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The Improver Podcast | Episode 5 | There is no performance without wellbeing

Intro (00:01)
Welcome to The Improver, the podcast that explores ideas in healthcare improvement and participatory change, hosted by Dr Na'eem Ahmed and Lara Mott.

Na'eem Ahmed (00:14)
Welcome to another edition of The Improver podcast. I'm Na'eem Ahmed, consultant radiologist, and clinical lead of ImproveWell.

Lara Mott (00:24)
And I'm Lara Mott, CEO and co-founder of ImproveWell.

Na'eem Ahmed (00:29)
And we're joined today by two excellent guests for a really thought-provoking discussion today, centred on "There is no performance without wellbeing". And we're joined today by Jon – Jon Pitts is the founder and Chief Technical Officer of IHP Analytics. Jon is a neuropsychologist with extensive, diverse experience in elite human performance that spans five Olympic campaigns, alongside military theatres, international cricket, and most recently F1, where the search and need for any human advantage is constant. Rob McCargow is the director of AI at PwC, evangelist for the responsible adoption of AI and advanced analytics. He is particularly focused on the issues relating to the impact of automation on the workforce, the skills agenda, and the development of technologies to improve wellbeing. He is an advisory board member of the all-party parliamentary group on AI and honorary visiting fellow at the Cass Business School. A regular media commentator and keynote speaker; HR Magazine has cited him as an HR Most Influential Thinker. Rob and Jon, welcome. And thank you for joining us.

Rob McCargow (01:47)
Thanks for having us along.

Jon Pitts (01:50)
Yep. Thank you.

Na'eem Ahmed (01:52)
Jon, we've obviously seen the fascinating discussion between yourself and Rob at CogX. And I just wondered if you could begin by telling us a bit more about IHP Analytics, your journey and what the technology actually does.

Jon Pitts (02:08)
Yeah, great. Thanks, Na'eem. It's been a bit of a crazy journey, really. I've spent 25 years or more in elite professional sport and military context, unbelievably privileged journey of working with some of the most amazing people on this planet. I've been to five Olympic Games now - all sounds very glamorous, isn't as glamorous as it all comes out, but it has given me a phenomenal insight into really diverse different ways in which humans try to perform different tasks. All sorts of really interesting areas, such as things like free diving, as well - a bit off piste - where, the world record for being underwater is 12 and a half minutes, just let that sink in for a minute.

It's phenomenal, really what we can achieve as human beings. And all of that really led me to think a bit about where my journey was going, which is, originally in sports science. So I've worked extensively in football, and cricket and tennis, as an advisor on that side of things, which then took me on to be lead human performance programme, where you become aware that there's lots of different parts to performance programmes. There's the physiological side of it, [the] biomechanical side of it, the mental side of it. Psychology has been enhanced by neuroscience these days now, where we can now scan the brain. So there's this huge area that needs to come together to understand human beings. They're really not as simple as we'd like them to be – talking about them as if we're not them. And so that then led me to work in Formula One, where I suddenly came across this technology, capable of understanding how this car is travelling around a track at ridiculous speeds. The car has 250 sensors on it. And that information, all 250 sensors, is beaming back to the track side, and then back to wherever the HQ of the team is, in about 0.04 of a second. So there's this phenomenal ability to combine all of these data things. So really, where this all came about from was that we started putting those two things together: human science on the one side, and it's important to say that I'm surrounded by far more intelligent people than myself who are basically there to make me look good - PhD level in physiology, psychology, that sort of thing. And the human science element was put together with the technology. We now have a system which is capable of crunching in excess of one and a half million data points a second, albeit to bring together this picture of humans and how they're going about what they're doing in their work, and life balance.

Na'eem Ahmed (04:51)
And so then with this focus on data it makes complete sense with your collaboration with Rob and PwC. Rob, if you could tell us a bit about, your priorities and your role as director, AI and how the two things dovetail together.

Rob McCargow (05:15)
Yeah, Na'eem, listen this whole debate around AI has been really lively over the last four or five years in particular. But there's as much hype as there is negative dystopia surrounding this technology. Let's be clear here, that this isn't deeply immersed in the world of AI yet, but there's a journey towards reaching that in the fullness of time. So what's been happening in the last five years has really come to a head during the pandemic, where you've seen this extraordinary growth in the application of workforce technologies to try to manage productivity and performance in remote workforces. We've seen a litany of stories trying to apply what's not particularly robust science, and amplifying it with technology. And this has been a huge focus for clients around the world of ours to automate as much as they can, and really double down on some of their technology investments. Now, that's great in terms of driving innovation, we've seen amazing things happen with organisations where they've been achieving things within a space of a few months, that were often years down the roadmap. So in terms of an innovation catalyst, it's been phenomenal. The problem comes though, is when organisations have raced too quickly into trying to apply this technology without having looked at it from all the different angles, thoughtfully thought about all the different externalities and unintended consequences. So what we are right now is hopefully, optimistically, looking forward to some return to a future normal. We haven't quite managed to quantify that yet. And we've seen amazing things announced by organisations across the globe around different approaches to hybrid working, for example, trying to empower staff.

At PwC, we've got a whole new approach to what we call empowered flexibility, where we're giving staff full freedom to work where and when they want, we're even trialling a compressed four and a half day week over the summer. So that's exciting to start being a beneficiary of. So really, from our point of view, we have always been focused upon doing AI or advanced technology well, doing it in a way where we brought the right experts around the table first and applying the technology at the end. And that first of all came to us when Jon's team approached us three years ago. Let's focus on the human factors bit first. I'm very fortunate to have actually a physician in my team. So Nick's been brilliant there to bring that insight in. We've got a full time data ethicist in the team, we've got regulatory experts and people that can navigate the legalities of these sorts of things. We've got brilliant comms people that can help to articulate to staff how data is collected, and how it's used, and how decisions are made. To get all these things right first, and then the technology should be applied thereafter, because I think, where you see it going wrong, has been where people have waded in too quick, try to automate or apply advanced technology when the foundations aren't in place.

Na'eem Ahmed (08:15)
I know Lara has got some questions about the work that you've been doing together. But what's the feedback you've had before we get into that, from the end user, the person that this collaboration is really intended to benefit? Because you've got the big data bit, but do you really see it translating in those meaningful changes for the end user?

Jon Pitts (08:35)
If I can go first, Rob, I think, the system is designed fundamentally to benefit the individual. Clearly, as Rob has talked about, there's the ethical considerations. And really, this was a concept which was designed to bring organisations and their people together. We face these challenges. Even before we started talking about the pandemic, we were looking at this system as a way of helping us to cope with the data and technology revolution that we're now experiencing. We all we've all seen Moore's Law, and this idea that technology is exponentially increasing at a rate of knots. And the fact is humans struggle to cope with that development pathway. The idea here is helping, as with the car and the driver in F1, is to try and help that technology and human interface come together. So, as I say, it's individually focused, predominantly because at the end of the day, if the individuals aren't getting anything out of it, they're not going to use it or really tap into the power of it, which is to assist with behavioural change. So it starts on a platform of self-awareness. We all see the world a different way. And quite understandably, our perceptions don't always marry with other people's perceptions. But the idea then in terms of the perceptions about ourself is, as we age, we start to become more aware of how we do things and our preferences and our choices. But the system is designed to draw our attention towards exactly what is happening to our wellbeing as we try and navigate our way through the world as it is now. So, it provides a power and an input to that individual, which then has a knock-on effect for the organisation.

Na'eem Ahmed (10:20)
That's really powerful that you say that, Jon, because I think a lot of people, as Rob articulated at the beginning – big data, people snooping on me, do I own my data, etc. But this collaboration is very much about how it can benefit the person at the end of it. Rob, you were going to come in?

Rob McCargow (10:44)
Just to reiterate what Jon was saying, I think it was really important for us to focus this on being employee-centric, and that, of course, there has to be some value exchange. So, one of the things that we'll speak about in due course is the project itself, so how does the organisation benefit overall? I think there's a huge amount of appetite for individuals to be more empowered by their own data, but with context, and I keep thinking about staring at my Fitbit app most nights, wondering why but yet another woeful night's sleep? Was it the dog barking? Was it the three kids keep me up all night? And I think that there's real promise now in in aligning the sorts of technologies with the needs of the workforce. And if not just that, I think, a moral duty and an imperative, when you start thinking about what all businesses are facing now, what's top of mind for CEOs globally now? And we know this from our various CEO surveys launched at Davos every year. What's top? ESG. Absolutely top of the agenda at the moment, how do we try to embed the way that we look after our staff right at the heart of that debate, I think will come front and centre, aligning this with your corporate purpose as a responsible employer. The people we interview now – hear us talking about these lofty ideals of our corporate purpose – they're holding is to account now, the very best people want to know that they're working with businesses that are purpose-led. And they can measure that and talk about it in tangible ways. The list goes on and on. And this is a very different opportunity and challenge for business. But it's only one that can be delivered through something that's intelligent and data-led. And to this point in time, that quality of technology hasn't yet been developed at scale in these sort of settings.

Lara Mott (12:36)
I think all four of us share a common passion for wellbeing at work, wellness in the workplace, all of the phrases that you are hearing about focusing on improving staff experience, and that's the business that we're in, in healthcare and helping the NHS in particular. It might be a good time, Rob, to now cover a little bit about your study and what you've learned, because I do have a few questions, and I appreciate both Na'eem and I have watched your talk on CogX, but some of our listeners may not have. So perhaps you could give us a short overview of the study and your findings. And I definitely have some questions that I'd love us to explore a bit further on the back of that.

Rob McCargow (13:10)
Yeah, absolutely. So let me just start at the beginning, and, Jon, please cut into keep me honest on some of the science and the process on this. We started this going back now three years ago. And it was important for us to understand how to do this well. So as I said before, the first thing you do is get the team right. And we pulled together a really quality multi and interdisciplinary team of practitioners across ethics and data governance and risk and regulatory and human sciences skills. And then of course, leveraging Jon's excellent world-class team. So, what we did is we ran a smaller trial in 2019, with about 50 participants, just to tease out how our technology works and how to do it well. Now, fast forward to the start of the pandemic, we went to the board with a request to see if we could extend this trial and we got the green light. So this saw us end up advertising this to participants within PwC in the UK, to be volunteers in this in this huge programme. And we were absolutely deluged with interest. We sold out within three hours, we had 2000 people apply to participate in this within three hours. So what that allowed us to do was pick a very epidemiologically sound sample that is representative of our entire workforce with several members of our board and then stratified by grade and sex and office location, etc.

So for several months during 2020 we were doing a number of things – they were wearing a Garmin, so we were collecting biometric data including heart rate variability, stress, sleep, rest, recovery, and that activity data. We'd also baseline them psychometrically and also looked at baselining some of their environmental conditions such as: do they have a dedicated place to work in their home, do they have home schooling responsibilities, but they'd also been undertaking a gamified cognitive function test looking at traits such as ability to switch tasks and concentration, pattern memory, etc. Crucially, what we also asked their permission for was a series of contextual data, so timesheet information, the hours they worked, how loaded their diaries were, the characteristics of their working day. So, this was an enormous exercise to get it right and get it done well. Jon, did you want to lean in in terms of the science behind this and why this is differentiated to what might sound similar in the market?

Jon Pitts (15:52)
Yeah. Okay. Thanks Rob, I think you've covered the basics of it. But the point of the system is that it integrates all of these things together. So we built up a very rich tapestry, if you like, of the individual, and then on a larger scale of the organisation as a whole. But fundamentally, there are there are probably, there are three key areas to it, that we're trying to push the boundaries of science, when it comes to looking at people. The first element is that, originally we're trying to get away from using subjective data as much as possible, because again, as I've said, everyone sees the world a different way. And we're all subjected to perceptions and bias. So, we brought in this objective data, and I'll speak a bit more about that in a minute. But, we wanted to get this objective data, so that we could really start to deal with the facts. In sport, we're probably a little bit ahead of the curve, in many respects, in terms of the fact that people are wired up, to within an inch of their lives, every moment of their working career or their career. So, we're very much measuring on that daily basis. But the idea here is, then that we've actually found an immense power to be able to relate the objective data to the subjective data, because it really is helping people to understand and just bring their self-awareness closer to reality, which, if you imagine conversations around promotions, or annual reviews, or things like that, you can actually start to build quite a sense of fairness around what's going on. We've moved from this industrial age of top-down hierarchy to a time when I think everyone's looking much more about this value exchange that Rob talks about. So that's very powerful. The second part of it is that we're trying to get away from benchmarking people – basically forming a one-dimensional profile of someone and saying, this is you. We know, psychometrics in isolation, they're fundamentally flawed – in that people change. We know through neuroplasticity, that people change. Telling people that you're a red or a blue or a dolphin, or a four-letter code, it has a value, absolutely. But people change. And more importantly, as we head into these difficult times, where we are going to fluctuate more, we're going to change more in relation to the stimulus that is around us, it's important that people have that room to change. So, the third part of it is that obviously, as Rob's talked about, is that we're collecting that data across a time series. So, it's not just this benchmark snapshot in time, like an annual medical, for instance, that just tells you how well you are on that one day, it doesn't tell you what's happened in the last 12 months. So that we can get this idea of the natural rhythms and cycles that people go through, we are, but as humans, there is a certain chronology to how we perform, and how we live. And so, it's important that we can see that those characteristics across monthly, yearly cycles, just to see how the factors of the work/life balance influence people. And then the final part of it is that underneath all of this is how we represent the data. Clearly, you can collect a load of data, but what's important is how you filter that data to provide meaningful insights and insights that are going to create behavioural change. That's crucial – how do we look at this data in a way in which we can help people to understand themselves better, and then increasingly develop the better habits that are going to allow them to get more from their work/life balance? So yeah, that's the thinking behind it.

Lara Mott (19:30)
We're in the business of helping organisations create the right environment to improve staff experience and continuous improvement. Ultimately, if you look after your workforce, they're going to give the best possible patient care. And our customer is the NHS, which is the world's fifth largest employer. So, when I was watching your talk, and I was thinking about this, Jon in particular, you've come from working with arguably, smaller teams in these elite sports and then you're applying your technology to a giant like PwC. But taking that sample population of a thousand for this study, which has given you all those insights on what works and how to do it right. Do you think that size of workforce is going to matter here? Do you think this is something that organisations would make available to the whole workforce or just enough of a sample size for people to look after a certain section of the workforce? Or is the vision really everybody should be doing this? Not everybody is going to want to embrace the technology, and some people may be absolutely fine without it, others may be more interested in it. And you've got to then appeal to everybody. So, my question is, does size matter in terms of how you would apply this technology?

Rob McCargow (20:44)
Now, what I will ask Jon to say in a moment is some of the statistical relevance of populations, etc. I would say that it's important that this technology is not elitist. We think it's elite technology. But it can't be elitist. It's got to be made available for the broader cross section of your workforce. So I think that's the first thing we'd say. Yeah, I think there's appetite across the board. I don't think this is exclusively in knowledge workers or in the white-collar workforce. I think there's interest in this, across the board. We call this tool My Work/Life Analytics. And we think that that ability to empower people with that understanding of their whole life is something that hasn't been within scope before. And our own limited experience of this is that there is a latent appetite for this level of insight that people have ever seen before. Jon, I don't know if you wanted to speak to some of the statistical relevance of population sizes around this.

Jon Pitts (21:45)
Yeah. And just quickly to begin with, in my mind, it has been designed for an entire workforce, I think it's a good segue to bring in the facts behind the ethical nature of it, which is, number one, everybody who does this is a volunteer, there is no "you will do this", it's a volunteer status, and you can remove yourself from at any time and your data is automatically deleted from the system. You can imagine from our side, when you work with a company like PwC, we have been to every single level of detail when it comes to the legal or the data privacy aspects of what we do, quite rightly. Actually, one of the reasons we approached PwC in the first place was because we knew that if we came out of this with PwC, we could probably do it with anybody. That's been a very valuable experience. In terms of the statistical size, yeah, absolutely it's important that it's epidemiologically robust. I spend my life in my roles balancing between – and this is going to probably come across wrong - but I am balancing between robust science on one side, and progress on the other side. And that comes across wrong in terms of the academic world, and I really don't mean it. What it means is that, the average tenure, for instance, of a football manager is about 11 months. So, when you come in, and the manager says to you, listen, I need to make some traction here, I got to get some progress. The Formula One analogy – I've got to get some rubber on the road. You don't have time to work your way through a robust study. What you've got to do is hit the ground running, collect some data, and think on your feet and iterate and iterate. We're consistently trying to balance those two things to make sure that, absolutely, this has to be scientifically accurate and robust. And we've gone to great lengths with that. So, we talk about a sample size, if we're working on a project that is significant enough to make the data itself significant. But it is absolutely designed to be for organisation-wide. And the idea is that you can see the organisation as a living organism, the real-time status.

Na'eem Ahmed (23:54)
When you talk about a real-time intervention, during the study, did you find that, I don't know, maybe a line manager, or someone who was looking at the data was able to put in interventions when they saw that the readings were, for example, demonstrating levels of stress, etc? That's the first part. And the second is what's our moral and ethical obligations then, thereafter? If you are seeing – Rob, this would be for you – that if you saw, for example, a department within your organisation or certain few individuals within your organisation's consistently, their metrics are showing that they're in a bad place. What would you need to do to take some action on it?

Rob McCargow (24:35)
Yeah, absolutely. It's worth saying that for the 1000-person trial, we hadn't quite finished the engineering to do the real-time analysis. And that's now in scope for this latest iteration. So, we didn't quite have that level of insight in real-time. But if I look forward now to this new world of work, this is one massive global experiment. We've had the news about the unlocking and the removal of restrictions, we're going to see a lot of organisations trying a multitude of different workforce strategies in office: remote, asynchronous work patterns, contingent workers, gig economy comes into the fore. And we don't have good baseline data about how this works. And I think I just need to reiterate that point, the vast majority of this, from the business leaders I meet is well-intended, it thinks it empowers staff, it drives productivity up. It is what people appear to want. And our big studies suggest that is the case. We did a study of 32,500 workers globally a couple of months ago. And if I recall, the stats, I think 72% specifically wanted a mix of in office and at home, there's some quite big minority actually suggested they never wanted to enter the office ever again in the future. So how companies accommodate this now, is going to be very interesting. And at the moment, we have a suite of tools that only provide you with part of the picture. And that's, as Jon has said, a number of subjective devices like employee pulse survey data, which huge stock is placed into, and the usual metrics around staff attrition and turnover, which effectively is too late in the day to do much about it to affect change. So. I think our vision, Jon's and mine is that this is really powerful now to provide that real-time assurance, so that if this well intended wellbeing strategy is not leading to the positive outcomes you want, you can do something about it with hard evidence and metrics and objective data, rather than gut feel. And a lot of the gut feel is really well thought through and well-intended. But in our case, it surfaced a year ago with a great gesture to offer the Headspace app to all of our 24,000 people in the UK, and it went down really well, it was great. But it wasn't right for everybody. And when you start looking at this through a commercial lens, there's a real opportunity now, and companies are going to be looking at these interventions that they're investing in and wanting to understand what gives them the right bang for the buck, as well as delivering on some of these moral expectations, Na'eem that you speak to. Jon I'd probably refer to you around, if we're empowered with data, what we should and shouldn't do about it, because you're the expert in the field in this.

Jon Pitts (27:29)
Thanks. I just had a couple of quick points, in that what was interesting was that we were able to look at the communications of the senior leadership of PwC throughout the pandemic. And the timing of those in terms of – for instance, there were there was one announcement that said that nobody would lose their jobs. When we talk about managing crises, I think what we saw was some very clear communication, very timely communication – and I'm not just saying this – it was quite impressive in the way that it was done. And you could see reflecting on the data, you can see a benefit to that communication strategy.

Absolutely. That's a very valuable part of it. The idea, again, is to try and provide a front foot position for a business. Let's talk about mental health as an example. Clearly, there's a clinical line at some point where, unfortunately, some people reach a point where it requires a clinical intervention. The system is designed to be able to prevent as many people getting to that point as possible. We want to be able to demonstrate the ability that the person can be given the power, the accountability to take control of themselves. It's great to have all these support systems in place, and organisations will continue to deliver those. And that's absolutely right. But equally, that it's a two-way street. So we've talked a lot about it being individual-centric, but as Rob said, several times, it's a value exchange, so, there is this two-way trust, if you like, we're giving you this system to try and help you and then here are the tools for you to take accountability for yourselves. And really, and truthfully, I think, we are going to see more of a requirement for that. It's the same in sport, you stand on the side of the pitch, and once those players cross that white line, there's nothing you can do about it. They're gone that they got to make their own decisions. As a coach, you can stand, and you can yell, and you can do what you like to try and get that message through. But really, you know you're onto a winning thing when those people are making decisions for themselves. We are continually moving in that direction, as Rob has said, where these sorts of things will become important. Now, some organisations, I'm quite sure, like PwC, will take the front foot and say, okay, we want to tackle this. There's probably like with anything going to be an initial phase that's a bit bumpy and we need to get it through. But ultimately, I see so much talk about the future of work, and I can see so many people sitting around and discussing things from different angles. What this system is designed to do is to provide the information to take those steps forward with as much confidence as possible. Some organisations will take steps forward, and the sooner people make a start, the sooner we're going to get to a place where we can manage the situation effectively. Those organisations that don't do that, they're going to get left behind, and ultimately will find themselves with more trouble, and probably more cost when it comes to the support mechanisms that they rely on.

Na'eem Ahmed (30:43)
I like the front foot approach that you've described. And as you said, both yourself and Rob, this is uncharted territory and you're definitely the pioneers in this space.

Lara Mott (30:58)
You've made this very employee-centric. How much is the balance on empowering the employee to look at their own sleep or bits and pieces and be able to make those changes themselves in the technology? And how much is focused on the individual group and then organisational view? Because you are B2B2C, in terms of your model, are you – in that you're selling the software to the organisation, but actually, you really need to look after that end consumer, arguably more so than perhaps the business that's purchased the software. So is there a balance there in terms of your development focus? Do you prioritise one over the other?

Rob McCargow (31:36)
Yeah, that's a great question, Lara. Case in point, the participants got their dashboard first, and the organisation one has only just been done more recently. So that was always our focus to make sure that was up front and centre. It is still a big investment, there was appetite – these people still had to sink their watches and play some games and make sure that they were effectively contributing to the journey. So that is a nice way of putting it as B2B2C. Nevertheless, the employer still has to pay for this. So, there's got to be something in it for them. And in our case, and I should probably just expand a bit upon this, it was phenomenally powerful. As Jon alluded to, there's been some interesting findings around the impact of internal comms on the wellbeing and stress of the workforce.

There was very, very clear evidence of things like the personas of different staff and the characteristics of how it's affected them in this working from home environment, whether or not you had home schooling and, and a dedicated place to work. It might sound obvious, but we could absolutely measure that as an impact on people's sleep. We could absolutely see the impact of both external stimuli, and what they were hearing in the press, as well as our internal processes on the stress of the overall workforce. But I think one of the most interesting areas, Jon, was the finding we discovered that looked at actual biometric stress, and then in looking at the comparable perceived self-reported stress. Jon, I think it's probably one worth teasing out in a bit more detail if you wanted to expand on it.

Jon Pitts (33:18)
Yeah, thanks, Rob. It's fascinating, I spoke earlier about the difference between subjective and objective data. Stress has become this huge thing that we're all talking about now. If we just go back a stage, technology – we are effectively addicted to our phones now. We see when you get a like on Facebook, you get a shot of dopamine. All this sort of stuff, which we can see through neuroscience now tells us that our brains are having to adapt significantly in their functionality to cope with all the bombardment of different information we get. We talk about mental health a lot, but stress gets banded in as well. What the data points to, frankly, is that there's a massive need for stress education. Number one, stress has become a dirty word, but we're designed to get stressed. We're not designed to be these flatline individuals that never go outside of our comfort zones. Stress can be good. It can prepare you to deliver a pitch to a client or to speak to your boss or to have your performance review or whatever it might be. It can be a good thing. And essentially, we need this education around this. But, specifically to what Rob's talking about, yes, we saw a marked difference between how people evaluated their stress and their actual physiological response. In pretty much 100% of the cases, we're seeing an overreaction to a stressful situation. So, if you just stop and think about that for a moment, what's happening is the emotional brain, our very primal element of our brain is producing, producing a response to the situation on stimulus, which is significant in preparing us for our archaic systems of fight and flight. But then what the data is able to do, because the system is on your wrist or it's on your phone, it's able then to draw your mind towards what's actually happening. And even that simple function will see a decline in the anxiety that the individual is experiencing. So you potentially have this, if you couple that together with working through with people, some individual mechanisms to help them to cope with stressful situations – that could be breathing exercises, meditation, even just a simple thought process or mindset processes that we use with elite athletes all the time, we can help people to harness their stress far more effectively. And that's my point about this front foot approach. Stress in an isolation is perfectly normal. Where we get into trouble is when that stress, or for that matter, sleep or anything along those lines becomes cumulative. So, we get into a cumulative place where it spirals out of control. And then the thermostatic regulations in our body, for instance, they get bent out of shape, and then they can't cope. And that's when we get to a clinical level. What it points towards frankly is, where this system by bringing in the objective side of the data can really help individuals to understand their responses, and just to correct that perception. And then, if you look at it from an organisational perspective, what we're able to do is to evaluate things like performance cycles, to look at what works best. Again, I'll give you an example. I don't know whether, if I mentioned the name, Kevin De Bruyne. He's a famous footballer at Manchester City. Recently he negotiated his contract in his, effectively his performance appraisal.

And he hired a data analyst to put together some statistics to show just how important he was to the football team, how many times the team won with him, how many times it won without him, a whole host of data, and took that into his contractual conversations, and said, "listen, this is what you want to pay me". But this is what my value to this team is. And, so we think about this top down approach of how the data can be used to look at you, but there's no reason why then the data that we're creating for an individual can't be used in a positive way for them to walk into these conversations and have a two-way conversation rather than this top-down hierarchical thing. So there's all sorts of aspects that we can use with all of this data to turn just to think outside the box and change the frame of it.

Na'eem Ahmed (37:58)
And Rob, from that – from the whole experiment and the test and the study that you did, what are the key things – you've mentioned some of those – but that you've immediately implemented and thought, these are things that we'd like to take forward now, before we even go any further, these are like no brainers that we should we should implement?

Rob McCargow (38:21)
Well, to lead on from what Jon said, that it's clear that businesses have wrestled with the optimal approach to performance management forever. Some people have scrapped it entirely. Some have some one big event each year. I think it's clear to see that there's a need to spread the approach over multiple phases, rather than just having one or two big events in the year, so that's seen us take some immediate action to adapt the performance cycle. So that will continue to adapt as we start to enrich this this data as we go ahead. The biggest thing really is how do we now have the ability to really provide and – to pick up on one thing you said, Na'eem – targeted interventions, we're not talking about targeting individuals here because we don't have access to look at individual data. But to ensure that we don't have this 'one size fits all' approach to ticking the wellbeing box. If there's particular parts of the workforce that need this type of solution more than this, we're able to offer that. So moving ahead, this is really the start of our big experiment ourselves. As of this week, we have this new approach to empowered flexibility, with staff having significant autonomy on how they run their lives, with compressed hours and all sorts of different things we're innovating. The clock starts ticking now. How do we move away from lagging indicators and start using technologies like this to provide us with that level of assurance we've never seen before. And maybe we'll report back in a year's time and tell you how that's gone.

Na'eem Ahmed (39:58)
Consider yourselves invited for sure! And then we are obviously in healthcare. What are the things, would you say, that you could see the read across to healthcare. I mean, I can see immediately given the situation that we've just come through in terms of still tackling the pandemic, but not only that, but the incredible amount of mental stress and burnout, etc on my colleagues, what are the things that you would say, that we could read across into healthcare?

Jon Pitts (40:37)
Yeah, so if I jump onto that one. With some of our other clients, and working across some healthcare areas, with the pandemic specifically, we saw in some of the data that after the first wave, there was a significant inability to actually recover before the second wave. And some of our clients were talking about wanting to make sure that after the second wave, there was a far greater ability to recover.

Across all different industries, quite understandably, we've seen significant declines in wellbeing and – it's that ability to recover, which in the sporting world is something which is a given, but we're just not seeing that recharge of batteries to get people back to where they need to be. And I think that whether it's shift patterns, or whether it's the fact that the lines are blurring now between work and life and people are, again, your phones are coming through at eight o'clock, nine o'clock in the evening, that I think the key area is that we're able to look at ways in which we can assist people to recover better, we use a metric or body battery, which is quite effective at showing the impact of stress and things like activity on that ability to recover. Recovery is not just sitting down and having a break, it's taking exercise, which actually helps your body to become more resilient. We're seeing significant impact on sleep patterns as well. It is often just about doing the basics well. Our bodies like a rhythm - they like to do things that they expect, so regular sleep times, making sure that your environment in which you're sleeping is right, and making sure that you have a pre-sleep routine, all those sorts of things are things that, we've started to implement in the in the healthcare area, just try to and get back to doing some basics well.

Rob McCargow (42:55)
There's significant issues, isn't there? We all know the challenges facing this heroic workforce that's gone through the mill in the last year and a half or so. There is and it goes back to the earlier question about is this technology for all? And it is it and it can be. The power of this is really shifting the balance towards workforce empowerment. And I think that's where the direction of travel is going more broadly. So yeah, we'd love to see the opportunity to see how this lands in the NHS in the months and years to come. So it's exciting times. In summary, I think where I'm at with this whole thing is that there's lots and lots of talk, as Jon was saying about the future of work. And that's here now, isn't it? There's people doing really big, bold, exciting things in in the way we operate, and the contract we have with our people and the way we're trying to focus on different outputs, rather than simply squeezing every last drop of productivity out of a depleted workforce. So, I'm quite optimistic in the main, that actually, some of these big trends are shifting in a positive direction. But at the heart of this, the only way we will know if it works is if it's aligned with really high quality, proven scientifically, valid data and technology that's been tried and tested. And this is where we're now at. Excited to see.

Lara Mott (44:15)
What are you most excited about, Jon?

Jon Pitts (44:19)
I'm excited about a lot of things. I hope it comes across. I designed this, because I can see a real value to it. I genuinely – it sounds so cringe worthy, in a way – but I really want to make a difference with this. I was sitting there in a sporting world and I'm thinking, "clearly we need to adapt it for this environment". We're certainly not pretending that we've got everything finished. This is a journey we're on, and like I said earlier, we've got to start somewhere. And to Na'eem's point about what happens if you uncover things people don't know about? We either move towards that better time, or we don't. What does everybody want? There's going to be bumps in the road, like I said, but we've got to start this journey now. So, we're looking for organisations like PwC, who recognise that this is something that we need to start now and in five years' time, we'll be so much further on. Part of our system has what we call compound metrics. Take wellbeing as an example, if you step onto the street today and ask people what wellbeing is, you're going to get 10 different answers. And in the scientific papers, there's lots of models, and you can get questionnaires to determine those sorts of things.

But, for the first time, we've produced a wellbeing metric, a compound metric, which can give you a value for wellbeing for an individual, and then obviously for an organisation overall, and we've got lots of other compound metrics: presenteeism, resilience, all the time we're designing more and more. We can measure burnout, fatigue, in perhaps more physical applications, as well, like pilots, for instance, we're doing quite a lot of work in those sectors. So, really, it's a case of – the system was designed to have these multiple lenses that you can look at the data with. And so, when you say, what am I excited about, I'm excited to see where this goes, because genuinely is designed to embed within an organisation to really evolve the HR function, if you like. Not to eradicate it, but to work with it. We have great fun going to different organisations and working out with them what we can do to orientate the data in a certain way to help them. We can bespoke apps or dashboards or whatever it might be to really get to where their pain points are, or help them on this journey. And so what I'm excited for, really, is to see where we are in five years' time, because if we can get through this initial phase of, "okay, well, this is a bit different, it's a bit new", the sooner we start collecting data in the right way, obviously – the sooner we start collecting data, the sooner we can get to some really exciting places.

Rob mentioned ESG [Environmental, Social and Governance], and diversity and inclusion. I believe that cognitive evaluations, for example, and the ability to use more objective data – it's by working in those sorts of areas that we can really start to eradicate things like CVs and this bias that we have within organisations. The only way you're going to remove bias is with black and white data, but actually getting away from subjective examples of how we go about things and really bringing through data to help to prove those things on. The ESG agenda, I'm a bit of an outsider from sport, but I look at it and I think there's no way E and G really get to where you want them to go until the S bit is right. Because until you stop people throwing plastics in the oceans or dropping litter on the side of the motorway, whatever it might be, until people are willing to look at themselves and actually create the right habits for how they go about doing things, that's not going to change. I'm on my soapbox now…(laughter)…but you see people who are innately quite selfish in the way they go about their lives. Until we realise we're on this planet together, and we have to function together and work together and find better ways of doing things – until we do that, we're not going to get the E and the G bit right. So, I believe it starts with the S, basically.

Na'eem Ahmed (48:45)
Jon and Rob, what comes across from both of you really strongly is that values base, which is saying, we just want to make things better for people. And I think that really resonates with us, and I'm sure it's going to resonate with everyone listening in with that. So, I would like to thank you both, for joining us, and for sharing the wonderful work that you're doing, which will ultimately make it a better place to work for everyone. So thank you for that.

Lara Mott (49:21)
We have a section in the podcast called Small but Mighty, where normally we showcase an idea that is been shared by one of our partner organisations using the ImproveWell solution that might be what on the outside looks like a relatively small change, that can actually make a big impact. And rather than giving one of those here, we'd like to turn it over to you guys to see if there's a small but mighty idea or learning from your work over the last 12 months that perhaps our listeners could take away, and potentially apply in their own work setting.

Jon Pitts (49:59)
Well, I'll go first, Rob. For me, it's about – it really is understanding about doing the basics well. I think it's so vital that we recognise just how our lives are being changed with the times that we're in. So, we've talked about self-awareness and everything else, but I would really encourage people to just consider – we spend a third of our lives asleep, but not many people are doing it well anymore. So, we need to have a good look at the basics of how well you're sleeping, because if you came to me and said, "What is the what is the biggest bang for my buck I can get in terms of performance enhancement?" – I would tell you, it's your sleep. And second to that is understanding how to recover, how to rest effectively. And when I say that, and we talk about things like body battery, it's the type of exercise for instance, that actually helps to boost your battery if you like. Simply going for a walk, getting some fresh air, getting some light, all those things, basics, and don't get me wrong. I know they're difficult to do in our in our modern lives. But, for instance, people who take these walking meetings where they go outside the office and walk around a block, brilliant, it's those sorts of things, considering your activity. We talk about this work/life balance, and I think it's just important that people – we think a lot about the work side of that equation, but what people aren't doing enough is thinking about the life side of that equation, and just whatever time you have available to you, maximising it. And if you can get those little bits I've talked about in terms of sleep, rest, recovery, activity, if you can get those little things aligned – because for each and every individual, they all play a slightly different role. But if you can get those bits aligned, you'll be amazed at how your quality of life improves.

Lara Mott (51:51)
Thank you! There's lots there. (laughs) Excellent.

Rob McCargow (51:55)
Lots of bits added up to more than mighty I think, wasn't it, Lara? I think really, my dawning realisation on this last year, and bear in mind, I was a participant, so I got my own data and picking up what Jon was saying there – I've always known about bad sleep and haven't really understand the impact it was having on my life. And I can see with my own dashboard, the effect is having on my ability to look at pattern memory, which as an AI practitioner, that's maybe slightly of a disadvantage for me. So for me, it's about connectedness and it's realising that we don't have this multitude of individual silos and systems in our lives. And we switch one up and we switch one down and we compartmentalise this and that. It is so holistic, isn't it? Every single thing we do, we experience, we see in the workforce and our lives working in an offline as well. It all adds up to the sum of the parts. And the exciting thing now is just having the proof that that is the case. And realising that we are really complicated creatures. And therefore, the inference I've made is that whilst we have seen the power of technology with people, the way we've been doing it for so long now, has been trying to codify and turn us into these units of labour. And we're too hard and too weird and too complicated to do that systematically. So for the first time, I think is actually how do we actually adapt the technology to us, rather than trying to adapt us to the technology.

Lara Mott (53:32)
Brilliant, thank you both so much. We are going to be watching your journey with a huge amount of interest. Na'eem, is there anything else you wanted to add?

Na'eem Ahmed (53:41)
I just want to thank you all. I think everyone will find this conversation just full of a wealth of information. And it's really cutting edge and exciting stuff that you're both doing. So I wish you well for the next part of the experiment as well and to thank you for your time. Thank you, Rob and Jon.

Rob McCargow (53:59)
Thanks, Lara. Thanks, Na'eem. Really great to be on the podcast today.

Jon Pitts (54:03)
Yeah, thanks, guys, enjoyed it.

Ending (54:07)
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