

## Belonging, AI and “Untangling” the HR Tech Market: HR Tech Fest 2019

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A record breaking 1250 people and 116 exhibitors turned out in force this November to hear from the leaders in HR, learning and leadership innovation.

Who better to kick off this year's [HR Innovation & Tech Fest](#) than the king of HR himself, Josh Bersin. He helped us “untangle” the HR tech market, and what a noisy place it's become with 2,918 companies currently vying for attention in this space.

“We are seeing more players in core HCM systems than ever before. Every major company is now building HR technology,” Josh pointed out. Since 2009 there has been \$16.0 Billion in investment in HR Tech, and more than half of these are brand new companies.



What is clear is that HR technology is no longer about a single system or platform.

There are now multiple systems, apps and bots that are combined to create outcomes. Josh had the heads in the auditorium nodding as he affirmed the power of connecting, relating, collaborating in experiential ways. “If your programs aren't improving employee experience, you're not doing your job as HR people,” he said.

## Belonging: the next wave of diversity and inclusion

We all know that having employees with unique ideas and experiences drives innovation and profitability. Diversity and inclusion are accepted as a necessary part of employee engagement, but it's not the whole picture.

Could belonging be the missing part of the equation?

This question was unpicked by a panel of experts: Behavioural Scientist and Inclusionist Dr Elizabeth Shoesmith, Adidas' Global Senior Director of Talent Andrew Longley and Psychologist & Founder of The Conscious Project, Sharon Draper. They discussed recent findings that has shown belonging to a community of co-workers can be a better motivator than money alone.



We were wowed by some powerful storytelling from Steve Fordham of Blackrock Industries, an Indigenous owned and operated mining services company. He faces different challenges to most companies when it comes to diversity and inclusion, but challenges all the same.

“75% of our workforce is indigenous, 26% are women and all our roles are all gender-neutral. On paper we're diverse, but we're not. At the moment we're working on a non-indigenous engagement plan to attract more non-indigenous people into our workplace,” he said.

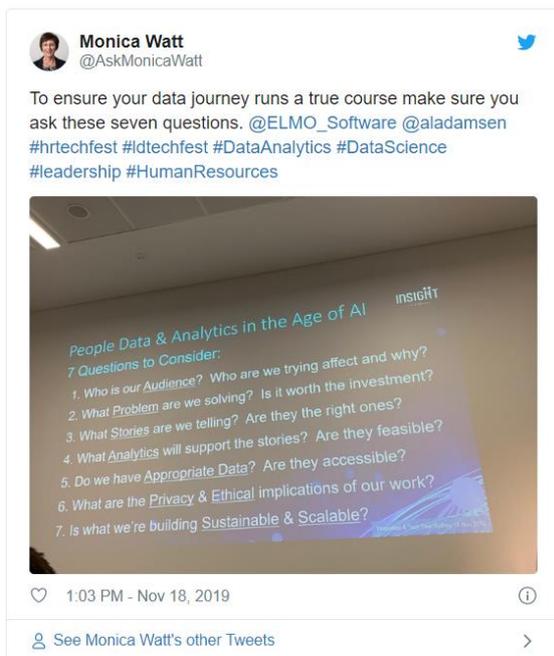
He shared his inspiring story of building a business from a \$20,000 house deposit into a multi-million dollar company within 20 months with 50 employees, as well as running an inmate program to give employment opportunities to indigenous offenders.

“I was always hearing that Aboriginals were too hard to employ and I wanted to prove that wrong,” he said. “We are not a token gesture, we are people and that’s how we want to be treated,” he said.

## Balancing human and business needs in the age of AI

“Every moment of every day you, your colleagues, and workers around the world generate data. This data is now being gathered and analysed faster and more effectively than ever before.”

These slightly terrifying words rang in the ears of the HR Innovation & Tech Fest audience as AI Adamson tackled the ethical and responsible use of people data and analytics in the age of AI. He outlined how data and insights are affecting the worker experience and served up some practical ways to bridge the gap between "knowledge" and "action".



Stacey Harris also weighed in on the data debate, as she challenged us to be more strategic with our data to make better decisions. She said HR must be outcome focussed, using data to make decisions on social responsibility and innovation. We must also move towards adopting an HR leadership model that stops us spreading ourselves too thin.

## Authenticity, vulnerability and courage urgently needed in leadership

Daniel Murray, CEO of Empathic Consulting, highlighted the importance of staying connected to our people in an increasingly disconnected world.

“As businesses become more digitally focused, we are interacting more, but with far less depth. Hundreds of emails, chats, social media posts and shortened meetings are resulting in more noise but less engagement and understanding,” he said.

Daniel unpacked the basics of neuroscience and gave us a step-by-step guide to building empathy in today’s complex world.



Chief People & Culture Officer at Beca, Laurent Sylvestre, pinpointed authenticity, vulnerability and courage as the three cornerstones of impactful leadership. He said that without these we cannot create an environment for people to be their best.

“If you truly understand your organisation, then you can understand why people behave in a certain way, and then you can agree on what you all want to become,” Laurent said.

### **Start-ups in the spotlight**

While it’s great to hear from some big players, there’s huge value in listening to the new kid on the block.

To shine a light on the new ideas and innovations powering HR and L&D, we ran a start-up pitch competition with 12 technology start-ups given the chance to showcase their technology.

HowToo, an L&D platform that enables learner-generated digital learning, was declared the winner, scoring themselves a pass to next year’s event and some incredible connections with industry heavyweights of HR and L&D tech.



A huge thanks to everyone who made [HR Innovation & Tech Fest](#) + [L&D Innovation & Tech Fest](#) 2019 another overwhelming success. The talented speakers who so openly shared their ideas, successes and even failures. Thanks to our incredible sponsors who make these ideas come to life with their technology. And of course the HR + L&D community – your passion for driving the innovation agenda in your teams and organisations is what gives this event life.