21st CENTURY LEADERS
Cass Business School, City University London
Regional event report
This workshop at Cass Business School, City University London, was one of a series where employers, academics and management consultants were bought together to share opinion on the current and future business curriculum. Delegates divided into smaller, mixed groups to discuss six key questions. Opinions were captured by a team of reporters, from which this report has been created. It aims to pull together the main viewpoints and conclusion rather than to provide a verbatim commentary of the discussions.

Employers expect graduates to have a strong set of core management and business skills, competencies and qualities. Demonstrating the right mindset, displaying future potential, being reflective in regards to your experience and showing the desire to develop and progress were identified as differentiators. Delegates said that communication, strategy, finance, commercial awareness, human resource management, managing change and cultural and global awareness may be covered by the curriculum but needed to be given greater focus, forming the core skills foundation for graduates in the businesses of today and the future. Both employers and universities need to explore how they can work more effectively together to create worthwhile opportunities which will improve the employability of management graduates.

Question 1: Describe your ideal management job candidate
- Is there a different skill set required from MBAs compared to Bachelors – or is it just a question of maturity and level of skill?

Question 2: Describe the candidates you actually see
- Is there a different skill set/education level required for senior positions compared to middle level? (or is it just experience?)
- What management and leadership skills do good candidates demonstrate?

The delegates focused on three core areas of importance. Initially attendees listed the technical competencies and traits that they would expect to see in a graduate, but as discussions developed towards experience, stronger statements were made in relation to the future potential that ideal candidates should display, such as their ability to reflect on experience gained and the value of obtaining an MBA. Senior management skills were discussed, focusing on the current lack of leadership qualities, such as strategic execution.

Technical skills

An ideal candidate needs both the knowledge and technical ability.

Managers need the sector or specialist knowledge and the technical competence so that they are credible to their subordinates said Alistair Scott, Senior Account Manager at Broadgate Mainland. An ideal candidate will possess the technical ability to meet the needs of the role, with middle managers employed because of their industry/sector knowledge. Dominick Sutton
indicated that if a candidate does not understand the job then they simply cannot do it. Employers can hire candidates with less technical skills if they've got strong other skills, but candidates need to develop the necessary skills quickly in order to hold onto their position. He added that the ability to learn and re-learn is an important skill to possess in business. As Mae Keary, IM/KM Consultant for the Scott Keary Consultancy expressed, ‘knowledge is an asset; to lead a team you need knowledge of the sector, the team, the organisation, the objectives’.

Baskar Sundaram, Head of Business Development at Serco stated that people are confused as to whether they need to specialise in a particular field, or whether they should be a generic manager. He recruits on the basis of the talent that is relevant to the role, for example, a designer with the main criterion as creativity. He noted that this employee might not be effective in business.

Ideal candidates should be able to:
- display an ability to solve problems
- display creativity
- think clearly and make good judgments and decisions
- manage their time
- manage and deliver objectives
- ask the awkward but important questions
- disagree constructively
- display an ability to manage and motivate others
- supervise and not micromanage
- manage stress
- use technology confidently
- write in business and other necessary styles
- understand finance and display confidence with basic numeracy
- display a broad business knowledge
- display entrepreneurial skills
- display a knowledge of and uphold diversity and inclusion.

An alternative view was expressed by Donal Carroll, Director of the Critical Difference Consultancy, who suggested that poorer performing companies recruit based on skills and on evidence of previous management experience. The highest performing companies, such as Happy, recruit people who want to work for them and can demonstrate how they are able to add value to and improve the company.

Mindset

An ideal candidate may have industry or technical knowledge, but it is equally important to employers that they possess appropriate values, positivity, openness and a desire to learn.

Employers produced a lengthy list of qualities and attitudes that make up the mindset of the ideal candidate:
- they understand the organisation’s values
- have high moral and ethical standards: honesty, consistency integrity and trustworthiness
- are genuine, nice, pleasant people
- they fit with the team dynamic and organisational culture
- they make the workplace a fun environment
- are willing to admit to and show that they learn from mistakes
- are open minded
- they demonstrate a willingness to learn and are proactive in their approach
are able to adapt
are resilient and tenacious
are self-motivated and display initiative
have the positivity in order to act
are focused
are ambitious
are self-aware
passionate and enthusiastic
have a degree of confidence, but not arrogance
are realistic, with realistic future plans
are not selfish
are able to comply with instructions and be managed, particularly in lower positions
are not influenced by monetary rewards
do not come across as desperate.

Positive attitude is valued highly by employers and is sought during the interview process commented Baskar Sundaram. Phil Ryan, Chair CMI West Midlands Regional Board however, suggested that there is a wider acceptance that interviews no longer work, with probation periods introduced to allow exit routes to both parties.

Dominick Sutton stated that some candidates just have a ‘spark’ that is something you see, something you like and it clicks; ‘this person will fit this role in this organisation’.

Soft skills

It was indicated that in addition to technical skills and a good attitude an ideal candidate will have a strong set of softer skills, which include:

- sociability
- effective communication skills
- listening skills
- team working skills
- encouraging a climate of questioning, debate and discussion
- an ability to work across generations
- an ability to influence others
- an ability to articulate a vision
- a customer service attitude
- negotiation skills

Experience

Donal Carroll said that experience is very useful, as long as it comes with reflective ability. There isn’t always a positive relationship between experience and quality; as sometimes experience can make a candidate ‘cynical and deadbeat’. It is the uplift factor behind the experience that employers want to draw out and see at interview.

Future capability is more important than previous experience suggested Phil Ryan. There are so many missed opportunities, as employers ask candidates to demonstrate what they have done in the past; whereas how a candidate would improve the company should be the focus. People can only show what they did in a historical context and in the real world things constantly change, so it is important that candidates can display adaptability. Employers recruit for the ‘X-factor quality’
that an individual brings which does not depend on what they have done in the past. Having some experience is beneficial in other contexts he added, as he found entering Higher Education for his MBA more useful once he had real-world experience as this allowed him to develop and use critical thinking. He also suggested that the younger the candidate is the better. If employees are younger they can be institutionalised within a couple of years, this being in a case of 'maturing to the organisation'. If employers can acquire graduates at a certain age, then experiential learning is extremely beneficial.

A younger professional can demonstrate the characteristics of leadership even when they have come straight out of university and do not have any work experience, stated Ena Saxena. Professor Amir Sharif, Assistant Head at Brunel University’s Business school stated that it is crucial that business schools support their students by showing them how to demonstrate skills. Candidates need to be able to offer employers something unique, but at the same time employers should ensure that they are open to something new or unexpected. Indeed good candidates interview the employer as well as being interviewed themselves.

Employers must be more prepared to take on new graduates and provide them with a structured development programme to equip recruits with the skills that an employer desires. Lots of individuals are left on their own to progress indicated Ann Bell, Learning Organisations Champion at the CMI London and South East Regional Board.

The best candidates are people with Masters Level qualifications from newer universities indicated Jeremy Swinfen Green, Managing Partner at Mosoco. He added that graduates from newer universities are better employees because the courses they offer provide better practicality and more opportunity for application. What graduates from older universities have learnt is too theoretical and this ‘sticks with them’ and they can’t adapt and are less flexible. Michael Aston highlighted that people who have the ability to combine the theory with the practical are exceptional candidates. He added that too much theory can alienate others.

Delegates expected that the majority of Senior Managers would have an MBA. However, the value of an MBA is declining, suggested Zarina Camal, from the Ministry of Defence. Muhammad Khalil, Director of Business Development at the Cromwell College of IT and Management added that this was because some graduates go straight from their undergraduate study into an MBA course, which is a waste; these graduates may have very good qualifications but will lack practical experience. Employers preferred that MBA graduates possess a good amount of business experience which they will have acquired in the years after their undergraduate degree. P.H. Aruna Pradeep Ranasinghe, Director of studies at Bradford Regional College indicated that the value of an MBA is the network that it brings. He added that there is a huge difference between the networking benefits from an MBA at a leading institution and an MBA at a lesser one, with the value of bringing the network to the hiring organisation important to employers. Studying for an MBA or other Masters Level degree demonstrates commitment of both money and time. A degree or higher qualification is not always needed, commented Georgina Sear, Head of Education at CIPA. An academic qualification is important but does not necessarily make for a good management candidate, as it is about the delivery; many candidates lack practical experience.

The best senior candidates are headhunted and poached from other organisations, suggested Ena Saxena. Senior managers need to demonstrate the impact of their projects, as employers do not care about the size of the candidate’s previous company, for example. The not-for-profit sector invests better in the development of senior managers.
Alistair Scott stated that there is **not one best source of ideal recruits**. In the Ministry of Defence, for example, there is a cross section of different graduates. Many good managers are recruited and developed through **internal development programmes**, Dominick Sutton adding that he was initially surprised that internal candidates developed so well. Michael Aston suggested that a problem occurs when some employees are promoted simply because of the time spent with the organisation, and these employees actually lack the skills necessary for management; having limited strategic thinking skills, for example.

Geoffrey Berridge, Director of Knowledge Based Solutions indicated that an ideal candidate is somebody who is **capable of looking beyond their current position**, has strategic vision and **knows where they want to go** and the options they have in order to get there.

**Management and Leadership skills**

An **ideal candidate does not necessarily need an MBA for a senior position**. Senior managers must have strategic and critical thinking skills, an ability to work effectively with experts, understand the data that they are presented, and have knowledge of their industry/sector and have the technical knowledge so that they can ensure their subordinates are working effectively and can question with credibility.

Senior managers need to be able to ‘**delegate responsibility down the line**’ stated Granville Stephenson. He added that senior managers **lack delegation skills** or the desire to delegate effectively. Senior managers are failing because they lack effective leadership skills. Leaders are differently skilled. They are more strategic, can create and implement a vision and achieve their goals. Majekodunmi Emmanuel Sola, Programmes and Marketing Director at the Wharf Executive Academy noted that managers need the **technical skills to execute a strategy** and training younger talent would help to develop these execution skills that are necessary for effective leadership.

There is a perception that leadership is a fixed concept argued Baskar Sundaram. Leadership is shaped by context and culture added Geoff Elliot, Director of the Elliott Partnership.

An ideal candidate may display the following management and leadership skills and attributes:
- succession planning
- an understanding of organisational politics
- tact and diplomacy
- makes sound decisions
- manages themselves
- thinks globally
- possesses change management skills
- is a good coach and mentor
- puts the company first.

**Question 3: What is being taught?**
- What are the knowledge and skills you expect a business school to teach?
  - Assign a rating 1-10.

Academics provided an overview of the management course content from the Brunel Business School and BPP University. Employers criticized universities for placing an excessive focus theory and upon methodologies that are only effective when working in fixed scenarios, which restricts the flexibility and creativity that working in business
requires. Delegates considered the delivery of taught content and the effectiveness of both experiential learning and the pursuit of innovative teaching. Communication skills, strategy, finance, commercial awareness, human resource management, managing change and cultural and global awareness were identified by employers as the key areas that they expected business schools to teach.

Currently being taught

Delegates were critical of some of the teaching methods used in universities. The traditional model of teaching is already challenged stated Donal Carroll. Students at the University of Manchester have recently demanded that an overhaul of the economics curriculum takes place, to include more alternate ways of thinking to the market economics currently taught - including alternatives to the models still championed that are said to have contributed to the 2008 financial crash. Students want a more open, critical approach. He added that problems in business are not ‘fixed’, they differentiate. Geoff Elliott added that the problem with structures such as Prince II and other methodologies are that they are based on rigid systems of thought. There is no flexibility, or scope for innovation and creativity in what is taught. The problem with western education is that it focuses on analytical thinking not conceptual thinking. Donal Carroll suggested that perhaps the form and method of teaching are more important than the content itself. Delegates alluded that there is a limit as to what can be taught in the classroom/lecture environment. Experiential learning is what is of greater benefit to students and can be delivered better in the work setting. It allows problems or tasks to be completed in a supportive, enfranchising environment. Phil Ryan added that experiential models may work for some people but perhaps not for everyone.

Rob Goate, Head of Admissions at BPP University Business School questioned as to whether innovative teaching is just being pursued for innovation’s sake, and whether there is any evidence that any type of innovation works. He added that there is so much hype around online learning and webinars, for example, but no scientific evidence that this works better than face to face education.

The way in which management is taught has not changed much over the last 50 years, indicated Donal Carroll, referencing an article by Cathy Davidson from Duke University. Current teaching is very transmissive and there is something wrong with it. Business schools shouldn’t teach in a way to what is already being done; they should try and find an independent method of delivery. Innovation is not just about ideas but putting them into practice. Donal Carroll noted that there are loads of case studies of big companies that are trying to solve the wrong problems; how to use crowd sourcing for example. A little more ambiguity and flexibility should be built into the taught models.

Newer universities have lecturers who mix the theory and the practice suggested Rachel Holmes, Head of Programmes at BPP University. However, Jeremy Swinfen Green commented that a lot of academics are out of date and out of touch with business.

Wajeeha Fazal, a Management and Accounting student with JP Morgan commented that her course consists of finance in detail and entrepreneurship initiatives. Thea Frazen, a student shadowing consultant Ena Saxena, added that her course was very knowledge and theory heavy, but with some CIPD material, behavioural elements and team building built in.

Delegates also discussed examples of innovative teaching. Professor Amir Sharif described the current offering at Brunel Business School, which focuses on delivering both the functional business knowledge and the opportunity for students to branch out into more specialist
areas such as marketing, for example. He added that the courses ensure that graduates have a wide business understanding and business/employability skills, such as negotiation. Employability programmes are built in alongside all levels at Brunel Business School, from BA to PHD. Professional bodies such as CMI and the CIPD are all involved in these sessions, which are not run by academics. He added that students won’t fail if they don’t pass a workshop – but their attendance is recognised in the Higher Education Achievement Report section of their final degree transcript.

Rob Goate, Head of Admissions, detailed the key skills taught on their management programmes at BPP University:

- problem solving
- communication skills
- self-management
- team working
- changing and improving
- leadership
- business and customer understanding
- diversity and integrity
- application of numeracy and IT
- enterprise
- professional context skills.

What is expected to be taught?

Employers expected business schools to teach a broad and diverse range of topics including strategy, financial and commercial awareness, human resource management, managing change and cultural and global awareness.

A common theme was the centrality of communication skills. Graduates need to be able to communicate and listen effectively at all levels and in all forms. Delegates indicated that a person should have undergone personal development as a result of undergoing a business school education and thus business schools should have a responsibility for providing an environment in which the following core skills and qualities can be developed:

- communication, collaboration and interpersonal skills
- team working and challenges
- trust
- empathy
- judgement
- ethics
- self-awareness
- resilience
- negotiation/mediation
- influence and persuasion
- diplomacy skills
- presentations and speeches
- business etiquette
- problem recognition, analysis and solving
- the art of questioning
- critical thinking
- creativity and innovation.
Strategic thinking and strategic leadership are important skills for graduates to possess in order to continuously progress. Phil Ryan said that at this level business schools can only share strategic models and encourage their students to critically analyse them. Strategic thinking cannot be ‘taught’ as such, as it is more a facilitating development process. Business schools cannot make students think strategically but they can create an environment for learning.

There is a gap in terms of financial awareness. Managers need to know what the numbers relating to their business mean. Granville Stephenson noted that small businesses would benefit particularly from graduates with this broadened knowledge as they do not have some of the specialism, like finance, which are available to larger companies. Some SMEs overtrade, take on orders that are too big for them and run into difficulties as a result. Business schools need to teach the nuts and bolts of business finance right through to how not to overtrade.

Sector knowledge should be built up by using relevant case studies. Case studies have an important place in the business and management curriculum but business schools should use a wider range of studies, not just ones from the USA.

Aspects of human resource management are important to employers. These included recognising and managing talent, retaining staff, performance management and people management.

Additional suggestions of what should be taught included:
- project management
- change management
- risk and risk management
- boardroom and meeting skills
- opportunity spotting/horizon scanning
- competitor intelligence
- commercial awareness
- entrepreneurship skills
- inclusion and diversity
- cultural and global awareness, understanding different perspectives
- alternative business models
- thinking about thinking (metacognition)
- knowledge management
- evaluating information and report writing
- conflict resolution
- marketing
- sales
- standardised business vocabulary.

Question 4: Are there any skills specific for your region/sector?
- What are the top 5 skills required now, and in the future?

Region/sector specific skills

It was noted that London as a region is hugely diverse. Delegates listed the following skills:
- managing diversity
- ethics and values
- inclusivity
• openness
• collaboration
• networking
• discovery
• creating new opportunities
• managing capabilities
• sector knowledge
• improving the working environment.

The top skills required now and in the future

The core skills and qualities continued to be considered by delegates as the top skills needed now and in the future. These included: collaborative working, networking, communication skills, interpersonal skills, good values, openness, honesty and ethics as the base.

Managers need to understand the information that isn’t just people management, what is considered ‘good practice’, for example. They must understand the laws that must be abided to that can threaten an organisation, adhering to policies such as health and safety, or ensuring correct and up to date licensing is in place.

A mix of generic and more specific skills were listed in other discussions:
• management of diversity and inclusivity
• international and cultural awareness and perspectives
• technology and trends
• discovery
• embracing vision
• employee management
• forming and managing partnerships
• finance
• cross-functionality
• business and organisation community awareness, beyond the politics
• understanding of profits, and ethics as a part of this.

Question 5: How can employers help?
• Suggest a list of potential interventions: work placements, employer lecturers, events etc.

Question 6: What have you seen work well in practice?
• What activities are most beneficial to the candidate?

Delegates were asked to consider the role of employers and how they could be involved in helping to develop good management graduates and to contribute to the curriculum. Examples of challenging, significant work placements and real-life projects were outlined. The need for universities and employers to work closer together was emphasised within a comprehensive list of additional interventions.

Placements

Placements that offer duties which have significant value to the student and organization, provide challenging problems that are achievable are of most benefit to students. These could be offered across a wide range of sectors and in organisations of different sizes. Students
should have exposure to the different levels of management and the different disciplines within an organisation. Good placements allow students to gain confidence, apply their taught knowledge practically, develop additional workplace skills, find out if management is what they really want to do, and add weight to their CV for future employment.

Participants emphasised the importance of arrangements that benefited the employer, student and university equally. Employers who see placement students as free labour, getting somebody to ‘*do the photocopying*’, miss the point and so do universities that see placements as something they just ‘*have to do*’. Both should focus on ensuring the quality of the experience is as best as it can be. Employers and business schools should work to agree what the employer’s expectations are. Students should receive a job description like a volunteer hire so the expectations are outlined in advance, suggested Professor Amir Sharif. Ena Saxena added that placements could be made to be more flexible, with options to shadow different heads of functions, look at appropriate notes and reports and attend meetings.

Rob Goate indicated that BPP University Business School asks for employers to offer the student minimum wage as pay, as they think that it is fair. Other delegates suggested that employers could similarly sponsor or fund students and possibly look to offer them a job after their study.

Employers and business schools engage in a dialogue to work out how to work together better.

**Projects**

Employers should work with business schools to provide real life projects for students to work on. These should be aligned to the organisation’s objectives. Huge learning can be had from something new, something different in the teaching environment. It should be something that students can take seriously as they will then treat it as such. Dominick Sutton added that achievements can go onto a student’s CV and it gives them something to demonstrate in terms of skills and experience.

Students can sometimes be bemused and bewildered initially so it is important that they are supported by expertise from businesses, to ensure they understand the projects and the benefits they gain from doing them.

**Further interaction**

A number of additional suggestions and comments were made with the focus that ‘*employers and business schools should stick with their commitment to each other*’ for the benefit of producing good business and management graduates. These included:

**Employers**

- employers should offer mentorship to students
- reverse mentoring, business students to coach employers
- employers should form part of syllabus creation panel and should assist with examination assessing
- employer sponsored management skills; for example, team leadership, conflict management delivered by an employer
- reintroduce apprenticeships because vocational learning is effective
- secondments from employers funded by the employer or 50/50 with a business school
• employers should ensure universities speak to the right people as HR do not know the right requirements, whereas the operations managers do. HR can get the wrong ideas and make assumptions of what operations managers need/can do
• employers should have talent management in place within business schools
• sponsored awards.

Business Schools
• business schools should work with different types and sizes of employer
• more tutors with recent business experience
• scenario actors, as for example used in the OSCE NHS scheme
• events where CEOs are invited to explain how to create a value added network
• reviewing if interventions are still relevant and working effectively
• business schools need to establish a clear package of benefits to employers, including the costs and benefits of working with business schools, detailing information about providing placements etc.
• case studies for employers to recognise the benefits of engaging with business schools
• business schools to have a scheme on professional etiquette where students are marked down, for example, if they’re late

Courses
• sandwich courses can provide the right mix of practical and theoretical education
• most masters level programmes are only for one year in the UK but for two in the US, with the second year spent on an internship/apprenticeship
• existing courses should be customised so that they are aligned with specific sectors (e.g. Retail). They would have a sector skills council with a wide range of employer. It was noted that this worked at Manchester Metropolitan University and the University of the Arts
• universities should look overseas to give students international placements
• management role play to test and learn new skills, providing a chance to fail in a no risk environment
• online webinars, social media, podcasts

Employer/business school interaction
• universities standing up and asking the employer what they can bring to the table
• business schools are struggling to find businesses to recruit students, companies are not reaching out and also don’t want to give something back
• you are never sure who the right person is to speak to in a business school is and so this needs to be communicated out
• business schools can have a cosy relationship with certain types of business, which can sometimes perpetuate poor company cultures.
• got to make sure that systems put in place, whether these are schemes ran by the employer or by the academic staff, are consistent and if these staff leave there is a system in place so that good initiatives do not die out

General
• business schools and employers need to get the language right and standardized – ‘employers try to be academics’ in the setting, whereas they should be normal and honest
• undergraduates to be open to Women in Management
Case studies

There were a few examples that could be followed up to provide relevant case studies:

- Happy’s hiring practice
- Saltive – Scotland’s process to help entrepreneurship
- The Institute of Civil Engineers has the ‘Presidents Apprentice Scheme’ where a number of apprentices shadow the CEO for a period of time
- University of Manchester’s Economics students, who demanded a change in course content
- EDHEC Business School’s incubator model, where start ups utilise students
- John Lewis and the University of the Arts mentoring partnership
- Sector orientated programmes at Manchester Metropolitan University and the University of the Arts.
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<td>Mr Somanah Achadoo CMgr MCMI</td>
<td>Voluntary Action Camden</td>
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<td>Operations Director</td>
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<td>Mr Edward Adeleye MCMI</td>
<td>Global Empire Resources UK</td>
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<td>Mr Shafaqat Ali</td>
<td>SSP UK</td>
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<td>Regents University</td>
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<td>Programme Director</td>
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<td>Newham Council</td>
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<td>Housing Manager</td>
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<td>Mr Berlin Asonganyi MCMI</td>
<td>London School of Science and Technology</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lecturer in Strategic Management</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mr Michael Aston FCMI</td>
<td>Michael Aston &amp; Associates Limited</td>
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<tr>
<td>Management Consultant MD</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mr Balaillanthirayan Balachandran</td>
<td>London School of Economics and Political Science</td>
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<td>Visiting Lecturer</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mrs Ann Bell CMgr FCMI FIC</td>
<td>CMI London and South East Regional Board</td>
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<td>Learning Organisations Champion</td>
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<td>Mr Mark Bentley</td>
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<td>Mr Geoffrey Berridge MCM</td>
<td>Knowledge Based Solutions</td>
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<td>Mr Christopher Bond CMgr MCM</td>
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<td>Principal Lecturer</td>
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<td>Mr John Botterill FCMI</td>
<td>BT Global Services</td>
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<td>Mr Piers Cain CMgr MCM</td>
<td>Chartered Management Institute</td>
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<td>Head of Customer Insight and Knowledge</td>
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<tr>
<td>Miss Zarina Camal MCMI</td>
<td>Nuclear Capabilities – Plans</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mr Donal Carroll</td>
<td>Director</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mr Nicolas Ceasar CMgr FCMI</td>
<td>Head of the Business School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr Chelliah Chandrarajan CMgr FCMI</td>
<td>Director</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mr Ajay Channana FCMI</td>
<td>Senior Category Manager</td>
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<td>Mr Vishal Dave MCMI</td>
<td>Haematology Operational Manager</td>
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<td>Mr Hector Dela Victoria MCMI</td>
<td>Programme Leader</td>
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<td>Mr Geoff Elliott FCMI</td>
<td>Director</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mrs Hilary Ellis MCMI</td>
<td>Founder</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mr Majekodunmi Emmanuel Sola</td>
<td>Programs and Marketing Director</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ms Jane Fallon CMgr MCMI</td>
<td>Partner</td>
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<tr>
<td>Miss Wajeeha Fazal M&amp;A</td>
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<td>Miss Thea Frazen</td>
<td>Student</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mr Rob Goate</td>
<td>Head of Admissions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Eur Ing Paul Greenwood FCMI</td>
<td>Managing Director</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr Edward Handley</td>
<td>C.O.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katrina Harradine</td>
<td>Assistant Manager (Governance and Projects)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Mr Patrick Hitchen FCMI
Senior Lecturer in Management
Essex Business School, University of Essex

Ms Rachel Holmes
Head of Programmes
BPP University

Mr Andrew Hughes
Dean
University of the Arts London

Mr Malcolm Johnston
Founder and Director
Re-Formation Associates Ltd

Mr Alex Katsomitros
Assistant Director, Research and Development
Association of Business Schools

Mrs Mae Keary MCMI
IM/KM Consultant
Scott Keary Consultancy

Miss Priscilla Kendall
Principal Associate
AoC Create Ltd

Mr Wajahath Khaja MCMI
Director
Cromwell College of IT & Management

Mr Muhammad Khalil FCMI
Director, Business Development
Cromwell College of IT & Management

Ms Judith Krichefski MIC
Director
JHK ltd

Professor Bruce Lloyd FCMI
Emeritus Professor of Strategic Management
London South Bank University

Dr David Lukey
Management Consultant – Healthcare and Pharmaceutical Industries

Mr Anton Manickam MCMI
Auditor

Mr David Meggitt MCMI
Partner
Meggitt Bird LLP

Miss Nancy Meza
BA
Barclays

Mr Sol Miah MCMI
Team Manager
Alliance Boots

Mrs Kate Michell MCMI
Head of Operations
Hudson & Yorke Limited
Mr John Milburn CMgr MCMI
Head of Marketing
Chartered Management Institute

Mr Emmanouil Molympakis
LSE Management Student & Master of Pharmacy Holder
London School of Economics and Political Science

Khemindra Nadarajah
Pre Sales Consultant
Williams Lea

Mr David Nott MCMI
Director of People Operations (EMEA)
JNZ Capital Partners

Ms Anne Ofeke MCMI
Manager Service Support
Essex Probation

Mr Robert Ojah-Maharaj MCMI
Senior Credit Controller
Trieste Group LLP

Ms Karly Olsen-Haveland FCMI
Head of People dev EMEA
Google

Miss Kehinde Omotayo
IT Analyst
HCL Ltd

Mr Robert Orton
Information & Content Developer
Chartered Management Institute

Mr Emir Osman
Finance Manager
Task Associates(Finance) LTD

Mr Martin Palmer
Police Inspector
Metropolitan Police

Dr Stephen Priddy CMgr MCMI
Director of Research
London School of Business & Finance

Mr Jeewansing Ramlugun FCMI
Independent Consultant

Mr P.H. Aruna Pradeep Ranasinghe
Director of Studies
Bradford Regional College

Ms Lianne Robinson
Senior Account Manager
Broadgate Mainland

Mrs Angela Rodgers
Consultant
Chartered Management Institute

Mr Norman Rose FCMI
Chairman
European Business Services Round Table
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>Mr Phil Ryan CMgr FCMI</td>
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<td>Mrs Ena Saxena FCMI FIC Director</td>
<td>Saxon Consulting London</td>
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<td>Mr Alistair Scott</td>
<td>Broadgate Mainland</td>
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<td>Ms Georgina Sear MCMI Head of Education</td>
<td>CIPA</td>
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<td>Professor Amir Sharif MCMI</td>
<td>Brunel Business School, Brunel University</td>
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<td>Mr Aaron Smith</td>
<td>Chartered Management Institute</td>
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<td>Mr Granville Stephenson MCMI</td>
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<td>Mr Dominick Sutton FCMI Managing Director: Content</td>
<td>Management Diagnostics Limited</td>
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<td>Mr Jeremy Swinfen Green CMC FIC Managing Partner</td>
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<td>Dr John Taylor MCMI</td>
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<td>Mr Paul Taylor MCMI Regional Board Chair</td>
<td>Chartered Management Institute</td>
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<td>Mr Andrew Whelan</td>
<td>Accenture</td>
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<tr>
<td>Miss Joan Yeadon</td>
<td>Credit Control Consultancy</td>
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