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Let's talk talent



Gordon McFarlane looks at the long-term benefits of talent programmes as part of your organisation's workforce and people strategies



By **Gordon McFarlane**, PPMA President

In a world where we are all battling with short-term, immediate and often urgent workforce challenges, it's incumbent on us to also create space for leaders to focus on the long-term. It's hard to do, with uncertainty as to how fast moving change will shape the future, but it's really important that we have the discussions and turn the ideas into plans.

Investment in learning and development, in growing our own, and in the practical aspects of our medium and long-term workforce and succession plans is really important. Many HR colleagues are engaging key customers in conversations about the longer term.

Of course there is a risk that following a period of development, some people will thank us for their newly gained skills and qualifications and find opportunities elsewhere, but this risk is far outweighed by the long-term benefits we get from upskilling, developing and retaining great staff.

Every time we run our talent programmes, it confirms to me the future of local government and of HR is in safe hands

There's nothing new about any of this, but with the intensity of the workforce challenges that we're facing, there is renewed and increasing focus on apprenticeships, graduate programmes and other 'grow your own' schemes.

These are long-term investments that should sit as part of a wider recruitment and retention strategy or plan.

Talent programmes delivered in the right organisational context can also help with increasing buy in and commitment from participants, and if combined with development plans, they can be powerful tools. When we think about apprenticeships, we have a huge pot of money for development available and ring-fenced via the apprenticeship levy, and we need to optimise this.

At the PPMA we have run talent programmes for our HR community for a number of years, and we really believe in the importance of giving people opportunities together with space to grow and develop.

We're just about to run our One to Watch (targeted at those who are in the early stages of their careers) and HR Rising Star (for people looking to move

into a more senior role) programmes for 2023, and I've been privileged to work with two groups last year and to see the amount of learning and personal development and growth that took place in the space of only two days together.

Our apprenticeship programme draws apprentices from all parts of local government, and finally, our Peer into the Future programme is aimed at future HR directors.

Every time we run these talent programmes, it confirms to me the future of local government and of HR is in safe hands.

Returning to the focus on our individual organisations, it's clear to me that as well as focusing on short-term initiatives and fixes (which we have to do), talent programmes as part of a wider workforce or people strategy absolutely have their place. ●●●●●

INSIDE:



- Apprentice of the Year – Jess Tordeur
- London & South East Regional Summit

London & South East Reg

The latest PPMA Regional Summit featured an informative panel tackling the subject of values-based leadership in the digital era. *Connected* looks at the themes that emerged from the discussion

Set in the spectacular Haymarket Hotel in the heart of London's Pall Mall, the Regional Summit Roadshow continued its journey in partnership with the PPMA and Oracle, with the Hounslow LBC taking centre stage.

Bringing local public sector leaders together to share, learn and connect, the second event asked the question, 'How can values-based leadership make a difference to our local residents and communities and is it relevant in a digital world?'

The panel, chaired by Niall Bolger, Chief Executive of London Borough of Hounslow, featured Zoe Vince, Director HR Transformation Public Sector, Oracle; Lorissa Page, Director of Specialist OD and HR Services, NHS Brighton and Hove area and Heather Jameson, Editor of *The MJ*.

Opening the panel discussion, Nial Bolger reflected on the relevance of values-based leadership for our local residents/communities and workforce in a digital world. He highlighted how the perception of leaders had changed over recent years when we refer to the importance, relevance or impact of values-based leadership – moving away from a marginal concept to being front and centre of business agendas.

Mr Bolger went on to say how there was so much evidence about why values-based leadership is so important in terms of our public eco-system. So why don't we do more of it? What is getting in the way? From his own perspective, he shared how Hounslow had positioned values-based leadership at the forefront of their cultural transformation. Their first step was to identify the culture and values needed to begin the transformation created

collaboratively through discussions with senior leaders, managers, employees, councillors and representatives from the recognised trades unions.

The development of their culture and values engaged more than 60 members of staff from across the organisation from all levels and locations, who volunteered as Culture Change Champions. They took responsibility for engaging with designated areas of the organisation, outside their own service, to ensure that everyone could take part in the conversation in a way that best suited them: workshops (using world café methodology), conversation hubs, team meetings, informal conversations, postcards, 'empty belly' posters and an online survey. A staggering 80% of the council's 2,400 people participated in this whole organisation conversation.



The council's actions from this initiative were to:

- **'lead with the heart'** – senior leaders ask people to be kind to themselves and contribute what they can
- **'do new'** – adapt and change to bring everyone closer to the community
- **'pass on the power'** – trust the workforce to manage their own time and achieve the best outcomes for the community, leading to greater community satisfaction
- **'harness the mix'** – focus on the Culture Change programme, inviting all equality network groups to have regular forums with the Chief Executive where they can influence strategy and decision making
- **'be a rock'** – ensure every service and manager go the extra mile to ensure that the whole community is supported, engaged and recognised.

Handing over to the rest of the panel, the discussion continued looking at values based leadership from different angles, with Lorissa Page talking about being courageous and tackling difficult issues and Zoe Vince highlighting how a digital world could indeed make all the difference in values based leadership.

Finally, Heather Jameson took us through the political arena, warts and all, bringing to the forefront the effect it has on values based leadership in the public sector.

There is a vanguard of leaders who have moved from 'why' to 'how', and public sector leadership has been critical in this shift. The reality in many parts of public service as to why this is such an important matter is very clear:

- We see high, and growing levels of debilitating stress

2023 PPMA Apprentice of the Year

Celebrating its 10th birthday this year, PPMA's Apprentice of the Year, delivered in partnership with Oracle continues to shine a light on the future leaders of our public services. This year's event had the highest level of entries and was as inspiring as ever. Jess Tordeur shares with us her experience of the event



Winning the level 2/3 Apprentice of the Year award was a surreal experience, I'm still pinching myself to be honest. I learnt a lot about myself in such a short space of time and I am truly so grateful to the PPMA and Oracle for allowing me to be a part of the programme.

I had the pleasure of meeting some of the amazing apprentices that work in all sectors of local government across the UK.

Since winning the award, I have had many opportunities come my way. At the PPMA conference in April I had the honour of giving my personal brand and legacy statement on the main stage of the conference with 300 delegates. The

whole day was incredibly nerve wracking, but I am so glad I did it.

I received a standing ovation and since that moment I have become so much more confident in my own skin, knowing that my words truly have the power to make an impact on people.

Standing up on that stage all I could think was: 'If the Jess I was two years ago could see me now, she would be looking at me with awe and overwhelmed with pride in observing what I have made of myself.'

I also believe that I have boosted the profiles of all the apprentices in my organisation and proved to them how priceless apprentices are!

Since attending the PPMA conference I have been invited to various networking events and recently presented as a guest speaker to an audience of chief executives and senior leaders at the South East and Regional Summit and have made some amazingly valuable connections through this journey.

At the time of writing this, my next stop was due to be as a special guest of the Oracle team at this year's *The MJ* Achievement Awards! ●●●●●●●●●●




Regional Summit – in focus

among public sector workers compared to the general working population as a whole – this is not a new issue and was very present pre-Covid

- We see an exodus across public services of skills and expertise and struggle to attract the next generation of public servants
- We know that when users of public services experience compassionate care – outcomes are better and when staff can be compassionate it has an impact on their motivation and their own wellbeing
- We know that if we have inclusive and values based leadership in public service it is associated with much lower levels of bullying and harassment
- We know that where public service staff are representative of the local communities they serve that this is associated with higher levels of care and service quality as well as financial performance.

We must, however, not undervalue the importance of Digital Transformation in values based leadership: it provides data-driven insights, personalised feedback and allows leaders to adapt. By analysing behaviours, performance and the personality of the entire workforce, strengths can be exploited, weaknesses positively nurtured and potential leaders identified and developed.

Values-based leadership in the workplace requires leadership and champions. As, we increasingly move towards 'how' rather than 'why' we do things differently, means the role of our public service leaders is of critical importance because what leaders talk about, what they monitor, what they model in their own behaviour, tells us what the values of that organisation and their wider community are. 



Discussion points: (l-r) Niall Bolger, Zoe Vince, Lorissa Page, Heather Jameson and Leatham Green (Transformation Director, Public Sector UK & Ireland, Oracle)

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To find out more and to register for the complimentary sessions which are available to you and your team, talk to the Oracle team or simply scan the QR code.



Q&A

Claire Symonds
– Chief Executive,
Redbridge LBC



You have now been in post for a year – what have been the main highlights and challenges of this year?

Hard to believe it's been a year! As someone who has lived in the borough for a long time, and indeed Redbridge gave me my first job in 1989, I thought I knew the borough quite well, but in fact one of the highlights of the year has been getting out and about with members and staff to see all of it. There were definitely parts of the borough I've never visited before. I arrived just after full council elections and walked each ward with members, which was a good way to meet them and to hear and see first hand the issues that concerned them and the residents they represent.

Redbridge is not a well known borough, but is home to great parks and open spaces, along with excellent schools, buzzing high streets and exceptional transport links. I have always seen Redbridge as a hidden gem, and one that needs to shout louder about the great place it is and the good things that it does. I was shown a video of Redbridge made 40 years ago and it showed what a great place to live Redbridge was then and still is today.

Another highlight from my first year was visiting our various council offices and seeing some of the fabulous services that we deliver and the real passion staff have for doing their best for Redbridge. One area where we have been really innovative is the creation of the Spotlight Programme, a scheme addressing the perpetrators of domestic violence – sadly an area where we have huge issues. The programme is for those who have been abusive but are committed to changing their behaviours, and it is making a real difference.

I suppose an unusual highlight was becoming a 'TikTok sensation'. As a way of introducing myself to staff I was asked to do a TikTok video, 85k views later it was shortlisted for an award for good use of social media and became the talk of the town hall.

It's been a challenging year for our residents in terms of the cost of living crisis and we have stepped up a whole service around anti-poverty and cost of living. This included regular cost of living roadshows, which have given local residents access to direct support. We have established an affordable community grocery store with a local partner, and revamped premises to support a local foodbank. We've made some real inroads in helping local people many of whom have never asked for our help before.

What are the key challenges you are facing in the council?

There are a few, but foremost has to be the housing crisis. Redbridge has the highest

number of people in temporary accommodation per thousand of the population in the country. We have got more people presenting as homeless than we've ever had before. We also have more rough sleepers. Sadly, we had a gentleman rough sleeping outside our offices last summer – many officers were involved in supporting him and dealing with his complex needs, but his experience really highlighted the issues in a tangible way.

We also have had a sizable asylum seeker population placed in our borough by the Home Office which brings its own issues. This challenge is reinforced by our extremely limited supply of housing, meaning it is a constant struggle to find suitable accommodation for people in need. So, a real challenge.

As with all London boroughs, the financial challenges this year were particularly hard with record inflation on top of unprecedented demand. We are launching a council-wide change programme, Shaping our Future, to help us improve outcomes and reduce net costs. Made up of a number of workstreams, the

initiative will change the way the council operates, creating a financially resilient and sustainable organisation that is effective and efficient. Shaping our Future is our way of meeting financial challenges head-on and innovating our way to a successful, sustainable Redbridge.

What do you expect from your HR function? How do you see this changing, if at all over the next five years?

The key for us is having staff that want to work here, that feel valued, invested in, and choose Redbridge as their employer. Some of the ways we've achieved this is through our apprenticeship schemes, investing in data, digital and programme management. The numbers show retention is up and that people completing the programmes are also getting promotions.

The team are updating policies, running annual staff surveys, implementing equality, diversity, and inclusion plans and using digital technology to make our recruitment processes faster, and improve our staff data.

Overall, I want an HR function that can

be experts, collaborators, and enablers. The team is improving all the time but there is still work to do.

How do you ensure you connect with the 'voice' of your employees and understand their 'lived experience'?

Personally, I believe it's about talking to people. So, as I mentioned, I have been out visiting services in person. We've also implemented an annual staff survey, for the first time in quite a while. The most recent survey has shown improvement in staff engagement. We have been running roadshows recently for our new change programme where we have been engaging staff and getting them to explain what their experiences are so that we can learn how to improve

I am very aware that my work experience is very different from those working in different parts of the council, so it is vitally important that we do learn from each other and understand what it is we're trying to do. I spent some time in the council's contact centre recently, always an eyeopener, not just to hear what our customers are asking but also to see the skills of our staff working with different systems and processes.

One live discussion we have been having is about hybrid working, of which I am a fan, but it has to be balanced with the needs of the service. My challenge to our staff, however they work, is how do they connect with their team and how do they connect with the place. What do they know about Redbridge the place? And how does that feed into their work. I think that's not about prescribing exactly when they will or not be in the office, though sometimes we do, but it is about ensuring a supportive work place and supportive managers. For me that it about being approachable and authentic and being available.

What is the employee experience you are seeking to create / expect at Redbridge?

I am an advocate for compassionate leadership, again something we have been discussing as a team here. I want people to be proud to work for Redbridge to know that they have the support, skills, and technology to do the best job that they can.

How do you see technology supporting the transformation of the council's services? What are your priority areas to maximise the benefits of emerging digital technology?

I've been hearing some fascinating things about AI and how much that can help us. We're looking at how we can streamline processes and at the opportunities for automation, whether it be applications for leave or things like that. We also want to use new technology to make life easier for local residents. We still do have some clunky systems in Redbridge and I would certainly hope that we would start to move those forward.

We are keen to ensure we utilise technology to drive productivity and reduce duplication across similar functions and support a place-based approach to service delivery which is focused on early intervention and prevention. ●●●●●●●●





Q&A

**Rebecca Hardwick –
Head of HR, City of
Doncaster Council**



What is your new role and what has been your journey to get there?

I have recently been promoted to Head of HR at City of Doncaster Council. I have been a member of the HR team in Doncaster for the last 13 years in the corporate HR service in a number of roles to gain valuable experience and most recently at a senior level as HR Business Manager. Prior to this I worked at HMP & Young Offenders Institution Doncaster in their HR team after leaving university.

What are you most excited about?

Having re-structured the HR service as my first objective, I am looking forward to working collaboratively with the HR team, supporting their development and encouraging their creativity to contribute to improvements for our employees and citizens of Doncaster.

What are the main challenges you will face? What action will you take to address these?

Similar to most other local authorities currently, predominantly recruitment and retention issues. We struggle with particular hard to fill roles and are looking at how we can widen the reach to potential candidates and making our offer and place as attractive as possible.

In terms of actions, we are reviewing and streamlining our current recruitment

processes, how we market ourselves to stand out and where we as

HR can add the most value. Utilising workforce analytics plays a big part in understanding why people are leaving, what attracts candidates to us and how can we improve.

How are you responding in the council to the emerging skills challenge?

With an already award-winning apprenticeship programme, looking at innovative ways to increase these roles across all services, particularly those currently hard to fill, which both increase skills and supported development. We constantly look to train and develop our workforce, aiming to develop organisation capabilities in house wherever possible. We engage with external partners to promote career opportunities including schools, special schools, FE/HE establishments, DWP, youth groups, employment support agencies and residents.

We are also reviewing our employment offer to potential candidates ensuring we promote the total package of benefits rather than a focus on pay.

What personal value do you consider to be the most important in your role and why?

For me it's all about treating people well and ensuring individuals have a voice. As a collective I do think we can make a difference to develop staff and services for the people of Doncaster.

Who has inspired you in your career and why?

I've been very lucky in my career with the managers/leaders that I have worked with and would like to treat people the way they do. I would like in particular to recognise Jill Parker, our HR Director – her dedication to local government is

second to none. She has always supported me as an individual and as a HR team.

What do you hope for the future?
That City of Doncaster Council

continues to improve in getting to the heart of local communities and in playing our part to motivate, develop and support people to achieve their full potential. 🌈🌈🌈

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Sometimes slowly, sometimes quickly



By Naina Patel, UHR Chair, and Chief People Officer at the University of the Arts, London

Those of us old enough to remember the launch of Google may have noted a detail of its early success – the astonishing fact that it reached an audience of 100 million users within just six months. Others among the current tech giants have similar stories of remarkable early market penetration.

Twenty-odd years later, ChatGPT has recently achieved the same feat, but in about six to eight weeks.

And so the world changes, sometimes slowly, sometimes quickly. AI has gone from ‘barely on the agenda’ to a key item for discussion, in the space of a few years.

New AI companies spring up daily, in every country and under every governance regime, many of them keen for greater guidance and regulation from governments across the world that appear to have been caught on the hop. The public is mesmerized by what it can see so far of the technology, fascinated but certainly also fearful.

As HR professionals we need multi-focused spectacles to make sure every issue remains clear and distinct.




Across the public sector we deal with many of the same issues and have similar instincts on how to act. But which lenses will we need in those spectacles today?

We move endlessly backwards and forwards from the detail to the headline – pensions and pay, recruitment pipelines, our equalities agendas and more, but also pandemics, immigration and AI.

If national governments are at a loss on some of these issues we can be forgiven the instinct to band together as organisations for support, to share ideas, and to make sure difficult learnings are gained once and shared, rather than painfully gained a dozen times because of a lack of such co-operation.

In universities, we might not choose exactly the same priorities as those in other public services. But at the moment we are certainly thinking about the effect of the cost of living crisis on our staff teams, and the impact of that on everything from pensions to terms and conditions to our ability to recruit and retain the best.

We continue to adjust as large employers to the changes in expectation brought on by Covid – for hybrid and remote working, for instance. Getting to grips with any of these challenges requires us to act in a connected way with those with similar concerns.

UHR is proud to work with partners across the public sector so that no matter what the speed of change is in our working lives, we can prepare, and develop the strongest possible solutions to each challenge. 

The mental benefits of using digital tools



Sarah Gashier, a workplace wellbeing consultant, reveals how digital tools can drown out distractions and help you find focus

Technology has been a vital asset for the knowledge industry to stay connected and collaborate effectively, with up to 95% of the workday dedicated to meetings, emails, and calls. However, it also brought in some challenges such as distraction due to notifications or overbooked schedules that reduced our ability of remaining focused on important tasks.

A recent survey by the Kings College London Centre for Attention Studies showed that constant interruptions and multitasking lead to decreased productivity and increased stress levels, despite this more than half of people think it’s more efficient to multitask. So, the next time you find yourself checking emails during an unnecessary meeting, ask yourself if it’s worth sacrificing your productivity and mental wellbeing?

Paying attention to the present moment can boost our wellbeing and concentration. Mindfulness doesn’t have to mean meditating, we can be mindful in the way we work, fully engaging in our tasks in a world where our attention is constantly pulled in all directions. To maximize productivity and ensure healthy work/life balance, it is fundamental for organisations to build mindful practices into their working culture.

The ‘Five Ways to Wellbeing’ are five evidenced based actions to improve mental wellbeing: Connect, Keep Learning, Give, Be



Active and Be Mindful. Are we able to be mindful in today’s workplace in the digital age?

To maximize productivity and performance, try creating a personal focus plan using Computer Assisted Protection (CAP) Time, these are digital tools that enable you to block out time.

According to a new study, employees with CAP time reprioritized their work, significantly improved their performance, reduced working after hours to catch up on tasks and employees felt they could finish their work quicker because they weren’t disturbed.

These digital self-control tools mute notifications, minimize interruptions and automatically pre-schedule long consecutive blocks of time to complete work that require high level and deep thinking such as writing, strategic thinking, analysis, coding, designing,

or a project with a lot of complexity.

Employees can decide when to schedule time to focus which gives them a sense of control and autonomy over designing their work schedule. When employees feel they have autonomy over their time, it improves their wellbeing and reduces stress.

Eliminate as many distractions as possible during focus time, work in a quiet location, put away your phone, turn off extra screens, shut down email, Teams, and other collaboration apps, and consider wearing headphones as a focus time signal. We often adopt wellbeing practices through social contagion learning from colleagues and leaders. It’s the leader’s role to create a culture of wellbeing and set the tone by role modelling, blocking the time in their diary and encouraging their team to do the same.

How can we make meetings more mindful? Ask yourself if there is a clear

agenda and if a decision needs to be made. Focus on really listening to others and contributing to the discussion, rather than just waiting for your turn to speak. And most importantly, avoid distractions like checking your emails during the meeting.

If you want to prioritize tasks and improve productivity, consider scheduling focus plans and time to read and respond to emails in your calendar – don’t feel obligated to respond immediately. But be disciplined and don’t let these plans get overbooked with other meetings, and don’t forget to take a break when needed.

We need to rethink how we measure productivity in the digital age, busyness isn’t a sign of productivity; leverage technology and encourage employees to step away from their screens every now and then to improve productivity and for the sake of their wellbeing. 

Bridging the skills gap in public sector



Swati Bisht-Rawat, Head of Talent, Performance and Innovation at Westminster City Council, outlines how unlocking the power of people through innovation is vital to ensuring the sector's future

In the dynamic world of digital innovation, addressing the skills gap in the public sector is a constant pursuit. The faster we strive to catch up, the wider the gap seems to become. It feels like a perpetual game where we are always two steps behind the target.

However, in the era of what has been termed Industry 4.0 or the Fourth Industrial Revolution ('4IR'), the need to adopt innovative approaches becomes even more crucial.

Understanding the skills gap

Job requirements evolve rapidly, but the skills of our workforce often fail to keep pace. That, in essence, is the skills gap. Outdated job descriptions, limited meaningful training opportunities, and challenges in attracting the right talent contribute to this mismatch.

Bridging the skills gap in the public sector requires an innovative approach that fosters creativity, embraces technology, and cultivates a culture of innovation

candidates who embody a spirit of innovation.

- **Innovation-infused skill development:** HR and OD teams infuse innovation into skill development initiatives. They design dynamic training programs that encourage out-of-the-box thinking and problem-solving. Collaborative projects, hackathons, and cross-functional learning opportunities foster creativity and nurture innovation-oriented mindsets.

- **Cultivating innovation ecosystems:** HR and OD teams foster innovation ecosystems by creating spaces for ideation and experimentation. They establish innovation labs or platforms

where employees can share ideas, collaborate, and bring their innovative concepts to life. These ecosystems facilitate cross-pollination of ideas and foster a culture

that embraces experimentation and learning from failure.

- **Partnerships for innovation:** HR and OD teams forge partnerships with external organisations, startups, and academia to leverage their expertise and fuel innovation. Collaborative projects, joint research initiatives, and knowledge sharing contribute to the development of innovative solutions while bridging the skills gap.

- **Embracing technological innovations:** HR and OD teams embrace emerging technologies to revolutionise skill development. From incorporating virtual reality simulations to utilising AI-powered learning platforms, they harness technology's transformative potential to provide immersive and personalised learning experiences.

Bridging the skills gap in the public sector requires an innovative approach that fosters creativity, embraces technology, and cultivates a culture of innovation. With HR and OD teams leading the charge, we can unlock the power of our workforce, nurture innovation-oriented mindsets, and equip ourselves to navigate the challenges of a rapidly evolving world.

So, let's embark on this transformative journey, where innovation and skill development go hand in hand, and together, we can shape a public sector that thrives on innovation, delivering extraordinary experiences and impact for our citizens. The future awaits, full of endless possibilities. 🌈

Why bridging the skills gap matters

Let's delve into the significance of bridging the skills gap through an innovative perspective.

- **Catalysing service excellence:**

Closing the skills gap empowers the public sector to deliver services with precision and excellence. It sparks innovation, paving the way for breakthrough solutions and elevated citizen experiences.

- **Thriving in a changing world:**

Innovation is the lifeblood of progress. By bridging the skills gap, the public sector equips its workforce to tackle emerging challenges, from disruptive technologies to evolving citizen expectations.

- **Cultivating a culture of innovation:**

Nurturing innovation within the public sector cultivates an environment where novel ideas thrive, fostering creativity, collaboration, and a continuous drive for improvement.

What it means for HR and OD and their innovative actions

HR and OD teams, armed with their innovation lenses, play a pivotal role in bridging the skills gap. There are many ways they can take action:

- **Trailblazing talent acquisition:**

HR and OD teams become trailblazers in the quest for talent. They adopt innovative recruitment strategies that go beyond traditional methods. From leveraging digital platforms to gamifying the application process, they attract





Powering innovation and creativity in local government – HR's golden chance



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

Employee care has been given a whole new meaning thanks to the pandemic, and HR has been front and centre of the response as local government organisations have adapted to new ways of working almost overnight.

In this trusted role, HR teams need to seize opportunities to enable their councils to continue to evolve and drive real innovation, involving themselves in strategic and operational decision making by placing people issues at the heart of corporate agenda items seeking to address and overcome business challenges. To thrive and flourish demands creative and radical solutions from HR teams, effectively supported by enabling technology.

Throughout the public sector and beyond, many organisations are struggling to retain and engage employees who have fundamentally re-evaluated their priorities for their work-life balance, their mental and physical wellbeing, and their careers. It is important to recognise the diverse segments within the local government workforce. Members of these diverse communities all have inherently different needs and motivations. As individuals they also have different personal goals, aspirations, and interests.

HR must listen to these employee groups and seek to enhance the employee experience in creative ways, through a number of lenses, such as HR service delivery, total reward, benefits and career opportunities. Taking an employee first approach will be a critical step-change on the path to facilitating the conditions that will enable local councils to succeed longer term through addressing the needs, aspirations, and expectations of their primary asset – their people.

Improvements in the HR offer to employees can no longer be just esoteric refinements but rather radical, relevant, and committed in the re-emerging world of work in local government.

HR teams should ensure that the following aims feature central in their people strategies:

- Being an employer of choice and attracting world-class talent
 - Providing a positive and flexible employee experience for all
 - Driving representation and advocacy especially with respect to diversity, equality and inclusion
 - Being digital by default in all business facets
 - Maintaining a clear skills and talent pipeline
 - Reducing employee turnover and improving engagement
 - Accelerating automation in HR for transactions and improvements in organisational data
- Pre-pandemic, many of these now business critical

issues were often considered by some organisations as marginal activities and received scant attention from senior leaders.

A core primary undertaking for HR to achieve these 'must haves' should be to enhance the digital savvy of their own communities. Removing paper-based systems isn't radical for some but there are still many employers requiring employees to fill in paper forms on-site, or email Word documents to HR, thereby affecting job satisfaction, overall experience and potentially even career progression.

The use of the right HR technologies is proven to provide employees with a far more tailored and streamlined experience, while freeing up HR professionals' valuable time to focus their efforts on addressing the challenges outlined above.

The status quo has been forever disrupted and employees of today, let alone the organisations of tomorrow, are demanding from HR a radical rethink, in order to successfully nurture their organisations through their continued growth journey.

The landscape of work, workers and the workplace has been changed in local government by external forces that necessitated quick and reactive responses. There has never been a more opportune time for HR teams to demonstrate their commitment to proactive, innovative and creative continued improvement and growth. 