

HR DIRECTORS BOARDROOM Nottingham 2019

Smart Working



Delegates gathered at Eversheds Sutherlands (International) LLP and participated in this thought provoking and informative boardroom event. Introduced by [Karen Brown – Senior Business Manager](#) for Ashley Kate HR & Finance and joined by [Jacqui Wall, Head of Recruitment](#) and chaired by [Mark Fletcher, Partner Eversheds Sutherland \(International\) LLP](#).

[Ruth Gawthorpe, CEO, Smart Working Revolution](#) led the event and by means of an introduction explained her passion for smart working and how this had developed through her career, primarily in senior HR roles within a variety of businesses. It was clear from the introductions that all delegates were keen to understand what more they could be doing with businesses in terms of solutions, ideas and how to overcome barriers to these ideas, which primarily seemed to come from senior teams.

With her wealth of experience Ruth empathised with all the perspectives given and hoped that she would be able to go some way to supplying ideas, solutions, results and tactics to utilise.



Ruth explained how a complex back operation forced her to change her life and made her try things that otherwise she would never have considered. From a work perspective, this led Ruth focus on a passion of hers for more than 20 year – Smart Working. Ruth explained that she does not use the term flexible working as many business leaders associate the right to request flexible working with women returning after maternity leave and often switch off if this terminology is utilised. So one key takeout of today will be to start talking smart and use the term Smart Working – never underestimate the power of language!

With over twenty years of investigating and implementing smart working, Ruth talked us through her first success with this, from many years ago. HR were being pushed by operations to solve the issue of the down turn in calls between 12 – 2. Ruth offered a group of employees free gym membership in return for taking a two hour lunch break (unpaid). The impact was dramatic and quantifiable, absence levels reduced, the unproductive times were not over staffed, and the scheme increased engagement and was very popular within the company.

Ruth's Smart Working Revolution focuses on 3 things:

To change the future of work

Inspire thoughtful leaders

Improve business outputs

From her own experience and from numerous studies, Ruth can demonstrate that if this is implemented properly then business outputs will increase by 13%. There are currently some much larger claims floating around but from Ruth's experience, 13% is something that can be demonstrated time and time again, impressive and realistic.

When you look at some of the issues facing British business this week then this is not just a nice to have:

73% of business are struggling with recruitment

80% of the workforce want smart options

Mercer reports states there will be a 1.9 mill gap of workers to vacancies by 2015

UK productivity has slowed more than any other G7 country

Edelman reports states 81% of people do not trust their boss

So we have a burning platform!

Ruth works with a Smart Working model and was keen to empathise that the key to success was to ensure that the options agreed with businesses had to be right for them. Even within the delegate group is it clear that so many factors will influence what can and will work for each business. Only by understanding each business fully is Ruth able to advice on which model will produce the best results. A constant theme running through all of this is that senior people need to be

open-minded. Too often leaders consider a very narrow band of “flexible” options and find reasons why these won’t work, rather than considering a wealth of options with locations, and a whole host of variations on hours, including annualised, compressed, seasonal, 9 day fortnights etc. etc!

One factor that is fundamental to the success of smart working and often over looked is to understand the peoples’ personal attributes and to not make assumptions about what will suit who. It is often felt that introverts enjoy remote working more than extroverts as they struggle to focus in a loud, open plan type of environment. However, experience has shown that this is often not the case as they do not work on communication and can become isolated. Extroverts on the other hand will ensure that they work hard on communication so that they don’t become isolated, as they know that they need this to work effectively.

The benefits of smart working are well recognised, but it is probably wider than most people think.

For the Employer

Wider talent pool

Improved retention

Satisfied employees

Increased productivity

Reduced overheads

Trust

For the Employee

Improved quality of life

Increased job satisfaction

Well being

Reduction in travel costs

For the Customer

Better customer experience – delivered by more satisfied employees

Customer Growth

For Society

Fairer distribution of work

Productivity of the nation

More focus on family

Reduced carbon footprint



As the majority of delegates voiced and has been encountered time and time again by Ruth, the main objections to the implementation of smart working are the “dinosaurs”. Often found at senior levels, their objections are largely driven by lack of trust. One great piece of advice from Ruth to win these people over is not to go too far too quickly!

Ruth highlighted 3 steps to success, which are:

Feasibility – work with the senior team

Pilot – this will allow you to choose the best option. A word of warning – do not be tempted to copy your competitors, you have to do what is right for your business and employees

Implementation

It is important to run a pilot, this will allow you to compare the options in practice. It is important to always have a control group. Vital to this process are having measurements in place to allow you to assess, measurements such as productivity, attraction, retention, wellbeing, absence etc. You can then demonstrate the advantages and is your opportunity to win over the cynics. You then move on to implementation.

Having worked on these for many years Ruth highlighted the top ten pitfalls to help the delegates avoid these when they go back to their businesses:

Dinosaurs don't really believe in smart working

Poor choice over options

Lack of poor leadership skills including trust

Lack of smart team members skills including trust

Not recruiting the right people

Technology and cyber security issues

Lack of overarching principles

Lack of supporting people policies

Well being

A culture, which does not support smart working

So to make sure you avoid these pitfalls you need to focus on:

Smart Leadership

Smart Tech

Smart Policy, Process and Infrastructure

Smart Mind-sets



One of the questions was around the cost of new technology to support this. Ruth felt that in her experience this was often put forward as a barrier, but that normally only a few tweaks were needed to support smart working. A common problem is that people are not trained to use the technology in a business fully and this is where it can fall down.

Something that is of vital importance to the success of smart working are the leadership skills, which are required, and these differ to more traditional leadership philosophies.

The focus needs to be on:

Two-way trust

Understanding each individual

Having a clear line of sight between the individuals work and overall business performance

Allowing work to happen in brains and not offices!

One question from the delegates was around fairness, many businesses have certain parts that do not lend themselves to smart working – for example factories and warehouses. These businesses can then be reluctant to implement smart working in the parts where it would work, as they feel it will create inequalities within the business. Ruth's take on this was that people choose the job that they do, and if this a job that does not lend itself to smart working then it isn't an option. This should not prevent a business from obtaining the benefits of this for some of its workforce.

As mind-set was a big feature of the discussion delegates were keen to hear whom Ruth works to try and change these. A favourite of Ruth's is Carol Dweck, something which is now being taught in schools and her work with Fixed Mind-sets and Growth Mind-sets. One delegate had seen good success with reverse mentoring with apprentices working with the CEO, which had been a real eye opener.

In order to make this effective you need to ensure that you build around your smart working such as performance management, your reward system, leadership training and culture.

Smart Working is not necessary an easy option, however the benefits are tangible and for most businesses, this is something that you simply can't afford not to do.

[Ruth Gawthorpe](#) is CEO of the Smart Working Revolution who support Thoughtful Leaders who want to attract and retain the most talented people.

www.smartworkingrevolution.com



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Our exclusive HR Directors Boardroom debates gives you unprecedented access to valuable business and professional contacts as well as providing you with unique opportunities to debate topical and strategic HR issues. We have dates in place for 2018 for the debates and well as essential Employment Law Updates.

Please email hrnetworking@ashleykatehr.com to find out more or to book your place.

The flyer is split into two main sections. The left section has a purple background with white text. It features the Ashley Kate HR & Finance logo at the top left, with the text "EVERSHEDS SUTHERLAND" written vertically next to it. Below the logo, the text reads "Ashley Kate HR & Finance". The main heading is "HR DIRECTORS BOARDROOM" in large, bold, white letters. Underneath, it lists four dates and locations: "Thursday 5th March – Nottingham", "Wednesday 25th March – Leeds", "Thursday 2nd April – London", and "Thursday 30th April - Birmingham". The second heading is "EMPLOYMENT LAW UPDATES" in large, bold, white letters. Below this, it lists three dates and locations: "Wednesday 13th May – Manchester", "Thursday 4th June – Cambridge", and "Wednesday 17th June - London". The right section of the flyer is a black and white photograph of a woman standing at the front of a classroom, holding a book and looking towards a group of students seated at desks.

