

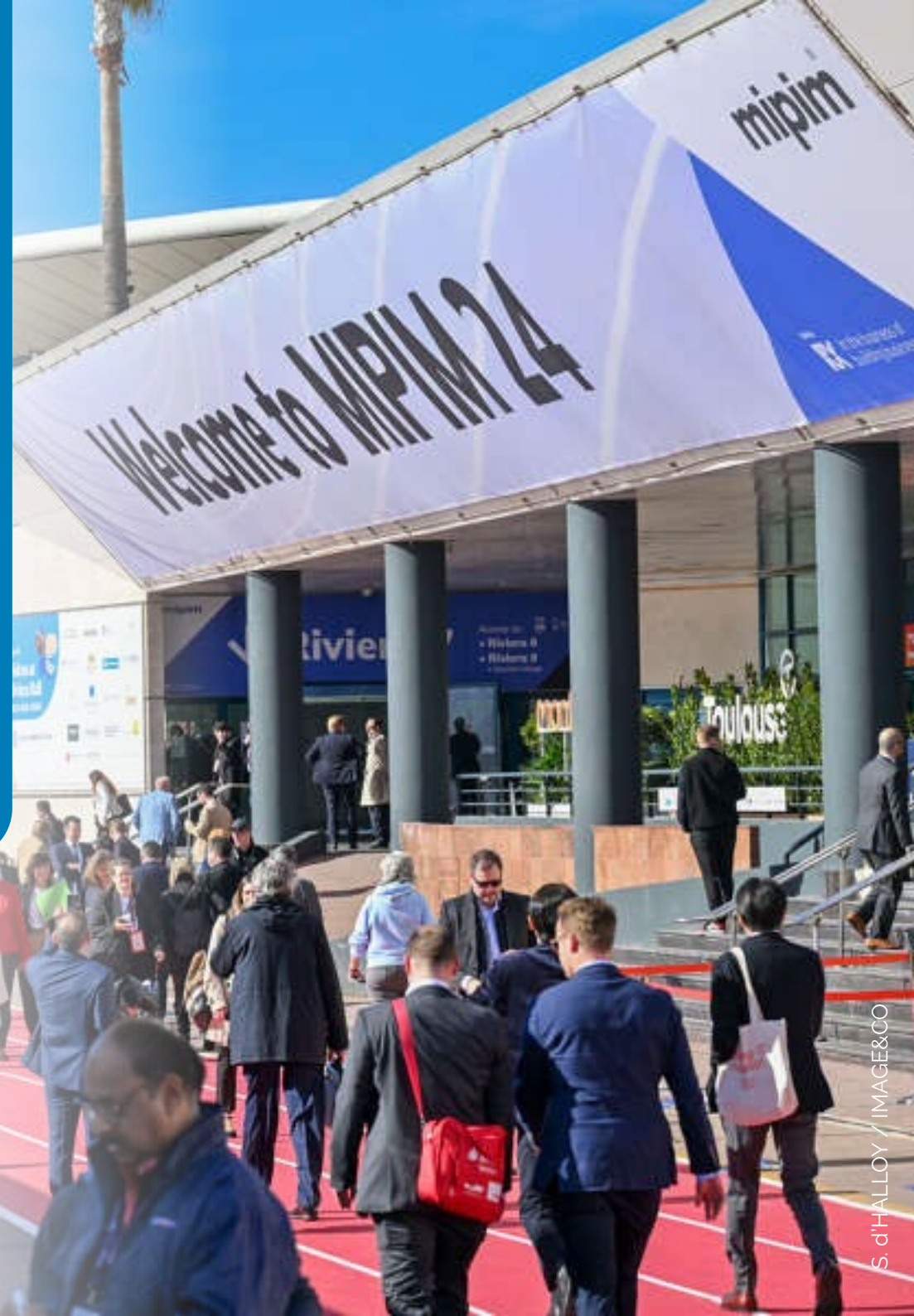
LEADERSHIP IN THE AGE OF DISTRACTION

Built environment experts came together at Mipim for a roundtable discussion hosted by *BE News*, and sponsored by Freeths and Rehoboth Property Group, to discuss the challenges of leading businesses during times of uncertainty and what attributes good leaders need



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THE PANEL

Sanmi Adegoke, chief executive, Rehoboth Property Group

Tania Adir, co-founder, Adir Group

Hannah Awonuga, group head of diversity, equity and inclusion (DE&I), Knight Frank

Liz Banks, partner, Freeths

Bradley Baker, chief executive, CO-RE

Lucy Bradban, partner, Freeths

Jo Cowen, chief executive, Jo Cowen Architects

Tom Davies, managing partner and co-founder, Bloom Developments

Lady Lucy French, chief executive, Fleet Street Quarter

Charlie Gayner, co-founder, Re:shape

Sarah Hayford, founder, The Land Collective

Brian Moran, head of investor relations, Rehoboth Property Group

Sammy Pahal, managing director, UK PropTech Association

Steve Sanham, co-founder, Common Projects

Julia Skeete, senior associate principal, SOM

Sarah Stephen, residential director, Rehoboth Property Group

Duncan Swinhoe, managing principal, Gensler

Chair: Liz Hamson, editor-in-chief, *BE News*

The last few years have been some of the most tumultuous in history for UK business leaders. In addition to dealing with lockdowns during Covid-19 and the aftermath of the pandemic, which has seen the widespread adoption of hybrid working, there has been ongoing political uncertainty both in the UK and globally, wars in Ukraine and the Middle East, rampant inflation creating a cost-of-living crisis and a recession.

At Mipim, *BE News* brought together leaders from across the built environment at a roundtable dinner discussion sponsored by Freeths and Rehoboth Property Group to discuss leadership in the age of distraction.

In addition to talking about how challenging it has been to lead businesses at a time of such great economic and political uncertainty, the conversation also covered what makes an effective leader and what attributes good leaders need.

The debate, moderated by *BE News* editor-in-chief Liz Hamson, kicked off with a discussion on the unique challenges created by the Covid pandemic and what has changed about how people lead their organisations.

Sammy Pahal of the UK PropTech Association said one of the key things she had noticed was that there had been widespread recognition that businesses and organisations needed to be much

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Sammy Pahal

more flexible in their approach to managing people. "In a start-up, you're used to being flexible and trusting the people who work for you because you have no choice and it's obvious if they're performing or not," she said.

"I've seen corporates move a little bit more towards that start-up mentality because you have to actually trust the people that you employ."

Rehoboth Property Group's Sarah Stephen agreed with Pahal, adding: "Flexibility comes from trust and that trust comes from dealing with people as adults and recognising that life and work merges. So whether you're a parent, or a carer, or whatever, it's understanding that your work is part of your life, but not the whole of your life, and that's where I've seen leadership transform."

Disconnected from staff

Lucy Bradban of Freeths said that during Covid, senior leaders faced a major challenge because of the merger between people's work lives and home lives. "We had lots of lawyers who were at home working long hours and they potentially didn't see anyone else," she explained. "As leaders in that environment, we felt very disconnected from our staff. And so we were actively pursuing engagement via Teams and trying to maintain those key relationships that you have in an office environment."

The conversation moved on to the difference between leaders and managers. ➤



Sammy Pahal



Lucy Bradban



Sarah Stephen



Lady Lucy French



Tania Adir



Jo Cowen of Jo Cowen Architects said that “leadership is not about following management – it’s about enablement and it’s about protection”.

Follow the leader

Freeths’ Liz Banks said for her, the key distinction between managers and leaders was that “people follow leaders”. She added: “You want to set a good example and be a good role model and you want people to follow you. Particularly as a woman in the legal sector or the property sector, I think it’s really

important that you leave the door open for others to follow you through it.”

Knight Frank’s Hannah Awonuga expressed concerns around how some leaders are traditionally appointed: “Something I noticed in financial services, and I’m also noticing it in real estate, is people are appointed as leaders not because they’re good leaders but because they are good salespeople. The assumption is that if you’re good at your job and you’re in sales you are a good leader, but that’s not necessarily true.”

The discussion moved on to talk about

the challenges of leading people when so many employees are still working from home for at least part of the week.

According to Tom Davies of Bloom Developments, the issue is amplified for people who are just starting their careers. “I learned through a process of osmosis and being there just watching and sitting in meetings,” he said. “And now people are only in the office two or three days a week I think it’s really difficult to learn from your leaders.”

Gensler’s Duncan Swinhoe agreed, citing the example of an intern course the ➤



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Bradley Baker

business runs. "At the end of the course, we asked what the experience had been like for the interns. They all said: 'I wish there were more people in the office to talk to because this is gold dust for us. We're going to learn so much. It's amazing.'"

Physical interaction

CO-RE's Bradley Baker pointed out that creative processes such as creating new developments from scratch required physical interaction between people.

"You can't create groundbreaking, stunning projects via Teams," he said. "You need to get people in the room, see the body language and see how these things evolve."

While there was widespread agreement hybrid working presented lots of challenges for leaders to grapple with, Sarah Hayford of The Land Collective said that the pandemic had made things more "equitable".

"So if you have a neurodiverse condition, or if you have a disability, the workforce was very hard for those people before Covid,

because people would tell them they had to be in the office," she said. "But going into Covid, it levelled the playing field because everyone worked from home."

The debate shifted on to the topic of mentorship and the importance of mentorship in terms of the development of good leadership skills. Many of those in the room said they had not had mentors and some had struggled to find a suitable mentor.

Sanmi Adegoke of Rehoboth Property Group talked about the importance of legacy



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and added that part of his legacy was around mentoring people who work for the company.

He said the key to success for any business was having a leader who had a vision and who was able to convey that vision to their team. "In terms of understanding what is good leadership, my keystone would always be around what is the vision of the leader and what are their core values," said Adegoke. "Clarity of vision is important and culture is also key."

The discussion ended with participants being asked to sum up in a couple of words what they believed were the quintessential attributes of effective leaders: "integrity", "honesty", "transparency", "authenticity", "fairness" and "loyalty" popped up repeatedly. Steve Sanham of Common Projects opted for "principles", while Re:shape's Charlie Gayner said "inspiration and feedback".

The final word went to SOM's Julia Skeete, who said effective leaders had to "strike the right balance between positive and negative reinforcement". □



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