

# Event Takeaways

## C-Suite Challenges: Effective Leadership in Disrupted Times



# The Panel

Our panel for this event was exceptional in every way. Talented, charismatic and passionate leaders who gave candid and entertaining accounts of their experiences and shared genuinely actionable insights with our audience. It was obvious that they care as much about inspiring people as they do the bottom line, and their success is in large part due to this. It was obvious that they care as much about inspiring people as they do the bottom line and their success is in large part due to this.

- **Mark Cuddigan** helped Ella's Kitchen become the No.1 brand in its sector while staying true to his belief that business can be a force for good.
- **Karen Hilton** shepherded car retail startup heycar through the dark days of covid, launched an ecommerce platform for the business and continues to successfully inspire a young workforce during a tough time in the car retail market.
- **James Connelly** founded his first business Fetch in his early 20s and having sold it to a global group has gone on to be the founder of Charlie Oscar and a successful investor and advisor to other startups.
- **Ruth Kieran** was voted PR person of the year and featured in Campaign's 40 over 40 in 2022. She has guided Cirkle through an acquisition, transforming it from an employer owned business to being part of a large network while maintaining an employee first culture.
- **Paul Marsh** founded his management training and consultancy business, Lightbulb, 13 years ago and has since worked with leaders and senior stakeholders across 200 companies.

Thank you from all the team at TalentEdge and Talentarc for making this such an interesting, entertaining, and informative discussion.





***“Anyone can hold the helm when the sea is calm.”***

**Publilius Syrus**

## Introduction

The last three years have been anything but calm for leaders. There has been a tsunami of challenges that have threatened the stability of businesses and fundamentally changed the way we work. Some issues will continue to impact business far into the future.

Through this time many leaders came of age in their roles, a generation that have not only dealt with a unique combination of threats and opportunities but whose workforce, customers and clients are demanding something different from them.

The leaders that have flourished since the start of the 2020s are agile thinkers, great listeners, excellent communicators, and effective storytellers. Many tend towards building purpose led and people-first organisations and are more likely to be active participants in wider societal debates rather than solely commercial participants in the economy.

TalentEdge and Talentarc have been working with leaders across the C-Suite and Finance for well over a decade and we have witnessed these changes first hand. Organisations are looking for different skill sets to those that were required in the late 90's and in turn candidates want something more from employers.

If you would like to find out about how we can help your business hire effective leaders and scale teams to support growth get in touch with me on [tracy@talentarc.com](mailto:tracy@talentarc.com).



## Effective leadership in disrupted times

Communication is considered a central pillar of effective leadership and was a recurring theme throughout the discussion.

- It's important for all stakeholders (both investors and employees) to feel they are being taken on the journey with the leadership team, particularly when times are difficult. Communicating clearly and with transparency fosters this sense of inclusion, avoids confusion, manages expectations, and enables people to better understand difficult decisions.
- Strong storytelling inspires the workforce in a way that solely focusing on the bottom line will not. The leader who can translate the goals of shareholders and investors into a vision the business can buy into and communicate a sense of mission or shared goal beyond the bottom line, is more likely to be able to motivate their team to succeed during tough or challenging times.

*"The companies that were already communicating well, treating their staff with respect, and had the right values and principles, those businesses just had to double down."*

James Connelly, Founder & Investor

- When managing change, particularly when it is concerning something highly emotive such as returning to the office, clarity of communication is key to ensuring that people fully understand the specific reasons for the decision. This avoids misinterpretation and can help overcome objections.
- Admitting or showing vulnerability, once a taboo thing for leaders to do, is increasingly being seen as an effective way to connect with employees, a way to build trust and encourage people to communicate more candidly with their managers.



## Effective leadership in disrupted times

Our panel are passionate about creating a people-led culture and believe that putting people first generates growth and increases returns for shareholders. This requires leaders to not only communicate well with their employees but also to encourage them to communicate more with leadership and each other.

*“We do a weekly poll with people to see how happy they are at work. At the Monday morning meeting we talk about what the score was...”*

*Ruth Kieran, Cirkle (on their Happiness Index)*

- Central to creating a people led culture is regularly checking in with employees to understand overall morale as well individual concerns.

*“We asked everybody to think about what their superpower was and we got everybody to write their’s on a spreadsheet and said (to the business) when you need a specific superpower look at the spreadsheet and go to someone, it was amazing, this drove all sorts of cross functional work ...”*

*Mark Cuddigan, Ella’s Kitchen*

- Getting people to connect with others beyond their immediate team and encouraging cross functional work helps to build and strengthen culture.

*“I drive everybody I work with up the wall because the one question I’ll ask them is have you called them? Why don’t you just call them? It’s better than email or slack...” James Connelly, Founder & Investor*

- Over reliance on technology such as email, video conferencing and messaging platforms can create barriers to effective communication and building relationships, so it’s important for leaders to encourage their people to use every opportunity to speak to each directly or meet face to face.





## Effective management of a hybrid workforce

Many leaders are trying to persuade their people back into the office while also ensuring they are effectively managing them remotely.

- Leaders are concentrating their efforts on ways to attract people back into the office (rather than solely relying on mandates) through creating a better experience for them in the office than they would have at home and presenting it as an opportunity to be together.

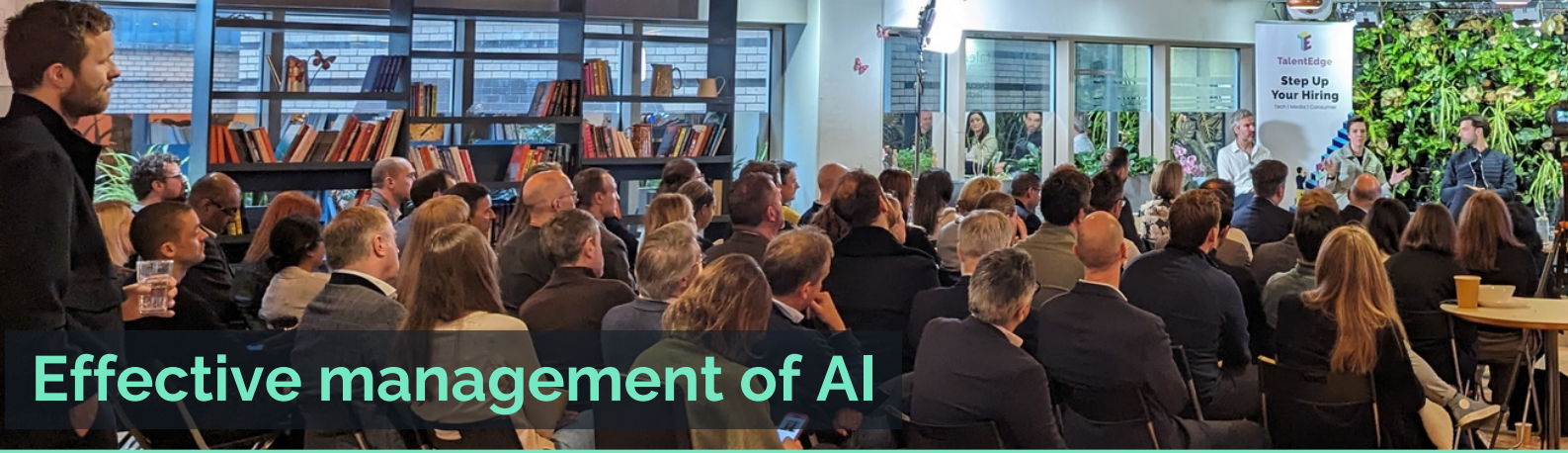
*"We've done lots of social events, lunches, sharing circles to discuss issues...reasons for people to come in and see each other"*

*Ruth Kieran, Cirkle*

- There's often misinterpretation on the part of the workforce as to why leaders are asking them to return to the office. Clearly communicating the positive reasons why being together is better for individuals and the business can avoid the issue of employees assuming they aren't trusted to work from home.

*"I have a section on my weekly list which is people I need to praise, 'who was it who did something brilliant last week that I haven't seen face to face?'"* Karen Hilton, heycar

- It's harder to gauge how people are feeling and to respond effectively when engaging with them remotely, so it becomes more important to keep track of, and acknowledge, what people are doing; what they're experiencing; and how they feel; in order to better calibrate an approach to managing them.
- It's undoubtedly easier for leaders if people are together in the office, but it's also important to acknowledge that flexible working is a highly prized benefit which attracts diverse talent. It enables people, particularly those with caring responsibilities or who have personalities better suited to working independently, to work in a way that better meets their needs.



## Effective management of AI

AI presents a myriad of opportunities and also significant risks. It both appears to be progressing at pace while its full potential still seems to be some way off. There's a sense of needing to both manage AI's future impact on the business even though leaders are unsure when that will happen, while also ensuring the workforce is being readied now for this leap forward when it does happen.

- One of the biggest issues many leaders face is ambiguity, and AI is another piece of ambiguity. It is easy for leaders to predict that AI will impact their businesses but much harder to predict when and to what degree. Committing to heavy investment in AI too early can be as detrimental as leaving it too late so it's essential that leaders closely monitor AI's progress and potential to ensure any significant investment is made at the right time.

*"We got our head of engineering to pull together the top 5 free tools and he did a quick demo, then we encouraged everyone to try it that week..as leaders we have to encourage people to have a go at things"*  
Karen Hilton, heycar

- It is really important to demystify AI for all employees in the business through encouraging them to experiment with the AI driven tools currently available, and also helping them to see the huge potential of AI to improve their jobs by removing tedious, repetitive tasks rather than regarding it as a threat to their positions.
- While AI will undoubtedly be a powerful tool in the future and is already being utilized in many applications, it's important for leaders to manage the messaging in regard to its usefulness within the business. Tools such as ChatGPT have their uses but should not be overly relied on.



## A final word ...

*“The way I would measure a great place to work is nobody having Sunday night dread. I want people genuinely to go on holiday and be looking forward to coming back to work. I think having fulfillment at work, proper fulfillment at work, is the heartbeat of a great company.”*

**Mark Cuddigan, Ella's Kitchen**

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We regularly host leadership events throughout the year which give our guests a unique opportunity to network with their peers, share their experiences and learn from our panel of experts. You can make sure you are kept updated on future events [HERE](#).