

Cross-Party Group on Women in Enterprise

Wednesday 4th May 2022

Held via Zoom

Minutes

Present

Katie Birrell, WES; Lynne Cadenhead, WES; Sophie Rooney, WES; Ayse Basak Cinar, Coach; Melanie MacIntyre, Mel MacIntyre Coaching, Liberty Bligh, TruBoox; Julia Latif, Our House of Spice; Dina Nziku, University of West of Scotland; Ruth McElroy, Federation of Small Businesses; Claudia Cavalluzzo, Converge; Jennifer MacKenzie, TEFL; Karen Hedge, Scottish Care; Lesley Landels, Love Scottish; Wendy Pring, The Way Forward; Jill Arnold, SIS Ventures; Ann Johnson, Blaze.

MSPs

Gillian Martin, MSP; Collette Stevenson MSP; Michelle Thomson MSP

Invited guests

Non-MSP Group Members

Apologies

Eleonora Vanello, Productivity Institute; Susan Love ACCA Scotland

Proceedings

1. Introduction by Convenor, Gillian Martin MSP, contextualising the theme of Wellbeing.
2. Gillian Martin MSP announced that Katie Birrell would be stepping down as secretary and opened nominations for a new Office Bearer.
 - Sophie Rooney proposed by Melanie MacIntyre, seconded by Lynne Cadenhead

3. Presentation by Ayse Basak Cinar, leadership development and wellbeing coach

Key points from Ayse's presentation included:

- Context and need for a focus on Wellbeing in women's entrepreneurship. The Covid pandemic has seen women more vulnerable to economic impacts, juggling primary care and facing challenges of adapting to digitalisation.
- Self-care is not a solution to the rise in burnout, instead, we must adopt preventative measures as a priority.
- Chronic stress has systemic, socio-cultural, business environment related dimensions that need to be addressed to facilitate sustainable health and wellbeing for individuals
- Business owners should combine their business strategies with wellbeing strategies
- Developing resilience and agility are key to building sustainable workplace mental well-being which foster the long-term, consistent success of SMEs

4. Presentation by Melanie MacIntyre, Executive Coach and Mentor, bestselling author and speaker based in the Western Isles

Key points from Melanie's presentation included:

- Three quarters of UK workers are experiencing burnout, with 41% of the workforce expecting to leave their jobs as the 'Great Resignation' continues.
- This shift can be framed as a mass awakening, as priorities like freedom, balance and meaningful impact take precedence. This presents an opportunity for growing entrepreneurship: running your own business is a key way to achieve these things.
- We need to construct a new normal, rather than rebuilding. We should create an entrepreneurial landscape and culture with wellbeing at its heart. It is crucial to support businesses to give time freedom and financial freedom, being profitable, while still offering balance
- Melanie proposes five pillars of performance for going forward: positive psychology, healthy physiology through habits and practices, connection with purpose and productivity. These should be at the heart of business design for leaders and employers, creating sustainable success.

5. Presentation by Liberty Bligh, experienced founder and disabled entrepreneur, Liberty is currently developing #techforgood scale up Truboox

Key points from Liberty's presentation included:

- We often don't value or notice our wellbeing until we lose it. The pandemic has highlighted this.

- Scotland should be concerned with workforce wellbeing. In June 2020, 1 in 5 adults reported having suicidal thoughts whilst at work. Women are more than twice as likely to develop mental ill-health at work. Poor well-being is statistically linked to poor mental health
 - However, embedding well-being at work and in enterprise boosts cardiovascular and immune health, providing an opportunity going forward.
 - Exploring her own shift in wellbeing, before and after experiencing Covid, Liberty has had to implement new strategies for recovery, which have also proven useful in business. Likewise, her experience as an entrepreneur helped her to effectively approach and innovate her recovery plan. This highlights the potential for successful interplay between entrepreneurship and wellbeing learnings. As a consequence, her business is in a stronger and more sustainable position than ever before.
 - Liberty shared the Global Sisterhood Initiative, which would see women collaborating globally to share wellbeing strategies and processes.
6. Gillian Martin invited attendees to share their experiences and views of entrepreneurship and wellbeing.

Systemic Failures

- Wendy Pring argued that while women have high capability, they must contend with unsuitable systems and unconscious bias. Living in a rural area, she was unable to get more than a couple of hours of childcare. This system has been put in place by men and has been tweaked but not fixed. She constantly hears women today having same experiences as she had with her kids 22 years ago.
- Karen Hedge stated that one of the reasons she asked to be on this group is the lack of recognition of social care as an area with proportionately more women entrepreneurs. We could do more to raise awareness of that, but also to recognise that it brings more to economy than agriculture forestry and fishing yet remains missing from the economic strategy. We need to shift change at various levels.

Systemic Change

- Wendy Pring, who is a civil engineer, provided the example of toilet accessibility in Queen Street Station to demonstrate how systems designed without being conscious of gender can be ineffective and harmful. For example, civil engineering with unconscious bias would suggest that the practical decision for placing toilets in a venue would be by linkages to plumbing. However, this overlooks usability for people, highlighting challenges of a toilet that is difficult to access for people with young children and disabilities. We need to be gender-conscious in service and space design to support wellbeing.
- Gillian Martin MSP suggested that Wendy's example makes a case for the importance of diversity in decision making.

Women's Business Centres as a Solution

- Lynne Cadenhead highlighted that establishing women's businesses centres will encourage this systemic change, by designing spaces and services which

address systemic issues. They would be a vehicle for women to be successful in business. Systems designed for women: childcare and peer support to address issues like loneliness and overwhelm. Support should be put in place for women anywhere in Scotland, from any demographic to help them grow businesses in the way that they want – that is what is in heart of Women's Business Centre strategy for Scotland.

Employee Retention

- Ann Johnson highlighted that while many businesses prioritise wellbeing for their workers, they lose employees to larger companies, for example in the oil sector, that offer higher salaries, while sacrificing elements of balance and health. These challenges impact business-owners ability and desire to continue running their businesses.
- Liberty Bligh shared learnings from American businesses which adopt personalised employee retention plans and have dedicated staff.
- Melanie MacIntyre suggested that connecting purpose to your business, and articulating this narrative helps people get more from their roles than money.

Meeting Employee Needs

- Collette Stevenson, MSP, shared her experience of adopting employee-driven changes, like allowing her office manager to bring her dog to work. It relaxed constituents, encouraged her to do the same and led to healthy changes like walking the dogs during lunch. Employees should be encouraged to share their needs.
- Jennifer MacKenzie shared some different leadership practices she adopted to create a new normal. She closed her office, created flexible remote working, built a new wellbeing group, an inhouse magazine 'The Coorie' to engage employees.

Changing Working Culture

- Claudia Cavalluzzo suggested that leaders often hire in their own image, employing people who are older, have older children or appear to have the ability to work late or at weekends. A colleague told her this stopped her from aiming higher. We need to work to normalise work life balance, encourage people to talk about their families, communities, even dogs. While it is a personal mindset, we must do work to share it with other to normalise these culture changes.
- Melanie MacIntyre highlighted that sustainable long-term performance is harmed by a lack of balance. Embracing seasonality, particularly of women, who tend to function cyclically, is crucial. Women must advocate for ways of working which support us.
- Lynne Cadenhead suggested that enterprise education has a role to play in shifting entrepreneurial culture to create sustainable business ownership. A thorough review of enterprise education is needed to place more value on emotional considerations rather than financial forecasts. Getting mindset and purpose, meta skills right should addressed first, the rest will follow naturally.
- Dina Nziku noted the diversity of Women's Enterprise Scotland and the Cross Party Group. While she celebrated the importance placed on

wellbeing at the session, she felt these discussions were not taking place among minority ethnicities. We need to broaden these conversations to communities where wellbeing may not be viewed as such a priority. Researchers and academics often view women from minority ethnicities as more resilient due to a difference in culture, this is however, proven wrong when such women end up dead. We should share our experiences, similarities and differences across cultures for greater learning.

Leadership

- Karen Hedge shared that she struggles to define what she does as a leader. Seeking to better articulate ourselves as leaders is connected to making changes in workplace culture.
- Ayse Cinar Basak suggested that leadership starts with the individual – we must put our mask on first. Leadership terminology need to change, highlighting the role of many characteristics associated with women, which lead to effective leadership that may challenge conventional ideas about leadership.
- Michelle Thompson MSP highlighted that women at their essence develop behavioural flexibility at an earlier age – productivity which comes from experience taking on multiple roles and changing how we present ourselves and communication styles.
- Dina Nziku highlighted the importance of role models. Women need to look at women who demonstrate and teach us leadership and management skills – embracing our own skills that may not simply mirror male styles of leadership.

The meeting closed at 19:20.