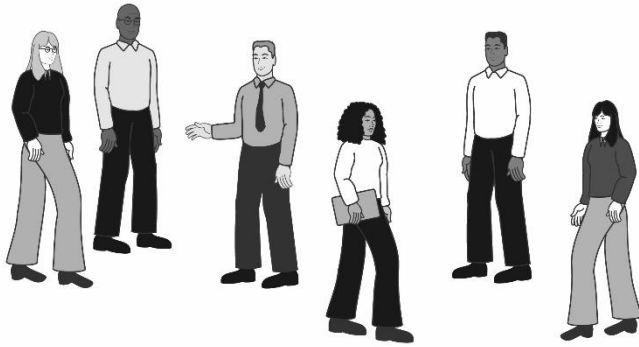
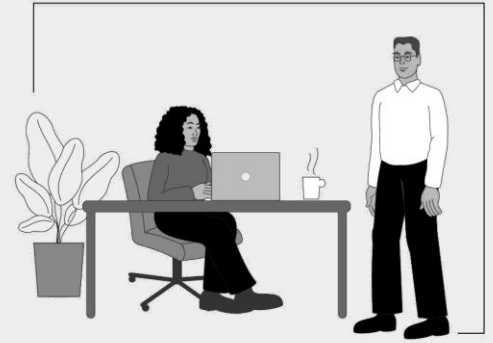


# CULTURAL TRANSFORMATION ROUNDTABLE BREAKFAST



This past Tuesday morning, at the lovely and historic Delaunay Restaurant in central London, it was my absolute pleasure to bring together 10 CEOs from a range of industries to discuss:

**cultural transformation and the role of the CEO** - a topic at the heart of most agendas at this moment in time.

This was my eighth breakfast event on transformation in the last 20 months, and the first one I'd hosted at the Delaunay – but certainly won't be my last. From previous events where specific aspects of transformation had been debated, such as digital, data, technological or commercial, this time I wanted to keep it more broadly focused on company culture itself. What I'd learnt over the course of the previous seven events, combined with 20 years of leading HR mandates for companies is that: nothing will ever change in the business if the company culture isn't prepared to adapt to that change. And, in fact, it first must be ready to embrace it and, often, to drive it from various vantage points throughout the course of the actual transformation.

And, as I always ensure I do, and to respect Chatham House rules, I never name any of my guests by name or job title but, for me anyways, I was very proud to have assembled such an impressive group of CEOs together for some eggs and coffee.

**If I were a leader in today's business world and I was concerned about my company culture, I would be thinking about the following things:**

- Leading by example
- Being crystal clear to my employees about my decision making – even if some of those decisions are tough
- Building a workforce that is a part of this decision making
- Ensuring I had a strong internal communications department to keep everyone on the same page
- Being honest about what my culture is, and isn't, during the hiring & interviewing process



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Around the table were **CEOs from the travel, leisure, Media, Food & Beverage, Fintech, start up and Data / Insight industries**. The first point that struck me loudly and which was industry agnostic, was the need to lead by example. If you are to truly embrace a culture that embodies a work life balance, you must stay consistent with your work hours and somehow dispel the 'always on, always working' myth prevalent in senior level roles today. One of the guests commented on ensuring he never responded to emails sent on the weekend as one example for how to lead by his actions first.

Transparency was also widely discussed at this event. The need to explain your decision, at all levels, to your employees. From greater transparency during the recruitment process (hiring to fit your culture and being honest about what this culture is), through to bonus time, monthly KPIs & revenue targets that were hit or missed – it seems that the more the employee knows, the greater empowered they feel today.

Another guest told a story about how she sent 180 separate personal messages to all her employees during the first Christmas period during Covid. This personalized message, apparently, made more of an impact to her employees than the actual present they received.



Adapting to a reality where teams meetings are now blended with in-person meetings and the inherent complexities around this reality was also an interesting topic of discussion. One of the guests, who launched his business at the very start of the COVID, mentioned that his entire culture had been built virtually via teams meetings / calls etc. and all processes were created within this world – and it works! However, as people return to the office, this virtual-physical dynamic seems tricky. This struck me as particularly interesting as it seems opposite from most realities – where teams and virtual calls were never the norm and we had to somehow adapt to them.

The need to internally communicate today is more important than ever. A reference was made to Justin King, as the CEO of Sainsburys for many years – and the key orchestrator to its revisitation back in the day – who had 13 full time members of the internal communications department that worked directly for him. For Justin, so it seemed, ***communicating to the employees at all stages of his tenure as CEO was essential and absolutely vital for building a strong company culture.***

A great event, and one that left us all with plenty to think about and ponder. And once again, as is always the case, the 90 minutes flew by, and I had to stop the conversation in its track to get everyone on their way by 9:30am – as I always promise to do.