SPEAKERS

- Elle Bradley-Cox
- Lindsay Kohler
- Alex Gapud
- Kevin Chapple,

Elle Bradley-Cox 00:08
Welcome to World Changers, a podcast exploring the trends making an enduring mark on our world of work, and how business leaders, HR teams and internal communicators can stay one step ahead.

Elle Bradley-Cox 00:23
Welcome back, World Changers fans. And if you're new, thank you for lending us your ears. We're very glad you're here. We are excited to be returning for a second series of this podcast. Each month we'll be diving into a different topic from our brand new 2022 report and consulting the experts on how these trends will impact and shape our workplaces and our lives.

If you haven't seen our report yet, what are you playing at? The link's in the episode description. Grab a brew and get stuck in. I promise you'll find some absolute gold in there. For now, what better place to start than by going back to the future?

Elle Bradley-Cox 00:59
War, famine, plagues, natural disasters. Humanity has had its fair share of tumultuous times and disruptive events. So, how can we harness the lessons of the past, so we're not doomed to repeat them? If 2020 was a year of reaction, and 2021, the year of reflection, then 2022 is most definitely the year of action. A time to put into practice the things we've learned. But where do we start? Lead behavioural scientist Lindsay Kohler chose this theme as her world changer for our 2022 reports. Later in this episode, we chat with Kevin Chappel, communications business partner at Electrocomponents, about workplace 5.0. But before that, Lindsay and I got together with our cultural anthropologist, Dr. Alex Gapud, to take some lessons from the past.

Elle Bradley-Cox 01:43
Welcome to World Changers 2022. Thank you so much for joining me.

Lindsay Kohler 01:48
Thank you for having us, Elle.

Alex Gapud 01:49
Really good to be here Elle.

Elle Bradley-Cox 01:52
Well, the saying goes that those who fail to learn from history are doomed to repeat it. So, what are the biggest lessons you've seen employers learn from the past two years? Our first big question of the year!

Lindsay Kohler 02:07
I think when I was looking into the past, and at this question of 'what are employers thinking about?' at first, because I was only looking at virulent diseases, I thought, "oh, gosh, what will we actually take from that?" But you know, what was super surprising is that there was quite a clear trend in the aftermath of all of these diseases. And it was just how much class impacts mortality rates when a pandemic rolls around. I think that we saw these so-called class divides between key workers and those who could work from home, or frontline and those who could work from home. And what was really interesting is that it caused this big sense of unfairness. And I think that was one of the largest engagement issues that we saw throughout COVID. I think it'll probably continue to be as we move into this world where hybrid is going to be king for at least a little bit longer.

Elle Bradley-Cox 03:10
How about you, Alex?

Alex Gapud 03:12
Yeah, I think that's a really interesting point Lindsey raises about that class divide. I think it's one of those things where, if we think about history as this long march, and you look at the wider picture of it, there's just so much that sometimes it feels like we resolve things or things get better. But I feel like a lot of times, you've got this slow march through time, but you've also got like some pendulums where things swing back and forth a little bit. Maybe what's going on is that something like a pandemic exposes what things actually are. Maybe we actually have had those divides for a long time in terms of people that are salaried versus wage based, for example. I think that we're seeing this pandemic put everything in sharp relief, as opposed to it was always there. We're just wildly aware of it, because we've had something strip back the layers or peel off the blinders. Maybe we don't want to see or don't want to pay attention to those kind of harsh truths of unfairness in our societies.

Elle Bradley-Cox 04:15
To me it's amazing, actually, speaking of class, how the Duchess of Cambridge has just turned 40. People are looking to Hilary Mantel's historical comparison between Kate and Marie Antoinette. We love to see how history influences today, don't we? I mean, Lindsey, when you were researching this report, what was the most interesting thing you learned about the past? And have you found that it binds with today?

Lindsay Kohler 04:39
Yeah, I think the most interesting thing, back to what Alex was saying about pendulum swings, and that nothing new is new. You know, I thought "oh, gosh, it's going to be some new insight or some this or some that" and I realised that history really does repeat itself in almost a predictable cadence. So, I thought, I'd like to say "oh,

yeah, we've gotten so much better" as Alex is alluding to, but we haven't. It's like we're repeating the same mistakes, but they're dressed up in different clothes. Class divide a big one, you know, staying safe in a pandemic. People didn't want to do that either, people push against it now. So, I guess what surprised me was just how little surprises there were. I thought I'd find more.

Alex Gapud 05:29
To add to your list, Lindsey. If you think about 2020 and 2021: racial inequality. That's another great example of, certainly in the United States, a lot of people when Obama was elected, were like, "Oh, this is this is a thing of the past. Right?" I think a lot of people wanted to think that and wanted to believe that. But then, obviously, we see all the police brutality, George Floyd, Black Lives Matter, and how that continues. I think it's such an interesting one. I used to research how people understood history in the past as an anthropologist, and we always think we're better than the past, right? But actually, as you say Lindsay, we just make the same mistakes. We buy into the same sort of illusions. We buy into the same comfort. So yeah, it's definitely worth having a discussion on what we can learn from it.

Elle Bradley-Cox 06:15
In the report, Lindsay, you say we're taking more risks. So, what do they look like?

Lindsay Kohler 06:20
Yeah, I think they're manifesting in a few ways. I think one of them is we're seeing this, "you only live once" attitude, which makes sense, right? We've had two years collectively stolen. I think we're all like, "why the heck not?" This is the day to go out and seize it. So we're thinking, "why shouldn't I move to that new country or take that new job or start that business that I always wanted to?" I think we're seeing that play out.

Lindsay Kohler 06:51
One of the stats that I've seen most recently is that 75% of people in the UK are planning to leave their job this year. I guess there's one caveat I want to make for that. I was on a panel yesterday and one of the panelists, Charlie Sampson, a business coach and one of my co-authors, made one of the most insightful comments I've heard in a while. We're talking about people leaving their jobs and taking risks and great resignation, blah blah, blah. And he said, "there's two types of people that are going out on their own right now". He said that there's a type that are really passionate. They spent a long time researching this, talking to people, and they're ready to go. And then there's another contingent who has hit the "F it all" mode. And so they're going off, because they've had it with their employer. They've had it with this pandemic, and they're in a very much in an "F it" mode. He's like, "which of the two do you think are going to be more successful?" So, I think something to put on people's radars, if they're also going through this, "I'm ready to take a risk" phase is to step back and say, "Well, what's driving it? Is it passion? Or is it because you're just over something else?" I think another driver of risk and going out and starting and making changes is that we're all looking for purpose. And before, when there was a lot going on, unfulfilling jobs could fly under the radar. When you had a really full social life and social circle, you could travel, all those things hid that maybe there was a lack of purpose and meaning in our work. And for those that are in those types of roles, all of that got stripped back. So, I think they're more likely to take those risks, because the driver, the purpose, the missing purpose, is so much stronger.

Elle Bradley-Cox 08:39

Really interesting. Thinking about the 'haves and have nots' that we were talking about earlier, these widening inequalities between them are only becoming clearer. And I really want to talk about how this shows up in the workplace, and what savvy companies can do to practice equity. Alex, any thoughts?

Alex Gapud 08:58

Such a big question, Elle. I wish I could fix it all in one afternoon, because that'd be amazing. But obviously, there's just such a big problem, even just the terms "essential" and "non-essential", right? I mean, I don't even know where to begin with that. I think one piece of advice is just think about those real people. You know, the people we're talking about here. And in terms of the 'have nots', they're real people with real stories, real needs. real feelings. I think there's something we can really do to humanise the workplace so that we don't think of people just in those abstract labels of "essential" or "non-essential" or "skilled" and "unskilled". Thinking about, for example, Visa categories. We've actually seen that so many people were all necessary. We all have a role to play in this and making things happen. So, just how we think about one another is definitely a starting place. The language we use also reinforces that. As well, just one thing we are seeing, as Lindsay's alluding to, is there is a changing employee/employee relationship. I think employees are right to expect a little bit more around purpose, around meaning and also, if we're honest, around things like pay and benefits. In the UK, we're seeing a massive cost of living adjustment. Rumours of energy bills, broadband, everything is going to become much more expensive. If you look at the trend, economically, speaking of wages, both in the UK, US and a lot of other developed OECD economies, wages haven't really kept up with the cost of living. So I think that's a really important conversation that employees need to think about. It's a really uncomfortable one, especially in the UK, we don't like talking about money. But it's a really important one to have. Because you don't want people to feel like a 'have not', but you also don't want people to feel like they're being left behind.

Elle Bradley-Cox 10:57

Yeah, and of course, there's the whole trial announced recently: the four-day working week in the UK. One argument is to suggest that people are actually going to work so much harder because of that flexibility. I've seen some things saying people will be 100% productive on those four days. And you're like, "ouch, that's really going to hurt." I think that no matter who you are, there's no way that you can be 100% productive during your day. And I guess, going back to the point about the 'haves' and the 'have nots', I think in a way, there's something there, where people can expect too much of those from a 'have not' background, because they're 'grafters', because they've had to work so much harder for that. I just find the whole conversation around this at the moment really fascinating.

Alex Gapud 11:53

I think this is probably another one we can talk about when we talk about my World Changer on automation, because it's a lot of the same issue. It's a lot of the same language. I think you're right to spotlight the obsession with productivity culture. I'll also add efficiency culture in that too. I saw something from Adam Grant recently, the psychologist at Wharton and Penn, and he's said "to be human, is to not be perfect", you know. That's the beauty of being human. We're not always 100% productive, sometimes we're a little bit more creative than we are productive, for example. I think there's a beauty in that. Again, when we think about the mindset of humanising the workplace and our expectations of people, it really comes down to embracing that, and valuing people for who they are and their inherent dignity as well as their stories, right? Sometimes people aren't productive, because there's actually a whole lot going on at home. Maybe they're taking care of someone, maybe their kids are having a hard time at school or something like that. Or relationships. There's a million

reasons why we all aren't always 100% productive or efficient. Sometimes we're learning, sometimes we're coming into something new or having changes in our lives. There needs to be some space for grace for that.

Elle Bradley-Cox 13:18
I wonder if some of this stuff is actually only what's going to lead to what we're calling the great resignation. Now. If listeners don't know, I do want to talk about what it. The latest stats. Lindsey, you mentioned 75% In the UK, but what is it? What does it mean?

Lindsay Kohler 13:35
It means people are leaving their jobs in increasing numbers. Some people call it the great reshuffle. So, it's not so much like we're all leaving en masse and never going back to the workforce. It's more like we're all shuffling about to find other gigs that are better suited for whatever it is that we're prioritising, whether that's money, whether that's purpose, whether that's time off, whether that's flexibility. So, I actually think in about six months, the dust will settle, everyone will kind of be settled in their new roles that fit what they decided their goals were. So it's really the descriptor of the mass reshuffling, because we've all just been pushed to different breaking points with COVID. Whether we were burned out, whether that search for purpose became more important and we are verbalising it with the one thing that we can control, which is how we make our money.

Elle Bradley-Cox 14:30
Do you think employers are right to be worried about it?

Lindsay Kohler 14:34
Yeah they should be! Anecdotally most of the people in my professional network have changed jobs in the last three months. And I know another 60% that plan to change jobs in the next six months. You should be worried and you should be asking yourself, "How am I really talking to my people to figure out what's important to them and how am I supporting them? How am I encouraging them to stay and If we both realise it's not a good fit, how am I helping them get to their next role?" Then bringing someone in who does want to be here. So anyone that's pulling the wool over their eyes or hiding under their blankets thinking, "Oh, no people will stay, they have nowhere to go." that's just not the case.

Elle Bradley-Cox 15:20
What do you think about useful solutions that employers can adopt?

Lindsay Kohler 15:26
I think it's back to listening. Really talk to your people, don't take it secondhand, don't assume everything's fine because you haven't heard anything. Survey, survey, survey. Talk, talk, talk! I think from those insights, then you'll figure out what you need to do. But it's also going to be bespoke. There's not going to be a one size fits all solution. It's where your managers are really going to have to step up individually to come up with game plans for their direct reports as to what you need to stay do your best work. Or, if we've decided it's not a good fit, how can I help you get to your next place in a good way? Managers are really going to need to step up in the next six months.

Elle Bradley-Cox 16:08
With a lot on their plates already.

Lindsay Kohler 16:10
Well, you know, that's the burden of leadership!

Elle Bradley-Cox 16:16
Alex, I know you do a lot of listening and a lot of focus groups. How's the great resignation landing out in your world?

Alex Gapud 16:22
Yeah, I totally agree with everything Lindsay said. As an anthropologist, there's another spin I'd add to that of, if you zoom out the camera and think about what's going on at a macro social level, and how that's playing into our everyday lives. There's all these things going on. There's a never-ending pandemic and people are feeling fed up. They're feeling powerless. So they want that autonomy. People want their freedom back, they want to take back control. We also live in an age where we've got these mass algorithms. Where I can get anything I want, curated just for me, I can find the perfect whatever. And I expect to be given that. Combine those two things and then you also think about the experience of working remotely. I don't know about you, I'm sitting at my kitchen table. And it's me in the screen. You two are on it right now, I've also got some emails and slide decks and whatever in the background. But it's me in the screen. And it's very individualised. It's very isolating. And, going back to productivity cultures, we are so focused on the task. We forget to think about actually, what's the relational side of work? So, as an anthropologist thinking about our need for human connection, how many times do we, the three of us, talk to each other? If we have something on our mind or are struggling?

Lindsay Kohler 17:49
When we record these podcasts. I think that's the last time the three of us were together.

Alex Gapud 17:54
Yeah, but you know, we have that connection with each other, right? Everyone has a "work best friend" that they always talk about. And, you know, I was doing some focus groups this week and someone's like, "My team has had a miserable year, but we stuck in it together and we're all here because we're together. We've looked after each other, we've supported each other." I've heard that so many times in focus groups. Combine all of that with the fact that we also have shorter job tenures. There's a lack of loyalty both amongst employees and employers. Our parents, our grandparents would have had a job for life. I don't have the stats in front of me. But I think our job tenures for our generation, speaking as a millennial here, are much, much shorter. So all these things: isolation, a lack of control and autonomy, a disconnect with your future, you're used to getting what you want, when you want it, you're isolated, you're disconnected from the people around you. If you add it all up, plus the lack of loyalty and lack of relationship between people and their companies, you've got disconnection. I think in addition to everything Lindsey's saying, at the heart of managers stepping up and having those one to ones with their people, is fostering a sense of meaningful connection. People don't usually leave something if they're happy, right? If they feel like they belong, if they feel like they're a part of something. I think the want for purposeful work and meaningful work is another part of feeling connected to something bigger than myself. Companies need to do all the things around pay and benefits and management. They also need to create something where people feel like they belong, and they're connected with the people around them, with their leaders and managers. And with the work they're doing and the wider organisation.

Elle Bradley-Cox 19:47

I feel like what is a very risky culture to build though, is a culture built entirely on the people you work with. I've got a friend at the moment who the team is very unhappy but they've been supporting each other and pulling through, but now the team is in a place where actually some of them are leaving, and therefore lots of them are leaving because they don't want to work in a company that doesn't have that team of people. And that's really risky for businesses, isn't it?

Alex Gapud 20:12

Yeah, it is finding that that balance. Obviously, you can't have everything just based on relationships. But I think if you look through the lens of relationship, not just at team level, but organizationally, where people feel like they're connected with what's going on with what this organization's purpose is, what its vision is, I think all that stuff is shouldn't be overlooked either.

Elle Bradley-Cox 20:35

Is there anything that we haven't talked about it, we can really learn from history, not just about what happened or why it happened, but maybe to help us be better problem solvers in 2022?

Alex Gapud 20:45

I think it goes back to what where we started with the podcast, actually, when you think about war, famine, plagues and natural disasters. Those are those are human problems that we've always dealt with throughout our existence as a species. And I think oftentimes, when we look at history, we look at what happened in terms of "describe it". Sometimes we dig into what caused it. I think another really useful frame to think about it, though, is, how do people solve it and what can we learn from that? It's the sort of thing where, if we think we've definitely taken a step back in this pandemic, when we think about people debating vaccines, for example. It was one of those things where that is how we defeated so many diseases and plagues in the past. So, if we look at the framework of "actually our problems aren't necessarily new", like the details, the contents of the problem, what it looks like, where it's happening, who's involved, all of that's different. But actually, if we compare and say, "how did we get over plagues in the past? What do we learn from that? What did we learn about how they solved it? And how can we implement that?" Sometimes that actually takes us from very abstract exotic context. So, if you look at how scientists eventually helped curb Ebola in West Africa, a more recent pandemic, actually understanding people's behaviour, and what goes on and how people spread a disease is such a massive thing to understand instead of, it's not just having the right information. Oftentimes, within the public health arena, we think, Oh, if we tell people the right thing, they'll just do it. But as Lindsay knows, as a behavioural scientist, and as I know, as an anthropologist, that's, that's not how it works.

Lindsay Kohler 22:33

I think, well, I mean, that's a disease where like, You're bleeding from your eyes. So, there's this inherent scariness and visualisation of people suffering that we all have in our head. So that's a much different ballgame then COVID and those misreports that it's just a cold, but I don't think we need to get into the vaccines and health updates. But I like your point of "there's nothing new" and about storytelling, which is something Elle is very good at. Elle, is it that they say that there's only seven original story arcs, and every movie, every story, every play follows one of them?

Elle Bradley-Cox 23:14
This is very true.

Lindsay Kohler 23:15
Well, I think different topics in history do the same. There's only so many ways things can unfold. There's only so many ways a war can unfold. I think for us, it's back to that connection, looking back for inspiration that understanding the context is different, moving forward, together.

Elle Bradley-Cox 23:35
And on to your point about storytelling. We might not necessarily remember all of the big battles and all of the details that happened in that war. But we do remember some insightful piece of storytelling. I certainly remember in the Second World War, were one of the one of the towns, Poole in the UK, shut off all its lights and blackouted it and a small island off the coast of Poole, Brownsea Island, put all the lights on to direct the German bombers to the island so that they would save the mass population. That's the story that people remember. They don't necessarily remember the huge battles. It's the people pulling together kind of stories.

Elle Bradley-Cox 24:13
Okay, what do we kick the bucket on? What do we leave behind in 2021 when it comes to the world of work?

Lindsay Kohler 24:19
We need to let go seeking control, which is funny for me to say, because I spent all of 2020 and 2021 telling people that control is a great defense against uncertainty. And it is! But I think that controlling workdays and locations and micromanaging people and trying to stay one step ahead of a world that's constantly changing every day? That's exhausting. So, I think we need to let go of that and just embrace a little bit more Zen, a little bit more comfort with the unknown. So that's what I would kick the bucket on.

Elle Bradley-Cox 24:54
Hmm, very nice. Alex, what do you want to what do you want to leave behind in 2021?

Alex Gapud 24:59
That's a really good question. I like Lindsay's answer. And I think actually, maybe the direction I'd go in is about assuming that we're going to go back to the way things were. We don't have to! We have so many new opportunities to do things a little bit differently. I think that relates to control because I think we're worried about that uncertainty, We just need to be bold and flexible, and learn. I think getting it right, in terms of what hybrid looks like, post pandemic, the truth is, I don't think any of us fully know. But I think actually letting go of that control linked with that certainty and actually being able and willing to go with it, to learn, I think you need to be intentional. There's also an intentional way to kind of run the experiment and learn from it and iterate and to be humble about it. I don't think any of us are going to get it right the first time.

Elle Bradley-Cox 26:09
I'm going to leave something behind that's quite obvious. It's just over communication in the workplace. Sitting here as a comms professional and knowing that things are really valid, and they do need to be communicated. But I honestly think if I could give one pro tip to any communicator is sort your shit out this year, right? Sort out the themes that you want to talk about that is strategically important to your business, and do not communicate anything else genuine. Have the strength and the courage – I'm sending it through the airwaves to you – to say

no. Please say no, because if I see one more poorly rushed-together communication, based on something that someone else wanted you to say, and your heart's not in it. And your colleagues read it, and they go, "why am I reading this nonsense?" Like, please! Burn it, put it in the bin. Be brave. Gosh, what a negative way to end!

Lindsay Kohler 27:08
In a non-negative way, should we talk about instead of what we want to kick to the curb, what we want to hold on to?

Elle Bradley-Cox 27:14
Oh, absolutely. Have you got any thoughts in mind?

Lindsay Kohler 27:17
Yeah, I've been doing a lot of reflection, because you know, it's that time of year, folks. I think what we should hold on to, and it's going to be different for everybody, but my advice is to hold on to the best thing that you learned about yourself when it comes to where and when you thrive at work. So, and everyone at my company knows this and says this about me, but mine is absolutely 100% managing my energy and my boundaries. I'm very unapologetic about that. But that lets me do the work that needs to be done to the standards that it needs to be done in the timeframes because I guard the rest of the time. So really think about those times where you thrive and hold on to that and double down on that.

Elle Bradley-Cox 28:04
That's really nice. I am going to hold on to the spirit of collaboration. We've had some new people join the team who have knocked the socks off some of us and really, really impressed me. And I just want to work with them and learn from them. That's what I want to do.

Alex Gapud 28:20
I really like Lindsay's of, if you're not already someone who takes that time to reflect on yourself, what you're learning, how you're growing, what you're learning about yourself, that's something to definitely pick up. One thing I want to hold on to is just hope. And I know it sounds really vague and ambiguous, but it is that positivity that things will improve for the better. I think it's easy, especially after the past two years, to get cynical. And hope can be a dangerous thing. But I like to be a hopeful, positive person at the end of the day.

Elle Bradley-Cox 28:55
What is life without hope? Gorgeous. Love that. Alex, thank you. And thank you, both of you, for joining me for the very first World Changers of the year. I feel delighted to have you as my guests and really interesting conversation. Thank you.

Elle Bradley-Cox 29:15
Kevin Chapple, communications business partner at Electrocomponents, got us future gazing when he shared his thoughts with us about learning from the past. Looking to the future of his own organisation and the wider world of work, Kevin mused about the revolutionary opportunity we all have in our hands right now to truly change our workplaces. I'm delighted to welcome Kevin to the podcast today. Hello, thank you for joining me.

Kevin Chapple 29:34
Hi Elle, thank you for having me.

Elle Bradley-Cox 29:36

So, when you gave us some feedback about our latest report, the World Changers 2022, you said "if the Internet of Things is industry 4.0, COVID has ushered in industry 5.0." Tell us what you mean by that?

Kevin Chapple 29:48

Yeah. So I think back in 2019, I first saw reports suggesting that AI in the workplace would bring about the next revolution in the way that industry and business works. Following on from what's happening now around the Internet of Things and connecting factories and so on to big data and the Internet, which we do a lot of. But I think COVID has changed the way everyone worked overnight with remote working. Everyone's had to start using digital platforms and learn to collaborate when they can't be in the same place as other people. Putting everyone through that experience in one go has meant there's been a big step forward. Everyone's taken the same step around learning how to work and behave in a different way. And now, as people start to move back into the workplace, there's talk around how we keep the best of both worlds and change the way we do things. But for me, that feels a little bit small, a small opportunity and a bit short sighted, I think there's an opportunity to really take what we've learned over the last couple of years and make it as big as possible and truly transform the way people work from, being able to attract the best talent, regardless of where they're located. They don't need to be anywhere near your buildings, or even in the same country anymore, through to empowering people with different thinking preferences, or maybe some physical challenges that keep them out of the workplace or make being in the workplace harder, all of that can be taken away. It's a blank slate, and we've got the ability now, if we truly embrace it to do something unique and revolutionary, and change the landscape for forever.

Elle Bradley-Cox 31:23

Love that revolutionary spirit! I was interviewing somebody recently who was a wheelchair user. And he said, "for the first time in my life, I joined an organisation where I didn't have to automatically say, I'm a wheelchair user, I could choose to say it on a video call. And it was just such a breath of fresh air." I really enjoyed that perspective. And I like your point about different world boundaries, as well, and choosing talent from whoever is the best person, right? Location doesn't matter anymore.

Elle Bradley-Cox 31:51

No, that's it. I was talking to some people internally, just a few months ago, and there's a guy who's been working in one of our trade counters who's applied for a job that would normally have been a head office role that wasn't available to someone that wasn't in the area before. But through remote working, they're now able to drive a different career path, bring their experience and being out in our retail network, into the office in a much more fluid and engaging way. And it's great for them, it's great for the team. And it just changes that dynamic, no big offices, your catchment areas, often limited to the town or the region you're in. And now you don't have to think that way at all. I think once people start to understand the barriers that have been taken away, although a lot of the talk has been around employees being given more power and more flexibility, that employers can make more of this as well. Team leaders, managers, HR teams, it doesn't matter where you are, you don't have to think with the same boundaries and restrictions you've had in the past. That can be really exciting, both for employees and businesses.

Elle Bradley-Cox 32:57

I can't agree more. I remember having to leave a business when all of the jobs that I wanted were only available to London people and it just left a really sour taste in my mouth after what was a really good experience. And I'm sure that really resonates with other people. And like you said, it's the savvy employers who take advantage of keeping great talent by not limiting kind of geographical boundaries anymore.

Kevin Chapple 33:20

And it's a threat because you know, those savvy employers can go around pinching your best talent tomorrow. So, you know, it's not just a case of doing this to be more enlightened or to have more employee-friendly policies. It's a double-edged sword, you can you can get the best people and that's not just skills, it's the empathy, the trust, the relationships. It's much more than just the talent that people have on paper. Or you could lose them. And so it's if a business isn't looking at this now, and exploring not just "how do we get people back to the office?" but "How do we keep people that want to work from home happy?" It's a much more existential discussion that people need to have about what the workplace means.

Elle Bradley-Cox 34:08

Interesting. Well, it's been said that we've seen 10 years worth of change in two years. Do you think that's an accurate statement? Is there a risk that we're doing too much too quickly? Or is a sprint like this deeply needed?

Kevin Chapple 34:20

It's an interesting question. I joined the workplace in 1991, a long, long time ago, and there were 14 of us in the team. We had one PC and two mainframe terminals between us. And it stayed like that for quite a long time. Which, back in the early 90s, that doesn't feel like it should be the way things were. So there was a lot of change in the end of the end of that decade with the Internet. It was becoming commonplace and I was doing PR for an online bank at that point. So, that's a huge change in your digital activities and behaviours over just the 10 year period. I think what's different this time is we've all taken the same step together. So the biggest challenge for any organisation doing a digital platform, whether it's collaboration, teams or workplace, or any of the things have been around in the last four or five years or more, it's adoption. And it's getting people to understand how they can be used and used well, and making that an everyday practice. And that's slow and difficult to do. It's the hardest part of every adoption. With COVID coming along, we all had to learn it overnight. That's everybody in the business learning the same skill set in the same tool, at the same time and lots of peer-to-peer education. People worked it out for themselves, they found new tricks, a lot more people started looking at patch notes and following what was coming so that they weren't surprised when you went from only having four people on the screen to limitless numbers, almost. I think the big change is that we've all done it together. And that skill set has been levelled up fromyoung to old. My kids probably say everyone's caught up with the way we've been doing things for a long time. My parents had to do Christmas over Zoom and that would be very strange to them. So I think it's everyone going through the same experience at once. And the big thing for me now is how do we keep moving at that pace together, and not go back to the people that enjoy technology and change, finding the latest gizmo and the newest way of doing things, striving off in one direction and leaving other people behind? I think within my team, we're all digitally competent to a level that we weren't before. We need to keep that level playing field there. Because you only get the best out of people from collaboration, when everyone's invited to the party, when everyone can play and work at the same pace. If you've got two speeds going on, between early adopters and people that find these things a little bit harder, the potential starts to break down and you don't see the benefits come through as fast or as quickly as you could do.

Elle Bradley-Cox 36:48

It's a very inclusive mindset. And one that I really value because I work with a lot of clever people here wh adopt a lot of cool technology and I'm always like, "could you just show me how to do that?" It's amazing when you start collaborating, the things that you can do together with just different mindsets. But all of the change you mentioned was accidental. How do you think we now get some purpose behind this and move forward?

Kevin Chapple 37:15

I think the thing that people need to face in to is understanding the challenges that exist within the workplace, whether that's on a physical or a wellbeing side, getting things done, and collaborating. I think a lot of the things that we've learned to overcome and deal with during COVID were already there. People experiencing stress and mental wellbeing challenges within the workplace, have probably always been there, we just haven't talked about them. There's been stigma attached to mental wellbeing. And because we're all working from home, when we needed to look after ourselves. We all talked about it, we all engaged with it. There were lots of discussions in my business between people that were open about their mental wellbeing challenges, sharing their coping techniques and things they need to do on a day-to-day basis to keep themselves fit and well with the rest of the company. And we were learning from those people. And over time, we start to see that level of engagement drop because it's not such a pressing issue. I think the important thing is for businesses to keep that going, learning from these people who are well skilled at dealing with these challenges. They face them every day and in a much more pressing way than the rest of us are. How can you manage those stresses and challenges and that wellbeing, whether you're in the office or not, collaborating is always a challenge. We talked about having lost the watercooler moments. You can't go into the coffee area and chat to people and learn about what they're working on. And that's something to get back. I know from working in my office in London, we do that an awful lot. But there's probably 150 people in that office and we've got 7000 worldwide. So the number of people I'm engaging with that watercooler is really small. So how do we make those watercooler moments happen across the business, regardless of the country you're working in or the or the town you're in and find ways of moving that into a digital space where the barriers aren't physical or geographic, so that we can learn and riff off of each other. The number of times we talk in the business and find those. There's a team in France doing something that a team in Nuneaton is also trying to work on and they just don't know, because there's no way of that being surfaced. And digital platforms, Yammer perhaps, or any other sort of internal social media or community platform gives people the ability to work out loud, to say what they're working on. It's not ego driven. It's just talking about that "this is my challenge" or "this is my problem. My customers got this need, how can we work on it together? It's "anyone already done this?" "Anyone already failed to do this?" because that can be important to not repeat the same mistakes or challenges. And just drawing people together to bring out that collaboration. We used to see that more in the office spaces but not letting the physical office space be the boundary where that stops, and that's limited. So it's taking the challenges that we've become more aware of during COVID and lockdown and working from home, understanding that they've always been there, and going back to the office won't solve them. But we've developed behaviours, practices and understandings of tools during the last few years that can transform the way that's done, even when you're face-to-face.

Elle Bradley-Cox 40:25

I like the kind of online networking but I also love the idea of thrusting people together who might never normally even speak or know that the other person existed because there are so many different brains, and you never know who you're going to connect with. And the other part I really like about digital networks is that more introverted voices can speak up and have a bit of a quirky personality on there, and you can get to know them and then reach out and test those ideas. Like you say, "I've got customer problem" or whatever. But actually finding different people, other than those in your direct team who you work with every single day, can lead to some fantastic solutions. I do want to ask you, it's a bit of a dirty word, but what do you want to leave behind in 2021? And what's important to you to take into the future? That could be at Electrocomponents, that could be personally, just what are you binning off?

Kevin Chapple 41:21

I want to bin off the challenges to be honest, I want to look at every problem and say there is a way of making this into a much stronger solution for everyone. We, as a business, try to focus on customer problems, making things easier for them, moving away from selling products to selling them solutions and using our digital tools. I mentioned at the start of this programme about our involvement with IoT. It's all about a customer problem, the customer needs and how we can make that better. And we've got to take the same approach for the workplace, whether that's an employee challenge, or a project that we're working on for a customer or supplier. There are technology solutions for nearly everything. Now, if we just sit down and spend some time thinking about it, a lot of the time there are offline solutions that don't require digital technology that we can be more aware of as people and interact more. I think it's abandoning the ego, working together as a unit. It doesn't matter who has the best idea or the right idea or who has bad ideas. It's just talking freely, and you're abandoning the word "challenge" and just making everything much more exciting. Now I'm recording this, today, I've just read a report that Elon Musk is going to stop making Androids and there's no plan, there's no prototypes. It's just a wild idea. And he's criticised and praised in equal measure about the bold statements he makes and how long it takes for some of those to come to fruition. But it's just that ambition, and just go for it. And if we can make something really good happen, that's fantastic. If we haven't, then then we've learnt something along the way. And maybe we just need to park it until technology catches up.

Elle Bradley-Cox 43:01

Love that. So binning off the challenges, binning off the ego, embracing the big fat chunky thinking, I really like that. So thinking about the people making the biggest impact on your world of work right now, who would you nominate as your 2022 World Changer? No pressure, you're the first of the series!

Kevin Chapple 43:20

Well, it's not about the world of work, to be honest. It's a guy called Nav Sawhney. Now, Nav used to be an engineer for a well known innovative home electrical goods. business, that very famous for having made some revolutionary vacuum cleaners. And he'd taken a break from work and gone back to India, spent some time with family and people there and realised that in the local village, women were spending most of their day hand washing clothes and taking up a huge amount of their time and a huge amounts of water, very labour intensive and then did some research and realised 70% of the world doesn't have access to a washing machine. He started trying to apply his thinking to "I'm spending all my time and energy making vacuum cleaners for rich people., when there are some humanitarian issues that my talents could solve." He had an aerospace engineering background. So he got together with some friends to think about how they could solve this problem. And they were inspired by the salad spinner in their office. The took it apart, reimagined it 50 times the size, using some basic parts and managed to create a hand cranked manual washing machine that uses 75% of the water and half the time. I may have that the wrong way around. But the numbers are incredible. So it's developed that into a viable product that he's taken research from refugee groups in Iraq and other places and late last year, he delivered the first batch of his second version of the model into some refugee groups and camps and it's really making a big difference. Charities get to buy them at cost. And we as a company have got behind him because he's so inspirational. The project he's working on is doing so much good. A member of the team discovered most of the parts he uses, everything apart from the drum for this washing machine, we stock and he was buying the parts from us. So we said, "we'll support you, we'll give you what you need, so you're not having to invest quite so much of the money he was raising to do this." So as a business, we're supporting him. It's called The Washing Machine Project. But it's taking the idea of big engineering, really talented people can take their skills and ideas and turn it into a more humanitarian course. And again, it's as a company where we're looking heavily at our ESG agenda, we launched a new strategy at the end of last year. And we think because of the technological

space we operate in, the number of customers and suppliers, we can bring together in some quite groundbreaking areas. We think we're in a position strongly, not to just improve the green credentials of our business, but help other companies around the world transform the way that everyone lives. So that's our inspiration. I'm looking forward to doing a lot with him and other people throughout 2020.

Elle Bradley-Cox 46:11
So I absolutely love that. And like you say it's not just one thing or one person that will change the world's problems. When we work together. We can do amazing things. Such an inspirational story.

Kevin Chapple 46:23
I think that's the big thing is sort of like community, if you can if you can unlock the community within your organisation to collaborate together, break down the hierarchy and democratise innovation. Innovation comes from people working together. I saw something on LinkedIn today, just a cheesy advert saying it was two people that invented powered flights. There's two inventors competing to try and energise the world through electricity. It's always people together. It's not one person on their own. Even with the space exploration between Jeff Bezos and Elon Musk, it's that competitive edge driving people together. It doesn't have to be competitive collaboration but your community within the business place and not being stuck behind hierarchy. That's what the COVID period has unlocked for us and that's what we need to harness.

Elle Bradley-Cox 47:14
Absolutely. I couldn't agree more. Well, here's to a cracking 2022 Thank you for joining me on the podcast today. Thank you. It's been a delight catching up.

Kevin Chapple 47:22
Thank you very much

Elle Bradley-Cox 47:28
Our huge thanks to Kevin Chapple. And if you want to join us for some future gazing, do sign up for our webinar later this month where you can put your questions to our expert panel. We'll share the details in the session notes and on our social channels. Want to continue the conversation in the meantime? Do come and chat to us over on Twitter @scarlettabbott or drop us an email at Hello@scarlettabbott.co.uk and we'll see you next time for another dive into World Changers 2022.

Elle Bradley-Cox 47:59
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