

The Oakridge Voice

Stop being the people person and become the performance

“I am a people person” can of course be a pronouncement of enormous worth. But so often it indicates someone in HR or L&D who may not be as equally business focused, financially savvy, or process minded. Somehow we use the fact that we interact with people as an excuse for not really being very good at the other things. Not all of us, I am sure, but enough of us for the world of business still to view HR and L&D as peripheral rather than central to organisational success.

We contribute to our own downfall as we subject ourselves too readily and too frequently to painful self-analysis and existentialist doubt. Sometimes we can be seen to care more about our MBTI profile or the workings of the competence framework or even our work-life balance than about the state of the Stock Market in China or the skills-gap impacting on the productivity of the organization for which we work. “People” is something we do, “Productivity” we leave to others.

The way we are portrayed, and the way we allow ourselves to be seen does little to raise our authority or influence in the places that matter. The CIPD seems to gain more air-time of late, but it still is only wheeled out when “people issues” are raised and is seldom seen as the spokesperson for wealth-generation, job-creation, productivity, or innovation when compared to the IOD, the TUC, or the CBI. This is often mirrored in our own difficulties as professionals in being taken seriously on the tough business challenges. We still seem to be running around after others, often mopping up, yet seldom the forward-thinkers or leaders on issues of performance or productivity.

Even now we are wondering whether we should exist at all and we have spent at least two decades trying to work out where we “add value”. Let’s be blunt about it, we have too much to say and too much to do in a busy VUCA world to spend time agonizing over our terms of reference and our *raison d’être*. We run the danger of being seen on the flabby side of the business-community with time on our hands to worry about worrying around our own roles. There are enormous challenges facing almost all of our organisations and businesses in the UK at present.

[So where should we be spending our time if it is not to be spent in existentialist angst?](#)

The forward agenda is very clear, and we ought to be leading it. Whatever the cause, whoever we could blame, the big issue is productivity, or rather the lack of it within the UK. If we are to be truly useful then we should be the harbingers of productivity, the champions of performance, the stern challengers of efficiency.

It is incredible how far we have fallen behind others, and how inefficient we have become. We fail to harness technology to its full potential despite its power and sophistication. Our process design in many cases is now well-established but we continue to reinvent the way we work and duplicate effort, or maintain redundant practices. Our workforce is the most highly educated of all times yet recent figures suggest we deploy only a fraction of their talent.

Workplace working conditions are all designed to create an optimal working environment but our productivity per square metre of workspace has never been lower. Finally, we provide training and development supposedly to create inspiring leaders, engaging managers and committed teams but the impact in many cases is minimal.

With all these positive attributes to the contemporary workplace perhaps it should be HR and L&D who ask the innocuous enough question “why with all these good things happening and with all our investment in technology, people, workplaces, are we as a country lagging some 21% below the average for other G7 countries?” (ONS 2014)

Our economic recovery at present is based on the fact that as the tide rises all the boats begin to float higher in the water. We are not recovering because of greater productivity since the evidence that with all our ability, commitment, & technology we are doing better and gaining a competitive edge, is simply not there. The task is one which requires more than process, more than technology, and yes more than people. *The Oakridge Voice* believes we have a major role to play in wising up to the challenge of productivity and putting ourselves forward as leaders not onlookers. The challenge is there, organisations are capable of doing far more, individuals can contribute more, and performance can and must be raised if we are to be competitive in the good times as well as resilient in the difficult times. Can we step away from our introspection and take up the challenge? There will be some great examples out there based on what you are doing for productivity. We would love to hear from you.

The Oakridge Voice