

The Future of HR Summit 2023 zooms in on practical insights for workplace transformation

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Topco Media recently hosted over 200 professionals and industry stakeholders at the Future of HR Summit & Awards 2023 in Sandton, Johannesburg. “Our role is to always seek to evolve as a collective. The Future of HR has been our focus since 2015, helping progressive companies and forward-thinking human resource specialists,” says Ralf Fletcher, CEO of Topco Media. “Good business, to us, encompasses human capital, diversity, equality, inclusion, sustainability, performance, innovation, and tech. Our programmes cover these topics to create a new, impactful future,” he added.



The summit, emceed by media personality and eNCA news anchor, Abigail Visagie, brought thought leaders, visionaries, and professionals together where they explored the evolving landscape of human resources by delving into the future of work, leadership on all levels, diversity and inclusion, the impact of mental health, remote and hybrid working models, the post-pandemic impact on the workforce, what diversity in c-suite leadership means for African youth, how to retain the next generation of employees, and how artificial intelligence (AI) is reshaping the HR landscape.

Here are eight key insights from various thought leaders and guest keynote speakers during the Future of HR Summit:

- **“This is not your normal HR conference. We're in a different space. We can't just respond to what the business asks for; we need to drive change.” – Graeme Codrington, CEO of TomorrowToday Global.** Codrington challenged traditional work practices and noted the importance of redefining work practices, stating: “It's not about having a long weekend every week; it's about understanding peak performance.” He also discussed the need to shift to output-driven environments, saying: “No more measuring inputs, no more clocking in and out. Measure outputs. Just do your job. That changes the game.” On the topic of fractional talent, Codrington highlighted: “Why buy somebody's time full time if all you need is three days a week? Fractional talent is the grown-up version of the gig economy, allowing flexibility for senior talented individuals.”
- **“Leaders must master empathy, connecting with others on a deep emotional level,” says Avanthi Maharaj, head of market HR, sub-Saharan Africa at Google.** Maharaj shared insights on the next generation of people leadership and stressed the enduring importance of the human element in leadership. She emphasised characteristics such as agility, continuous learning, and fostering a culture of collaboration and teamwork for future

leaders.

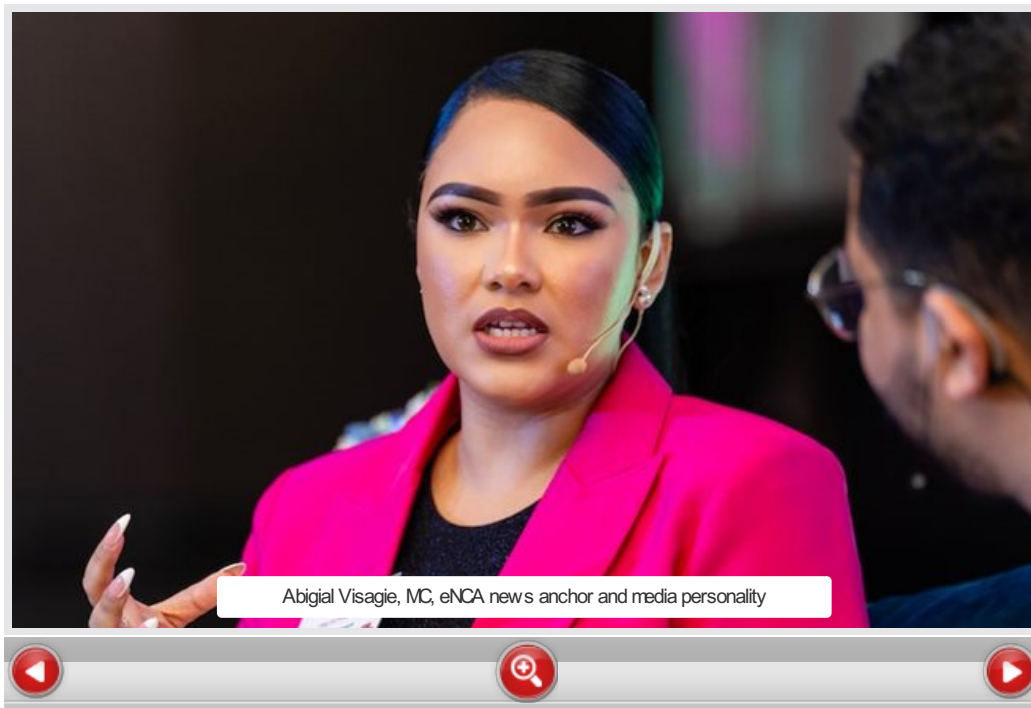
- **"Neurodiversity is not a checkbox; it's a spectrum of unique minds contributing to innovation. Embrace diversity of thought, and your organisation will thrive," says Nene Molefi, CEO of Mandate Molefi.** Molefi delivered a compelling talk on the importance of embracing a neuro-inclusive culture for fostering innovation through diverse minds. She states: "In the journey towards true diversity, equity, and inclusion, neurodiversity must not be sidelined. It's not just a social responsibility; it's a strategic imperative for unlocking untapped potential. From deficit-based to strengths-based: Neurodivergent individuals bring invaluable expertise, from concentration and creativity to hyperfocus and innovation. It's time to redefine 'normal' in our workplaces."
- **"Non-promotable tasks contribute to the overall success of the company but often lack recognition. They are not in job descriptions, KPIs, or factors for career development," says Sundrie Naidoo, head of people at Discovery Vitality.** Naidoo provided valuable insights into the mental health toll of non-promotable tasks on HR leaders and discussed challenges, motivation and the impact of Covid-19 on mental health, shifting responsibilities, and the importance of setting boundaries.
- **"If you don't believe in diversity, it just won't happen. You need to deliberately have a belief in it; you need to have a policy that supports it," adds Bess Skosana, regional talent leader at MTN.** Skosana engaged in a panel discussion on diversity in senior leadership including Lauren Clark, head of people at Mint Group, and Norah Sehunoe, executive head: human capital at Santam. They highlighted key challenges in the technology industry, shining a spotlight on accessibility and availability of talent, breadth and depth of diversity, and organisational culture with an urgent need for leadership development that requires intentional efforts in creating diverse leadership – the progress to date has been too slow and Sehunoe advocated for a multifaceted approach. Skosana noted that MTN is committed to diversity with a target of 50% women by 2030.
- **"The mobility of African talent across markets is a valuable asset, offering a deep understanding of diverse cultures, instrumental in devising successful strategies and product acceptance," says Yogendra Soobarah, head of people & culture at ABSA Mauritius.** Soobarah contributed to a panel titled African Talent Diaspora: Leveraging Global Connections for Local Impact, and was joined by Lillian Ngalam the human resources director at Diamond Trust Bank, Kenya and Theo Motshabi, the human resources director at BP Southern Africa. They spotlighted the reasons some talent choose to leave the African continent, the global skills gap, and the imperative to recognise potential talent beyond local borders. Discussions explored the delicate balance between monetary compensation and the sense of purpose for diaspora talent – recognising the need for affordable salaries aligned with organisational values. "African talent is very resilient in nature. What we need is the support from the HR component. We are very resilient when we are taken care of, and that's why the Employee Value Proposition comes in very handy," adds Lillian Ngalam. Theo Motshabi also stressed that decision-makers need to "Budget for repatriation. If you're really intentional, you'll put the money where your plan is. Companies can do so much to bring people back."
- **"Our talent is mobile and highly sought after, yet we don't appreciate or celebrate it. We need to change the national dialogue around appreciating and celebrating our local talent," Melvin Jones, CEO of Proconics.** Jones delivered a keynote address on South Africa's challenges regarding public sector dysfunction and the engineering brain drain and called for a change in the national dialogue to recognise the value of South African talent. He advocates for the implementation of a national talent attraction and retention programme and suggested introducing a community service year for young engineers, accountants, and lawyers to address public sector issues and foster a sense of nationhood. "Could we not make a community service year where we deploy young engineers, accountants, and lawyers into local municipalities for a year to resolve issues? It would create a sense of nationhood and positive impact," adds Jones.
- **"Employees aren't looking for a perfect leader. Employees are looking for a leader that has resilience. They need to know that we can overcome. They need to know we're allowed to have failures," shares Antoinette Roberts, group executive HC & transformation, Blue Label Telecoms.** The fireside chat with Roberts and her colleague Phumudzo Luvhengo, organisational effectiveness executive, emphasised that fostering an authentic

leadership style, marked by vulnerability and openness, creates a resilient organisational culture. Key takeaways include the importance of leaders acknowledging their own vulnerabilities, fostering open communication, and building a workplace where employees feel safe and motivated. Luvhengo made the point that: “Growing your career, but growing your career on someone else's or walking over someone else, that's not resilience. That's playing the politics from a completely different perspective.”

No event is complete without tackling the relevance of artificial intelligence. In the discussion on AI reshaping corporations, Venolan Naidoo, partner at Fasken Law Firm, highlighted the moral imperative of ethics in AI integration, stating: “Ethics must be at the forefront of AI integration in corporations. A robust policy framework is not just a legal necessity but a moral imperative to ensure responsible automation.”

In conclusion, here's an important reminder to HR leadership: “Forget trust. Trust is not what you say; it's what you do. Give your people autonomy – trust them to organise their own lives to deliver peak performance,” concludes Graeme Codrington, CEO of TomorrowToday Global.

The event was made possible with the invaluable support of sponsors including Proconics, Blue Label Telecoms, Mandate Molefi, Gordon Institute of Business Science, BEE 123 (Pty) Ltd, Wits Commercial Enterprise, Fundi Capital, Yulife; and our lifestyle partners, Nestlé and GQ Tissue Products (Pty) Ltd.



Abigail Visagie, MC, eNCA news anchor and media personality

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