

CoachDirectors

ACCELERATING
YOUR BUSINESS IN
UNCERTAIN TIMES

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“The biggest impediment to a company’s future success is its past success.”

Dan Shulman, CEO PayPal

Introduction

We live in unprecedented times. UK CEOs look onto a business landscape that is almost unrecognisable from even three years ago. The sheer pace of digital transformation is applying extreme competitive pressures on existing businesses and opening up incredible opportunities for new ones.

Transforming present challenges into future success falls – at times heavily – on the CEO’s shoulders. Depending on who you talk to, it can be either lonely and stressful at the top, or laden with opportunity. Critically, how you cope with stress can make or break you – and your enterprise.

So how are CEOs coping with these myriad business and personal challenges? We interviewed 60 CEOs, Founders and Managing Directors at businesses across London and the South East to try to gather their personal views providing unparalleled insights into the minds and actions of business leaders.





Chapter 1 - Global uncertainty

To kick off our interviews, we wanted to get CEO's view on the macro factors currently affecting global businesses, for example, digital disruption and increased regulation.

Isaiah Cox, CEO at WheelTug, who supply electric motor systems to the aviation sector, feels that there are indeed several factors affecting businesses today, with regulation being a major factor:

"There are a number of things dovetailing together that are making things uncertain. If you just look at GDPR, your inbox has probably been flooded by people saying we're emailing you to say we're not going to email you – the whole thing is a farce"

Compliance

Cox feels that compliance in particular, is placing a heavy administrative burden on organisations:

"Companies are being forced to spend a lot of money on compliance, but it's not just the money, it's the resources that could otherwise be doing real work"

He also feels that the current compliance requirements favour larger companies:

"Part of the opportunity is the deregulation that's going on in America while part of the hurdle, part of the uncertainty is increased regulation in Europe and GDPR. In the end which serves to reward big companies and provide barriers to entry for small companies, because dynamic companies don't have the corporate culture but also they don't have the resources or the time for the paperwork."

Confidence

Michael Dingle, Co-Founder at digital agency Reason sees the main effect of global factors as causing a lack of confidence in the future, manifesting itself in a reluctance by companies to commit to long term contracts in areas outside their core business.

"Our business is really built around helping companies invest in the future, and experiment and innovate around what their business could be like. There are many factors, whether it's Brexit, the housing market, or consumer confidence, there's just a lot of focus on core business currently."

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Technology

Stanley Morrison, Founder at St. James's Place Wealth Management sees the rapid development of technology, combined with changes in employee attitudes to work as a major influence on his business:

"People are not as necessarily as committed to the organisation's cause as they were in the old days. The style of working has changed. We work in a collaborative way. If you look ahead at where people will be in the future and where technology will be, there's a gap between the two and that's a big change."

Unaffected

Not all of the businesses we interviewed were feeling the cold wind of global uncertainty on their businesses though. Galahad Clark, owner of shoe brand Terra Plana is not seeing any effect on his thriving business:

"The times themselves don't feel particularly uncertain, there's lots of stuff in the news and we're all terrified about what the hell is going to go on in the world, but from a purely business point of view, honestly they don't seem that uncertain."



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Chapter 2 – Business challenges

Growth

For Galahad Clark, the main business challenge has been the transformation from a small company to a bigger one:

"Growth is something we are dealing with, and the challenges of growth are multiple. The most obvious one is cash, and just managing cash and priorities, and investing in the business as we grow and having to do everything a lot more professionally. People and culture is a really big one. When you suddenly really do start growing, everyone feels the business is doing really well, the profit creates a whole other cultural challenge in the organisation and massively changes the culture because then obviously, everybody starts to act differently. The motivation implications for people are really important – people having to grow with the business in their roles."

People

As his company grows, Grant has been faced with developing big company strategies towards employees:

"The people challenge is the ultimate one. If you can get the people right and the culture right, then you ultimately get good products, services and performance. We're taking it more seriously, putting a lot of effort into it. It's surprising how hard you have to work at culture, to really embed values and reward people on values."

This extra work includes putting in place team building exercises and benefits:





"We're doing more stuff together, investing in people, events, putting in more benefits. We're trying to practise radical transparency and have a zero bonus policy which helps a lot."

It is dawning on Clark why the HR in larger companies is such an important department:

"Simplifying and reinforcing is a never ending task, communicating the strategy. You can see why HR is such a powerful function in big corporations – it's the sort of thing that small business people don't really like to think about."

Innovation & staying agile

One of the challenges CEOs referred to most often in our survey was the need to innovate and stay agile in order to remain competitive.

Jerry Walker, CEO at Intelligent Fingerprinting - whose company offers a revolutionary new fingerprint drug test, sees innovation as key:

"Make sure that you're creating a valuable technology and that it meets customer requirements," he says, "and protect it, so that competitors can't encroach on where you are."

Some businesses have diversified their offer to stay at the forefront of change. Campbell North - a London headhunting business - has launched www.shecancode.io to encourage more women to enter the tech industry and is developing a spin-off company in the blockchain space, bringing with it fresh opportunity and more balls to juggle. Co-founder Will North says of the launch:

"You have to adapt to various scenarios. It's definitely challenging to get new platforms developed and then to grow and scale into a commercial product. We've already had a number of iterations over the last year. I have to keep saying to myself, once we have tackled the tech challenges it's going to be very exciting as there is huge potential."

Newer enterprises unencumbered by legacy structures and processes have a distinct advantage in remaining agile. A CEO at a mobile phone security firm says, being a small, nimble business lends a competitive edge:

"Our history as a business is one of having to continue to innovate in different ways. The technology that we're building and selling today is very different to the technology we started with 17 years ago. If we hadn't evolved appropriately, we wouldn't be in business today."

The need to keep moving forward, with an eye on the future, is essential, agrees Michael Dingle Co-Founder at Reason Ltd, a user experience led product design studio

"If you focus solely on core business in times of relative uncertainty, you risk falling even further behind the curve. So you have to think about the future now. The challenge is to ensure you have the courage and the conviction in your business and your service."

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“Finding and holding on to great people is one of the biggest challenges businesses face today.”

Alice Weightman, Hanson Search Ltd

Hiring

With an aging global population and the changing nature of work, it's not surprising that the fight for talent emerged as a major business challenge for many of our interviewees.

Indeed, a report by PwC⁽¹⁾ revealed that successful recruitment is seen as a key indicator of a CEO's confidence in their company overall.

The link between a CEO's confidence in their company and recruitment success is something Matt Wall, CEO of financial training company Alpha Development understands well: “A top hire performing well funds the next great hire” he says.

Emmanuel Eribo, CEO of women's footwear brand Butterfly Twists, is another who views hiring good people as one of his most important business challenges.

“Employees are the backbone of a business. Without the right people, a business will struggle to develop and the CEO will personally be unable to delegate. Talented people have an impact on your journey. You need to have a business that runs beyond yourself.”





“You either learn to control [stress], or it controls you”

Entrepreneur.com⁽²⁾

Chapter 3 - Personal challenges

Good Support

The CEOs we interviewed agreed that it is lonely at the top, but that the personal stress they face can be controlled if they are well supported by other senior level people, both inside and outside their organisation.

Stanley Morrison, Founder at St. James's Place Wealth Management has had need of support in his high growth business:

“I would agree, we are in a high growth business and we've grown from a 4 man operation to 68 individuals and our funds under management have grown from \$50m to \$250M. It does come with its challenges. I take a day or so off for thinking time, to reflect on the business rather than be in the business. So yes it gets lonely but you need to be able to connect with individuals who have been on the journey before and can share some of the emotional turbulence one goes through.”

Being realistic about the incremental progression of business is also important, Morrison says:

“If you run a business, big or small and you expect everything to run smoothly you are somewhat delusional. When you run a business, there will be high days and days when you feel emotionally drained. It's the marginal gains that you make each day that are cumulatively rewarding enough to feel impactful.”

Galahad Clark is another who values the support of having good people around him:

“I find having sounding boards and people I like and trust around me being ultimately the most important thing. Having the 'air cover' of a board of genuine people you can talk to and open with when you've got big decisions and difficult decisions to make is massive.”

Isaiah Cox, confesses that he doesn't feel stressed currently, not least because he also has good people around him, though this wasn't always the case:

“It's definitely true in the early years when you're wondering how you're going to pay your team every month but then I found a very good finance guy who really helped get the data in the business working and with good data you're able to run a much more collegiate senior team.”

Delegating to trusted staff is also key to Cox's peace of mind:

“It's really important on a personal and physical stress level to embolden the people around me as much as possible. And frankly the business works a hell of a lot better when I do less anyway. As businesses grow, the people that founded them are rarely the best people to pull the levers and push all the buttons.”

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Workaholism

For Mark Campanale, Founder at environmental concern Carbon Tracker the main issue for him is that there is literally no end of work he could be doing:

"I could honestly work from seven o'clock in the morning to midnight, happily every day, including the weekends, and sometimes I do just because there's so much to get done. I'm not complaining because I love to be getting on with the challenge, to be on top."

For Jerry Walker at Intelligent Fingerprinting, the biggest stress he feels is that of the constant pressure to drive his business forward:

"Just making sure that you're constantly working towards your strategic objectives and that you are creating assets and value within the company. That's what keeps me awake at night."

For David Monty, CEO at Tuxedo Money Solutions, one of the major personal challenges came when important funding issues took him away from the daily activities that drive the business forward:

"I couldn't focus on the important things of growing the business and looking after our customers. I was spending a lot of my time doing other stuff that is important, but doesn't direct results. And so that was quite a stressful time. It's quite a difficult thing to go through."





Switching off

Not surprisingly, bearing in mind the many pressures they face, CEOs often find it difficult to switch-off, as David Monty explains:

"I was a little bit cooler, calmer, more collected than I thought I was going to be. But I also found that I couldn't disconnect from it really at all. So, I was living and breathing and sleeping and dreaming about it constantly."

Lee Durrant, who co-owns recruitment agency Resource on Demand with his wife, concurs with Monty's sentiment, he even feels a level of guilt if he's not working:

"It's very hard to switch off. On days where I work from home, I almost feel guilty for not being in the office. Even on holiday, it's difficult not have to check my phone every two minutes."

Work-life balance

Many CEOs we spoke to are conscious of the need to maintain a healthy work-life balance:

"I spend a lot of time in nature, running around and family is also really important. You don't want to feel you're escaping to work or escaping from work either and that's a constant tightrope obviously"

Stuart Walsh, Managing Director at Franchise Finance suggests that leaders need to be disciplined to maintain work-life boundaries:

"It's very difficult, especially if you're passionate about what you do – there are parts of you that don't want to shut off. You have to surround yourself with people that you can relax with, otherwise the business will consume every hour you've got."

A commitment to care for his own health and wellbeing has been hugely beneficial for Will North:

"At times you have to take a deep breath and a step back when juggling multiple businesses, as it can be quite overwhelming, I exercise regularly and have recently started meditating to let the mind reset."

Vicki Young, owner of digital branding studio Nalla, understands the dangers of not being able to shut off, but has been able to move to more of a work-life balance in recent years:

"It's all too easy to get sucked into overworking. Certainly in the beginning, I found myself working all the hours in the day, and often all weekend too. Now I've realised the importance of taking time away from work, both physically and mentally, and I make sure I don't work at all at the weekend."

Young is keen that her team do not overwork too:

"I make sure the team switches off as well, which is quite unusual in a design agency. The creative industry has a reputation for making people work incredibly long hours. I'm quite insistent on my team that they leave at a reasonable hour however. Overtired and overworked people don't tend to have the best creative ideas!"

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Chapter 4 - People

We wanted to understand what CEO's were doing to ensure their employees were engaged and motivated in their businesses.

Information sharing

Michael Dingle at Reason believes transparency is key to engaging people in his business:

"We've made a big effort to be much more open and transparent about financials. When you're transparent and open about the challenges a business has, you find out people in your organisation care greatly about the business. They also have really interesting ideas and thoughts about how they can support or improve certain parts of that business."

Sharing internal and market information with employees is an important part of Isaiah Cox's engagement approach:

"The most important thing we do as a company is we share once or thrice a week, internal updates about everything going on, or at least most of what's going on in our business sector, how it relates to us, what it means and what the opportunities are, so everybody's consistently and repeatedly on the same page."





Stimulating work

For Bernard Parsons, a key way to create a sense of purpose is to ensure that the work itself is engaging:

"If you are providing interesting work, which we think we do, then you have a real opportunity to retain that talent for a significant period of time"

Isaiah Cox agrees with this philosophy, particularly when it comes to the field of engineering:

"People want to work on this programme, because it's exciting. If you ask an engineer on their deathbed, what they're proud of, they never tell you. I made this much money."

Time and Delegation

Limited time, combined with complexity, mean that the CEO can't (and shouldn't) do everything. Micromanaging is out, mastering the art of delegation is in:

"The key to working with great people is entrusting and empowering them to get on and do the job with autonomy; you can't be involved with everything" says Alice Weightman at Hanson Search Ltd.

A participant with years of both CTO and CEO experience identifies the risk of burn-out from 'over-delegating', particularly to recruits from outside the sector:

"We have learned that you can't delegate the ultimate ownership of responsibility. Every business is unique, and we face a whole set of challenges unique to us that external recruits would not have faced before. One mistake that we've made is hiring very senior, impressive people, but then giving too much responsibility, setting them up to fail effectively."

Clarity & vision

Without an emphasis on inclusive empathetic management, value-driven Gen Y and Gen Z will continue to vote with their feet, leaving 'command and control' cultures for more collaborative workplaces.

But how to achieve a culture of inclusivity? A CEO at a mobile phone security firm believes inclusive leadership only works when *"underpinned by a trust that everyone is striving for the same thing"*.

Lee Durrant adds that being financially inclusive demonstrates a tangible commitment to these values:

"It sounds a bit cheesy, but I think [our people] view it as a family-run business and they feel part of that family. Money talks as well, and we do have a share bonus scheme for the leadership team so that they're all incentivised to help us hit targets."

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“We need to invest a lot more time and energy in succession planning within the business.”

Cultural diversity

With workplace diversity now a CEO-level challenge, the reality is that it can continue to be frustrating and a challenge for many companies. Today's digital organisation, thriving on empowerment, open dialogue and inclusive, connected working styles, sees diversity 'woven through the talent life cycle rather than a tick-box recruitment exercise', according to Deloitte ⁽³⁾.

Mark Campanale of Carbon Tracker finds it important to tackle any related tensions immediately as they arise:

“There are issues internally around things like gender diversity and age diversity and decision making, which creates its own kind of tensions, which we try to resolve where we can.”

Succession planning

With exponential change directing time and resources towards pressing issues of recruitment, retention and getting products out, the longer-term vision risks being overlooked. But what could be more vital to a business' sustained health and longevity in uncertain times than the choice and nurturing of its future leadership?

Lee Durrant recognises the need for a pipeline of fresh, rising talent:

“We're growing a leadership team under us which will help because they have ideas and younger, fresher minds. That's actually really helped us because if it's just the two of us, it can be quite tiring.”

It has been admitted by participants that the daily race to the finish line can detract from the vision:

“We are guilty, as I assume many small businesses are, of ignoring that important aspect of planning because, you know, we can be so focused on the more interesting stuff and the more urgent projects that we are striving to get across the line, or on the new products that we want to build and release. And so we have allowed the whole challenge of succession planning to drift.”



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Chapter 5 - How do you attract top talent?

Use your network

Jerry Walker, CEO at Intelligent Fingerprinting always looks at his network first:

"We find out whether there's anybody in the network that knows somebody suitable. And I'd say that the best talent that we hire comes from there. And then we advertise where appropriate or use certain agencies to identify the talent that we need. Generally speaking, they're prohibitively expensive and don't always give you the talent that you want.."

For Mark Campanale, networking can lead you to stand-out candidates who share your passion:

"We go through our network. Sometimes you have to find people that are as passionate about the issues as you are. We recently recruited a senior person from a bank who was prepared to take a very sizable pay cut."

Tuxedo Money Solutions David Monty is another who values the power of networking his recruits, above any other method:

"Attracting talent is one of the hardest parts. I have not really ever had a particular long term success going through any of the traditional employment routes. I have found that virtually, all of the really good hires I've got that have lasted have pretty much come through networking through people that know someone who knows someone. Also picking someone else in another organization that I have worked with before."

"The number one way we can attract top talent is through the network of people that work here and the people we've worked with. We think about what's the right mindset rather than what's the right skillset as everyone can learn skillsets." Michael Dingle

Foster a progressive company culture

Will North believes that galvanizing people to take personal responsibility is a win-win:

"People come here for the opportunity to work on higher value mandates and with top tier clients, but also for the culture. They work within a more relaxed environment, managing their own time and performance with help from us whenever needed; it's a culture that works well for us and our people."

Leadership teams now more than ever need to be equipped with the confidence and judgment to instill, implement and inspire progressive cultures.

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Conclusion

The CEOs we spoke to are grappling with unprecedented global forces - regulatory issues that threaten to weigh down their businesses, technology advancing inexorably and buyer confidence in the future under threat.

Never has there been a time when innovation and staying agile is more important to the success of a business, bringing with it parallel challenges of finding and motivating staff to drive the business forward.

The personal toll on CEOs in this environment is considerable and whilst they embrace the challenge, they also admit that without the right mentors, advice and support around them, the pressure could be overwhelming.

Many are fans of meditation, exercise and family life - essential to 'switching off' from the business that could take over their lives if they let it.

Some admit that actually, having started the business, they are not necessarily the right person to grow it over the longer term which underlines again the importance of hiring the right people who can, in effect make you redundant in your own business.

Success for the CEO ultimately comes down to maintaining a healthy work-life balance and surrounding themselves with good people who help them drive the business forward.





Final Thoughts

Business owners and senior leaders tend to have a keen eye for future exit routes, so it is perhaps understandable that interviewees should see the quality of their people as critical to their ongoing success. Succession planning is indeed a key component to a healthy business.

What strikes me more is the sheer quantum and diversity of challenges business leaders face today. Our selected CEOs seem to have a good understanding of the challenges they each face and some have clear strategies to deal with them. In fact, they show more confidence, enthusiasm and optimism than I had originally expected given the current turbulent political and economic environment. And, for me, that prompts a question...

Does that optimism have a positive or negative impact on their business?

The answer is probably both. However, experience tells us that business leaders often have a tendency to allow their own drive and passion to blind them sometimes to important opportunities and challenges.

Let's face it. We all have weaknesses, regardless of our many talents and successes. The very best leaders amongst us are brutally honest with themselves, seeing reality for what it is and then taking action to address their weaknesses. This sometimes requires an external, objective stimulus to challenge our perceptions and encourage healthy, open dialogue.

That's where CoachDirectors comes in. We help business people to identify and eradicate their own blind spots. We work with progressive organisations and we challenge them to step-up to realise the full value of their business. Our tools and techniques help our clients to build confidence that they are covering all the bases, individually and collectively, to achieve their aims and aspirations faster.

If you would like a no-obligation discussion to explore how these services might benefit you...

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Acknowledgements



Alice Weightman

Alice is a talent expert and entrepreneur with over 15 years of experience headhunting in the communications and marketing space. She has worked with agencies and brands globally – from New York to Beijing - finding outstanding talent and advising businesses on building and structuring teams. Alice is the founder and CEO of two award-winning talent acquisition companies: Hanson Search, an international search consultancy and The Work Crowd, an online platform that connects businesses with expert communications and marketing talent. Passionate about improving standards in our industry, Alice a member of the REC and 30% Club. She is a respected voice in the communications and marketing industry and is often asked to comment in publications and speak at industry events. In 2016, Alice was awarded Entrepreneur of the Year and The Work Crowd was selected as the Overall Winner at the FSB London Business Awards. The Work Crowd also selected as the winner of the NOAH London 2017 Startup Stage.



Matt Wall

Matt Wall is CEO of Alpha Development Partnership Ltd, a global Learning & Development consultancy focusing on financial services clients. He started his career as a banker, in revenue generating roles at Barclays, SocGen and Nomura, advising European clients from Iceland to Hungary. As his career evolved, his role selling complex solutions started to encompass more client education, and he discovered his true passion for helping others learn. Matt moved into the L&D industry, and then joined Alpha in 2008. He has taught financial markets participants around the world in leadership skills, client skills and financial knowledge, been responsible at Alpha for sales and project management, and contributed to the Finance function, before taking over as CEO in 2014. Having done most jobs in the firm equips Matt for his most important responsibility: ensuring each new hire is smarter than him, and better at their role than he used to be. Matt has a Masters degree from Oxford University, and became a CFA charterholder in 2002.



Jerry Walker

A post-graduate of the University of Liverpool, Dr Jerry Walker has worked in the Life Sciences industry for over 30 years, most of which has been in strategic marketing, business development and business management as a business or start-up CEO. Within that time he spent 20 years in Amersham International plc, Margaret Thatcher's first UK company privatisation, which was eventually sold to GE Healthcare for \$8bn. Since then Jerry has been working to create start-ups from new university IP across the UK.



Emmanuel Eribo

A Graduate of the University of Bath with a BSc in Psychology. Emmanuel worked for several years in Equity Derivative Exotics & Business Development for Citi-group, HSBC & Morgan Stanley before Co-founding Butterfly Twists Ltd and becoming CEO. The Butterfly Twists brand today sells in 63 countries through its partners and has 23 mono-brand stores globally. It has also featured twice on the Sunday Times Fast Track 100 recognising it as one of the UK's fastest growing footwear brands.

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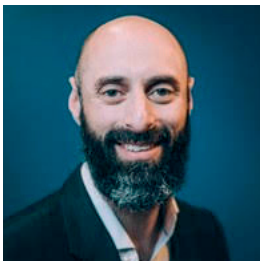
Will North

16 years recruitment experience spanning EMEA, USA and Australasia. Sourced top talent for multi-national companies such as GlaxoSmithKline, JPMorgan, Goldman Sachs, Two Sigma, Lyft and Palantir Technologies. Co-founded Campbell North in 2009, a specialist head hunting firm helping leading technology and data driven firms to grow through the provision of top percentile talent. Driven the expansion into North America as well as the diversification of the business into new verticals. Co-founded www.shecancode.io in 2016, an initiative bridging the digital skills gap by inspiring women to enter and remain in technology. Currently exploring how Blockchain Technology can positively impact the recruitment sector with www.refd.io



Michael Dingle

As Design & Strategy Director at Reason, I lead and manage cross-functional teams that design, build and launch new digital products and transformation programmes for a wide variety of clients. From opportunity identification, customer-lead concept development and hypothesis validation to MVP development, launch and beyond our team responsible for the success of the entire innovation process. I advise and build relationships with senior clients on both product development process, strategy and on the organisational change (e.g. new teams, skills and culture) required to build great products that deliver lasting, sustainable change.



David Monty

David is Co-Founder and CEO of leading FinTech, Tuxedo Money Solutions, having previously founded and led other innovation-led technology organisations. He began his career at Alpha Telecom, managing call centres, client application development and account services. As Head of Operations for Speechnet and Amerada, he oversaw all utility telecom services and IVR technology. In 2002 he founded Re-Inspire, delivering innovative payment solutions and was one of the first entrants in the SMS payment and 'micropayment' markets. David co-founded Tuxedo in 2006 and has overseen its technology development, innovation and international expansion.



Lee Durrant

Lee Durrant is Co-Founder of the UK's first Recruitment agency to specialise in Salesforce.com / Cloud talent. Starting out in Recruitment in 1999 Lee set up Resource On Demand with his wife Theresa in 2009 from the ashes of the 2007/8 financial crisis. Since then "ROD" has grown year on year from a lifestyle business into a recognized leader in it's field, working with some of the worlds largest Tech firms around the world from their Kent and London offices.

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Mark Campanale

Mark is the Founder of the Carbon Tracker Initiative and conceived the 'unburnable carbon' capital markets thesis. He commissioned and was editor of *Unburnable Carbon – Are the World's Financial Markets Carrying a Carbon Bubble?* report in November 2011. More recently, Mark founded and is Chair of the Fish Tracker Initiative – www.fish-tracker.org, which focuses on limits to growth in the fisheries space. Mark is responsible for management strategy, board matters and developing their capital markets framework analysis. Their goal is to align capital markets with natural ecological limits to growth. Prior to forming these groups, Mark had twenty five years experience in sustainable financial markets working for major institutional asset management companies. Mark is a co-founder of some of the first responsible investment funds firstly at Jupiter Asset Management in 1989 with the Ecology Funds, NPI with Global Care, the AMP Capital Sustainable Future Funds, and Henderson Global Investor's Industries of the Future Funds. Mark served on the World Business Council for Sustainable Development working group on capital markets leading up to the 1992 Earth Summit; was a Member of the Steering Committee of UNEP Financial Sector Initiative (1999-2003) and continues to advise a number of financial institutions including Tribe Impact Capital and Consilium Capital. Mark is a Founder Director of the UK Sustainable and Responsible Investment Forum (UKSIF), 1990-2006, is a member of the Advisory Council of ImpactBase.org; a member of the Advisory Board of the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation's 'Conservation and Markets Initiatives'; a member of UNCTAD's Sustainable Stock Exchange's Green Finance Advisory Group; and is the Hon Treasurer of The Rainforest Foundation UK. Mark has a BA in Politics & Economic History and an M.Sc in Agricultural Economics.



Stuart Walsh

Stuart started his career as an accountant and company secretary before moving into the Asset Finance industry. Initially he specialised in the financing of hi-tech medical equipment before joining GE (General Electric) to manage their customer finance business in Europe for their medical systems division. Stuart then moved to GE Capital where he set up and managed several European vendor leasing programs for worldwide suppliers of equipment such as large Printing Presses, Access Platform equipment and Digital TV and Film Editing equipment. He then moved into financing IT for Sun Microsystems, firstly looking after their top global customers and then as Director of the UK financing program. His final role at GE was Director of their equipment leasing business in the UK before leaving to create Franchise Finance, a specialist provider of business planning, financing and training to the franchise sector. He sold the business to Hitachi Capital UK PLC in June 2018 and remains as managing director.



Vicki Young

Vicki Young is the personification of the 'can do' attitude, and founder of Nalla – a multi award-winning branding and design agency. Starting out, in 2010, designing menus for local restaurants from her kitchen table, in a few short years she's grown Nalla into a thriving team working on global brand programmes. She was also recently awarded the title of Entrepreneur of the Year at the Business Excellence Awards (2018). After winning the D&AD Gold Student Award, Vicki went on to earn her stripes working at creative institutions such as SomeOne and The Partners. However, her determination to drag the brand design industry up to speed with clients' ever-evolving needs is what prompted her to go it alone and set up Nalla. This determination is what continues to make Vicki, and Nalla an appealing alternative to clients. Her successes, refreshing candidness and inherent desire to innovate means Vicki's a regular commentator on a variety of topics from business growth, to branding and digital innovations.



Thanks to other participants:

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Alan Morris, Chairman, Retail Assist
Guy Berruyer, Chairman, Linaro
Shaun Ledgerwood, CEO, Niu Solutions
Harish Kumar, Managing Director, Alvarez & Marsal Holdings, LLC
Janvi Patel, Executive Chairwoman & Founder, Halebury
Robert (Rob) Mallaband, Managing Director, Crimson
Adrian Crean, CEO, Indesser
Aleks Tomczyk, Chief Executive, Arum
Andy White, CEO, WeAreSpectre
Bernard Parsons, Chief Executive Officer, Becrypt
Chris Sykes, CEO, Volume
Adrian O'Connor, Founding Partner, Global Accounting
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