics disproportionately handed more punitive responses to their crimes.

Many young people for instance engage in low level offending because they are struggling to access real opportunity – they are desperate.

An AI tool, whether facial recognition or otherwise, would not benefit society if it was used to more efficiently round up vulnerable young people and enter them into a system with known flaws. At the same time, would we should not turn our noses up at accurate technology targeted at preventing human traffickers or illegally transporting guns into the country.

Many of the civil society activists I have spoken with are cautiously delighted to see this level of transparency take place. They are equally pleased to see the committee has 'teeth'; addressing a commonly cited concern over weak committees. One major question however, remains on the tip of their tongues – what about the other 42 police forces in England and Wales?

It is not enough for AI to be accurate, tested and free of racial or other bias, but its use must be proportionate and evaluated against the real-world social context

The recent Court of Appeal decision in *R (Bridges) versus the Chief Constable of South Wales Police** has shown the need for clearer regulation and statutory safeguards around the use of facial recognition technology on our streets. This is probably the most prominent contemporary AI debate, and there is good reason for believing legal reform may be necessary. Until then though, who is overseeing and publicly assessing the vast array of different AI products and predictive tools being touted to police

forces across the country?

We at the West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner's Office argue that a new National Ethics Institute is required. There are multiple ways to do this, but based on the principles of the West Midlands data ethics committee, we believe now is the time to have a visible, empowered and authentic new body. It is this that can help police forces traverse the new technological era and the difficult societal debates that accompany their advancements and implementation.

Placing transparency, human rights and diversity of perspective at the heart of policing AI, serves to simultaneously improve the technology, ensure its goals are consistent with a fair society and build public trust and legitimacy. For these reasons, we are kick-starting the conversation about what such an Institute would look like, and how it properly engages with civil society and the public. Equally, we enter this arena looking to offer police agencies assurance that an Institute of this kind must also understand the significant and constantly shifting challenges the police face in keeping the public safe.

* <https://www.judiciary.uk/judgments/r-bridges-v-cc-south-wales/>



Creating a culture where making it personal matters



By **Leatham Green**,
Transformation
Director UK&I
(Public Sector),
Oracle

The competition for suitable workers is fiercer than ever, and the challenge to retain and recruit talent is faced by all business leaders across every sector. This heightened shortage of talent, coupled with the unprecedented transformation of the workplace as a consequence of the pandemic, has strengthened the employee's hand in having higher expectations of their work experience.

Progressive councils recognise the operational imperative of improving their 'employee experience' as a major differentiator in the current highly competitive labour market to attract and retain the best talent.

What is employee experience?

The concept and significance of 'the employee experience' is a hot topic – treating your employees in much the

same way as you would other service users/customers rather than seeing them merely as a 'resource, commodity or asset' to be utilised and set aside when they are no longer of value.

Jacob Morgan, international best-selling author and futurist, defines the term very simply as 'changing the core workplace practices around your people, and thereby creating an organisation where employees WANT, not NEED, to show up to work'. It happens by focusing on three environments: culture, technology, and physical space.

Human centred work

From an employee's perspective, the scope of the 'employee experience' is end to end – from recruitment to retirement. It's all about making the experience of work more human, personal and relevant to each individual. As consumers of commodities and services, our employees now expect (as a norm) the same level of service we anticipate receiving in our everyday lives.

This concept of an employee

experience mirrors Oracle's objective of partnering with HR teams to make work more human centred, ensuring that people at all stages of their employment are genuinely nurtured, regardless of the job they do. We should aim to ensure that our employees feel good, or even great about their experiences, and then affirm with their network how brilliant their experience at work is.

We must understand that this is not a one-time exercise: as the life cycle of our workforce moves on, so must our employee experience

Challenging though it may appear, addressing the way our workers feel about their employer, is key to enhancing the employer's reputation as the 'go-to' place to work – building an environment where people want to work.

Through the creation of a brilliant employee experience, goodwill is created and broadcast through social media, word of mouth and the grape-

vine. This in turn instils in potential employees the desire to join an organisation in preference to its competitors.

To achieve and maintain this advantage may be no simple task – some employers may be part way there, and some floundering at the starting line, grasping that a cultural and mindset shift are pre-requisites to aligning employer aspirations with those of their workforce. We must understand that this is not a one-time exercise: as the life cycle of our workforce moves on, so must our employee experience continue to not merely match, but stay ahead of the dynamic expectations of our workforce.

To achieve cultural and mindset transformation requires us all to move away from the conventional 'one size fits all' experience which many of us are conditioned to delivering, and adopt an approach which recognises that the individual is key to future business success- reflecting the notion of 'my experience, my needs, my wants, my aspirations'. 