

Our world is shaped by the influential technologies of our time. The internet, artificial intelligence and big data have transformed the way in which we communicate, work, learn and create, blurring the lines between our personal and professional lives.

Chapter 6: The Connected Organisation

6

THE CONNECTED ORGANISATION

“If you want to go quickly, go alone, if you want to go far, go together.” African Proverb

In this chapter we discuss how the next generation organisation can engage with its next generation staff, partners and other key stakeholders and enable different generations to connect and work together for success. Next generation leaders will be social-networking, digital natives who multitask and create impact through technology, and who often reject leadership in its traditional forms. This poses new challenges and opportunities for organisational change makers with a focus on the future.

The External Environment

“The young, free to act on their initiative, can lead their elders in the direction of the unknown.” Margaret Mead

Every generation is unique – our developmental years are defined by the influential cultural, economic, political and technological world events of the time, shaping our view of the world, including the ways in which we live, work, and consume. This chapter will discuss the importance of collaboration and of valuing individual differences for the benefit of the organisation as a whole. It also discusses the challenges and opportunities of truly engaging cross-generational collaboration; how to better engage the younger generation, both within and outside of the organisation, and how to embrace new technology and new ways of working in order to truly become a connected organisation.

When we think of early career professionals we are often referring to those born in the early 1980s to the mid 1990s (sometimes referred to as Gen Y or “Millennials”) and those born late 1990s to early 2000s (also known as Gen Z or “Digital Natives”). Both of these demographics are “tech savvy”. The former being the last generation to experience a childhood before the dawn of the internet, the initial early adopters of new technology, and the latter known as

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Digital Natives who have never known an offline world. Digital Natives have grown up with their smartphone as an extension of their arm, their childhood seen through the lens of a camera phone, and their activities documented online like never before. It is hard for them to conceive of a world without instantaneous communication and access to information. Indeed, many in this generation will never have even seen a fax machine or typewriter.

Some of the authors of this book grew up without a computer at home and still remember the unforgettable tone of the dial-up internet, which you could of course only use if no one was needing to use the phone. A far cry from today's continually connected living.

Worldwide an average of 57% of the global population is now connected to the internet, spending an average of 6.5 hours per day online (Hootsuite and We Are Social, 2019). Additionally, 98% of consumers have used a social media network in the past month; being an internet user means being a social media user. Of these 6.5 hours online per day, an average of 2 hours 23 minutes is spent on social media, with users aged 16-24 being the biggest users and also the group with the most social media accounts (Global Web Index, 2019).

Furthermore, we are currently living in unprecedented times. Due to coronavirus, many countries are experiencing "lockdown" and "social distancing" measures being put in place. This is resulting in a greater focus on virtual working, where individuals are working online from their homes. In their pandemic webinar series, Lynda Gratton (2020) spoke about how this revolution in virtual working and learning is bringing about significant opportunities, whilst Herminia Ibarra (2020) relayed the often challenging implications for diversity and inclusion.

This demonstrates just how integrated technology and the ability to be constantly connected have become in our lives. It is truly staggering to think that this nebulous online world has only really come about in the last twenty years. It now permeates almost every aspect of our lives from the way in which we communicate and interact with others, to how we consume information, purchase products, learn, entertain ourselves and work.

Technological advancement is not the only generational change which has impacted the ways in which younger generations live and approach their careers. More people are now attending university and leaving their hometowns in order to do so, and the younger generation is also

the generation that has been most impacted by the 2008 global recession. This has prompted a change in how people go about finding work with an increase in the “gig economy” of temporary assignments, zero-hours contracts, internships, fixed term contracts, and a greater need and therefore willingness to relocate to pursue career goals.

For example, in the UK, the housing crisis has contributed to an increase in people renting homes, with many delaying getting married and having families until later in life, focusing instead on developing their career and being less confined by location in order to do so. 43% of Millennials envision leaving their jobs within 2 years (Deloitte, 2019). This increases to 61% of Digital Natives showing a large shift from previous generations who focused on finding a job and working up the ladder over a number of years.

Lifestyles have changed and job security in the traditional sense has become less relevant. If organisations wish to remain competitive, attract the best candidates and appeal to younger generations, they also need to embrace new attitudes towards working and continually evolve with social norms.

The Observatory

“Not until diversity is made the logic of production will there be a chance for sustainability, justice and peace. Cultivating and conserving diversity is no luxury in our times: it is a survival imperative.” Vandana Shiva

A connected organisation is consciously and actively connected and will need people who are able to adapt to a rapid pace of change and an organisational culture that is open and positive towards new ways of working.

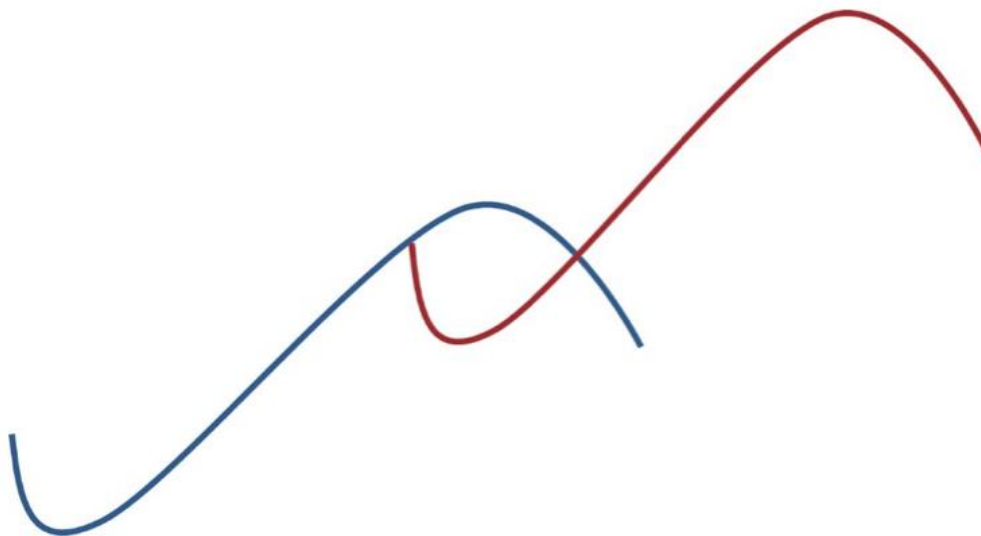
The undeniable fact is that in the future a greater percentage of the workforce will be made up of Digital Natives. Therefore, engaging the next generation of future leaders is vitally important. Creating an environment and organisational culture that reflects their values and skills, where they can lend their expertise to others as well as learn and develop themselves is essential, because otherwise they will look for opportunities elsewhere.

As we move into an unknown future full of uncertainties: environmentally, politically and culturally, we need to envision new ways of living and working. Organisations will need to be

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adaptable to change in order to rise to new challenges and not only embrace change but anticipate it and create value from it.

Charles Handy's (2015) "second curve" states that all things (products, services, organisations, ideas and so forth) come to an end, usually after following the traditional model of introduction, growth, maturity and eventual decline. Handy argues that the way to remain sustainable and relevant is to be innovative, think differently and try to anticipate what the next thing might be for your organisation. Like in this diagram of impact plotted against time, if timed well, organisations must seize the initiative to act when things are going well i.e. near the peak of the blue curve. Change can be hard; it takes time and investment is required. Productivity along with confidence and enthusiasm can go down before the benefits of the change start to be felt. Resilience and patience are necessary. Thus, finding your second curve while you have the energy, time and resources is the key to remaining relevant and sustainable.



Charles Handy's Second Curve

So how can an organisation ensure it is responsive to change, innovative and creative, and ultimately future proof, finding its second curve? The key is likely to be in engaging a diverse range of people, from different backgrounds, age groups, genders, cultures and more that can offer a diverse range of skills. A team that is comprised of a diverse set of individuals will benefit from a range of different perspectives, skills and idea sharing. We all need people on

our team who are able to think outside of how things have always been done and can envision how they might be done in the future.

As already mentioned, the next generation may move around more frequently than before, but instead of seeing a problem we might also see the value in having a workforce that is constantly changing and evolving. The culture of the connected organisation needs to promote exchanges of experience and opinion, encouraging learning, fostering trust, and enabling transparent communication. This may mean embracing new technologies, changing recruitment and staff engagement practices, putting policies in place to ensure that diversity, equality and inclusion are not only tolerated but actively practised, and being open to experimenting with new ways of working. This could be implementing “idea sprint sessions” to generate creativity, mentoring schemes, remote working options, flexible working hours, creating learning opportunities and discussion spaces.

A willingness to embrace innovative ideas and to accept that failure is yet another learning opportunity will present new opportunities as well as creating a culture in which staff feel more connected to their peers and feel valued as part of the wider organisation.

The Library

“So powerful is the light of unity, that it can illuminate the whole earth.” Bahá’u’lláh

Connected organisations are intrinsically collaborative. Not only do they keep abreast of developments in society, across the globe and in cyberspace, they also have a collective mindset and recognise the value of collaboration both internally and externally.

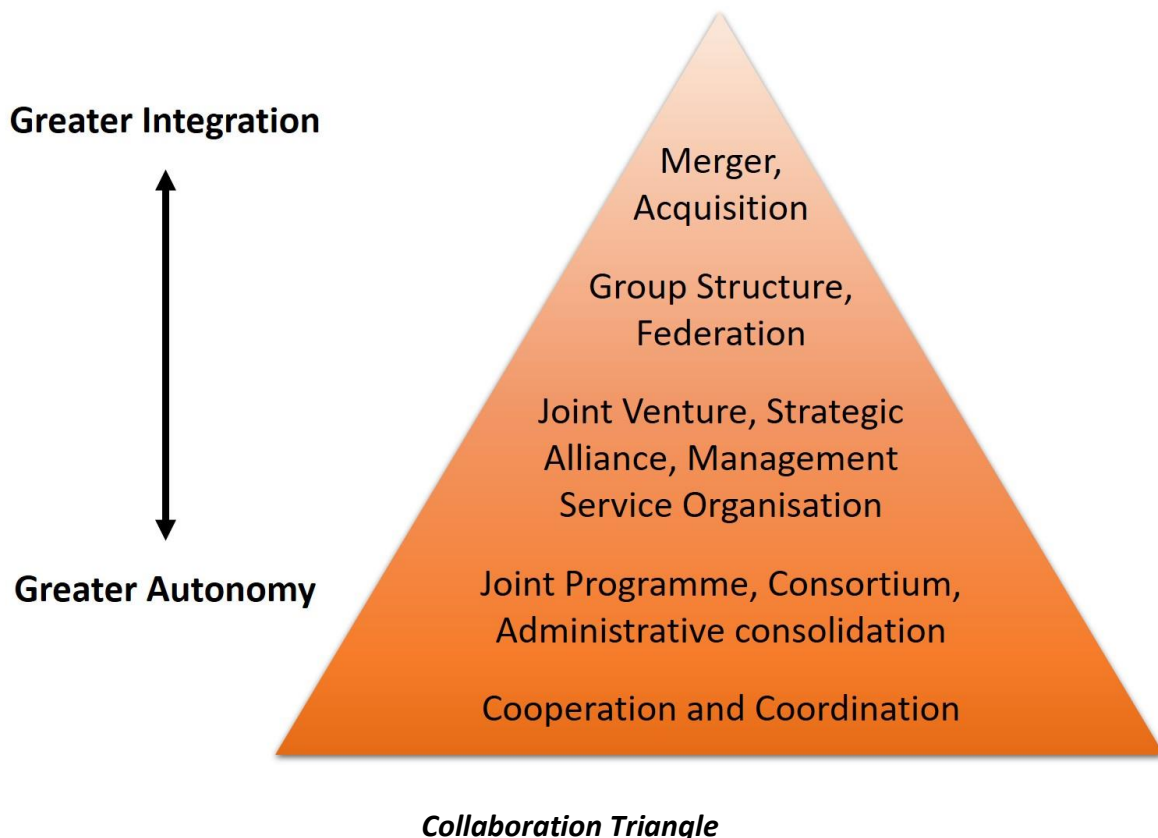
In the Western world people live in an individualistic culture where they feel compelled to differentiate themselves from others in order to progress and compete for visibility and recognition. Collaboration, therefore, has been a rather overlooked and underestimated leadership capability. In contrast, collaboration has for many years been well understood in many non-Western cultures. In African and Asian cultures, more collective mindsets have enabled many societies to flourish.

There are many forms of collaboration, ranging from informal coordination to full-scale mergers. It is generally considered that the greater the integration, the less autonomy

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individual organisations retain. However, if handled well, even more strategic forms of collaboration can still lead to teams feeling a strong sense of autonomy. The type of integration and collaboration that will be most appropriate for your organisation will depend on the drivers and desired outcomes.

Here is a model developed by Mike Hudson (2005) representing the various levels of collaboration possible:



- **Cooperation and Coordination** – for example; running joint events, networking, shared advertising, shared office facilities or just simply shared ideas for working towards a common goal. At this level, each organisation tends to maintain its own identity and independence, although a collaborative event may fall under a joint name. Usually this type of collaboration is achieved fairly quickly. It generally has relatively low cost.
- **Joint Programme, Consortium or Administrative Consolidation** – within this form of collaboration, the relationship between organisations will be underpinned by more

formalised and strategic level arrangements, including agreements about objectives, roles, cost-sharing arrangements and so on. The organisations remain independent.

- **Joint Venture, Strategic Alliance or Management Service Organisation** – for example, in a joint venture, the parties involved come together for a medium- or longer-term initiative; a legal entity is typically established which they jointly own and control. There is some loss of independence for the organisations.
- **Group Structure or Federation** – in this form of collaboration, a formal structure for separate organisations to work together is usually created, for example, a parent not-for-profit to all the organisations involved. In some cases of deeper level collaboration, an umbrella organisation might exercise a degree of control over local independent not-for-profits. In these circumstances, members might be affiliated with the umbrella body and have access to the resources and expertise offered.
- **Merger or Acquisition** – some collaborative working arrangements at lower levels of integration can lead, over time, to a merger. On other occasions organisations opt to select this option straight away. A merger or acquisition is where two or more separate organisations come together to form one organisation. When this happens, either a new organisation is formed to continue the work of the original organisations (a merger), or one organisation assumes control of another (an acquisition).

Beyond these initial considerations, it is often useful to have an enduring way of evaluating what the most appropriate form or structure of collaboration is at a given time, especially taking into account the fast changing environment and the need to change and adapt to new realities. Different forms and structures for collaboration have emerged, including for movements: for example, a holacracy is a decentralised form in which decision making is distributed throughout self organising teams.

We have often found that using a simplified set of principles is very helpful to organisations when considering different forms of collaboration:

- **Effective decision making** – It is more effective, as well as more motivating, for people involved with collaborative structures to retain as much autonomy as possible within their respective contexts. For this to happen, it needs to be agreed what is going to be

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decided collectively and what freedoms of decision making exist for different elements of a collaborative entity.

- **Sense of belonging** – It is important for people in collaborative ventures to feel a sense of belonging at several different levels. For instance, a person might feel a sense of belonging to a local team, a country and a region along with the movement or organisation as a whole. It is important to understand and respect different identities at different levels. People’s feelings of belonging and identity are a very significant part of organisational culture.
- **Interdependence** – It is important for people to feel committed to the principle that each part of a collaborative initiative needs the help of the other parts, as well as any co-ordinating body that might exist, in order to develop and thrive.

In all forms and structures, it is essential to keep in mind what is helpful for people to feel connected; to feel human. This includes taking into account the digital transformation happening internationally, accelerated as a result of the coronavirus pandemic and the challenges and opportunities involved with developing meaningful relationships online.

The Family Room

“Individually, we are one drop. Together, we are an ocean.” Ryunosuke Satoro

Next generation leaders are likely to reject traditional, hierarchical leadership styles, valuing flatter structures where collaboration is encouraged, and where they feel their voices are heard. If an organisation leaves their team members stagnating in roles, then they are likely to lose valuable people who could contribute in a myriad of ways. Harnessing talent and applying talent speedily and efficiently in different configurations to new challenges is the hallmark of an effective connected organisation.

Connected organisations encourage people to work on varied projects, with people from different teams, in different capacities. Not only does this foster a great exchange of ideas and relationship building among people within the organisation, but it also ensures that staff remain challenged and their work does not become monotonous or mundane.

Building diverse teams can also mean expanding and re-imagining the workplace. Technological advancements, as well as the impact of Covid-19, mean that for many being in a physical office space every day is no longer required. Cloud computing solutions enable team members to work together remotely on the same document at the same time. Equally, communication apps and video conferencing software have made it easy to talk in real-time with colleagues located around the world. These may not completely replace face-to-face meetings and collaboration, but it can enable us to rethink the traditional 9 to 5 office-based job. Greater flexibility allows people greater work-life balance, and additionally can make them feel trusted and valued to manage their own time to the best of their ability. Connected organisations encourage the connection between home and work, enabling careers to be an enjoyable part of life, creating meaning and forging deeper connections with the wider world.

However, there are many challenges involved with these new ways of working. For example, Colleen Ammerman (2020) believes that the current crisis and an increase in working from home is putting organisations at risk of losing female talent. With schools shut for over 5 months in many parts of the world, parents were managing round-the-clock childcare while trying to meet deadlines, keep connected to colleagues, and demonstrate their value. Home life and caregiving roles are now much more visible. Ammerman notes that:

“Being seen in a caregiving role tends to boost men’s reputation and elicit warmth from others but when women’s caregiving is visible it triggers doubts about their capabilities.”

She calls this the “fatherhood premium” and the “motherhood penalty”. With the increased blur between work life and home life, it is important that we are more understanding and respectful of different circumstances and the multiple different roles that women, and men, have.

Furthermore, with increasing use of online working and video calling, it’s extremely important to ensure that digital spaces are kept inclusive. This means making sure that everyone within your organisation has access to a computer and internet, that meetings aren’t being held at times that disadvantage certain groups (e.g. parents feeding their children or people in different time zones), and that side conversations using the “chat” function aren’t excluding individuals. Work-life balance, mental health, and diversity and inclusion were already

important subjects pre-Covid-19 and these challenges are potentially being exacerbated now that many of our offices are virtual.

The Foundations

“If you do things well, do them better. Be daring. Be first. Be different.” Anita Roddick

Individuals no longer need to go into a classroom to learn new skills as online learning courses have become very commonplace and high quality, often with tutors from top institutions contributing to the course. Free, short-term courses are available to learn the basics of a new piece of software, writing or report writing skills. In addition, long-term courses at Masters or PhD level are available for those wishing to explore certain topics in great depth and gain a valuable qualification without necessarily needing to relocate or leave one’s job in order to do so.

Mobile apps also can help learning on the go, for example language learning can be done in bite-size pieces, and lectures can be listened to via a podcast. It might be that staff wish to explore learning in areas not directly related to their current role, for example, a coding course, or presentation skills. Enabling people to further learning beyond directly related fields can enhance creativity and motivation. Giving staff the ability and freedom to select what and where they would like to learn, rather than limiting them to further learning only in directly related fields, not only demonstrates trust in your staff but can also foster innovation and enable the whole person to come to work, connecting home and work identities.

Furthermore, dedicated days spent learning a new skill, or working on a shared problem, mean that staff can focus on this learning without worrying about staying on top of day-to-day tasks and bowing to the demands of their inbox.

Allowing freedom of what to learn, how to learn it and where, enables people to create more meaning in their careers and develop new skills which can help them both personally and professionally, and dramatically develops in-house organisational talent. Having the trust in staff to complete their jobs without being constantly “seen” whether in person or online, can allow people the time to do deeper thinking without being distracted by minor tasks or demands. Constant multi-tasking is not compatible with deep, creative and insightful thinking.

Managing expectations, and having senior staff take the lead in setting an example, can help enable others to take the space and time they need for deep thought and learning.

The Roof

At Caplor Horizons we frame sustainability in terms of Purpose, People, Planet, and Prosperity (to understand more, read Chapter 2). We can look at each of these aspects in turn to see how improving connectivity both within the organisation and externally with the wider world not only enhances sustainability but is key to it.

Purpose

What you choose to do as a career has always, to some extent, been a defining part of a person's life and identity. However, the lines between our professional and personal lives are becoming increasingly blurred; the ability to be constantly connected makes it harder to leave your work at your desk, the increased visibility of career and education opportunities can widen the choice of where people decide to dedicate their time, and make it easy to explore new options.

Enhanced awareness of ethical issues has resulted in a visible move towards people wanting to contribute positively to worldwide issues and work for an organisation that enables this. More openness around topics such as workplace depression and stress has prompted a change in how we view the role of work. No longer is it seen as simply a means to an end, but as an end in itself. People actively want to find meaning and soul in their work and are increasingly willing and able to change careers and organisations in order to pursue this. A shared purpose can mean many things, but a sustainable and connected organisation sees its staff members and consumers as valued members of its community, working towards shared values and goals.

Organisational cultures will need to support this aspiration, and should be managed collaboratively, with input from all areas of the organisation, as well as by actively engaging and responding to the wider world.

People

The internet has enabled greater choice than ever before in all aspects of life, be this buying clothes, reviewing a new organisation, or selecting a new life partner! Everything can be done at the click of a button or the swipe of a fingertip. The same goes for selecting the organisation you wish to work at. It's easy to read customer reviews, look up previous and current staff members, and access the vast amounts of data on organisations freely available online. Previous generations did not have this array of choice and comparison, and therefore may have been unaware of better options elsewhere. Whilst the grass is not always greener, companies need to ensure that they treat their staff correctly: implementing ethical working standards, safe working environments and fair pay. Going above and beyond by offering good work-life balances, excellent health care, flexible working policies, and education opportunities can help organisations to stand out to prospective employees as well as improving the wellbeing and retention of existing staff.

In recruitment and promotion practices, ensuring equality of opportunity and diversity of gender and ethnicity, amongst other things, is key. If prospective staff members look at your website or come along to an interview and only see non-disabled, white, male faces staring back at them, they may wonder what that signifies about the underlying culture of the organisation. Actively pursuing inclusion practices and policies, and addressing any issues to the contrary, will also improve connections within the workplace as well as communicating this to the wider world.

Planet

The environmental bottom line refers to an organisation's commitment to sustainable environmental practices. As both consumers and employees, the younger generation have been educated to be more socially conscious, wanting to engage with organisations they feel are acting ethically and in line with their own social values. Indeed they want their employers to be connected to the planet and its future needs.

As future leaders, young people are telling their employers that they should encourage a shift in perspective and deepen the connections between business and the natural world. In the

last decade or so people have become much more aware of their impact upon the environment, and the real dangers and consequences of climate change.

The environmentally conscious consumer is actively looking for sustainable products, materials, production methods and practices. They are able to research and access information about business practices and are not afraid to call out a company on a public platform or boycott a brand that is seen to be environmentally detrimental.

Connected consumers can be an organisation's biggest advocates as well as its worst critics. If your organisation is dedicated to environmental sustainability, not only does this in itself contribute to the sustainable future of the organisation (as arguably environmentally sustainable business practices are the most profitable in the long run), but it can attract others sharing the same beliefs.

Not only should the organisation work towards reducing its negative impact on the environment, but it should create a positive impact. Eco-volunteering opportunities for staff is one way to do this. Allowing them to have paid time away from their desk to contribute to an environmental or social good cause not only is beneficial for building relationships and morale among staff, but also has a direct benefit for the wider community and the planet as a whole.

Prosperity

We have already discussed the need to engage the younger generation in order to future-proof an organisation, help it to continually evolve and be able to adapt to a fast pace of change. Whilst this may incur short-term costs, or investments that don't always pay off, in the long term this is necessary for ensuring the economic sustainability of the organisation.

Technology can help make processes more efficient, cutting down time and cost, and enabling staff to focus on the bigger issues. More efficient ways of working may mean less time in the office is required. Online meeting software may not fully replace face-to-face meetings, but it can mean that there is less need for international travel, saving both the monetary and environmental costs. Working collaboratively using cloud-based solutions can also reduce the need for lots of hardware and storage space.

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To work towards achieving financial sustainability, organisations need to engage the younger generation now, as not only will they become the leaders of tomorrow, but also the largest consumer group with increased purchasing power over time. Given the shift towards the socially and environmentally conscious consumer, the sustainability of the organisation and the planet are becoming more closely aligned and connected than ever.

The Kitchen

Practical steps to becoming a connected organisation

- **Foster an inter-generational exchange of ideas through mentoring schemes** – Many organisations are now using “reverse mentoring” where young people are coaching older generation colleagues in new technologies and social networks. One tool that can enable inter-generational mentoring within your organisation is “Donut”. Donut automatically pairs up different team members so that dedicated time is set aside to simply chat over a coffee, hear about different projects, learn from one another’s experience and build stronger relationships.
- **Explore potential opportunities for collaboration** – Whether it is informal coordination or a full-scale merger adopting a more collaborative mindset is vital to deliver a sustainable future. This could include running joint events, sharing office facilities, putting in a joint bid for a competitive contract, collaborating on a medium- or longer-term initiative, or becoming a member of an umbrella organisation.
- **Use technology to improve efficiency** – Technology can ensure that processes can be efficient, particularly the most basic and necessary. Simplifying tasks such as managing expenses, calendar management, or updating records can mean that people can focus on bigger issues and explore new projects and ideas, as well as encouraging a culture of continuous improvement and adaptation. Furthermore, working collaboratively using cloud-based solutions enables team members to work together remotely on the same document at the same time.
- **Encourage innovation, experimentation and collaborative projects** – Implementing rapid prototyping can enable freedom of idea-creation, getting things done quickly rather than perfectly, and then working on shared solutions across teams. “Sprint sessions” are a good way of doing this: bringing together a group of people from across the organisation to work on a shared project for a short, dedicated period of time. This can often bring to light individual skills or attributes that had been overlooked and can open new doors and opportunities for people within the organisation.

Key messages

- Connected organisations are consciously and proactively connected. This means using digital technology and data effectively, exploring potential opportunities for collaboration, promoting innovation and experimentation within projects, and encouraging diverse and flexible teams.
- Digital technology provides greater opportunities to be connected. Worldwide an average of 57% of the global population is now connected to the internet, spending an average of 6.5 hours per day online. Most people will use the internet as part of their day-to-day jobs, transforming existing jobs and creating many new career opportunities.
- Next generation leaders will be social-networking, Digital Natives who multitask and create impact through technology. This provides an exciting new opportunity and perspective which needs to be harnessed and encouraged to achieve a sustainable future.

Reflection questions

- How “future proof” do you consider your organisation to be? Is engaging the younger generation a priority? Is the organisation environmentally and socially sustainable as well as financial?
- Does the culture at your organisation encourage or hinder innovation?
- Do you and your colleagues have a sense of shared purpose and community? What does community mean to you?

Action and impact questions

- Are project teams inclusive, comprising of people with a variety of backgrounds and experiences? If not how could cross-organisational collaboration be improved?
- Challenge the status quo. Could working norms and recruitment processes be improved to attract and recruit a diverse pool of candidates?
- Could you review administrative processes and technology to see where “quick wins” can be made and efficiency improved?

Further reading

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