

# What's **NEW** in the workplace

## Flexible office spaces

An organisation with 1 500 people used to build an office for 1 500 people, with 1 500 desks. Now, employers can get away with less, but they need to think differently as workers adopt different work schedules, and stay at home and travel more. This kind of “out of the box” office design thinking used to apply mostly to tech companies, but now it's all companies. Take Delphi, an automotive parts supplier. “We're trying to be more flexible to improve from a retention and burnout standpoint,” says IT vice-president Andrea Siudara. “It's more about results than desktime.”



## Airport cities

A unique trend identified is the development of “airport cities” in which an airport becomes a business magnet and an engine for regional economic development. For a growing number of companies, large and commercially developed airports provide not just physical connectivity but a functional headquarters where geographically dispersed corporate staff, executives, and board members can fly in for sales meetings, client contacts, and high-level decision-making. For example, The Sofitel at Heathrow's Terminal 5 is ranked among the most popular places to hold business meetings in the United Kingdom.

## No more 40-hr weeks

Companies are becoming increasingly driven by outcomes. “It's not about ‘what did you do for 40 to 48 hours this week’, it's about results,” says Alan Lepofsky, collaboration software analyst with Constellation Research. “The concept of a consistent 40-hour work week doesn't work for anyone any more.” Trust is the new currency. And so more and more people are working from home.



## Machines as talent

Using machines to read, analyse, speak, and make decisions is affecting work at all levels. Some believe that jobs may be lost. HR teams must think about how to help redesign jobs as we all work in co-operation with computers in almost every role. It's about collaboration, not competition.

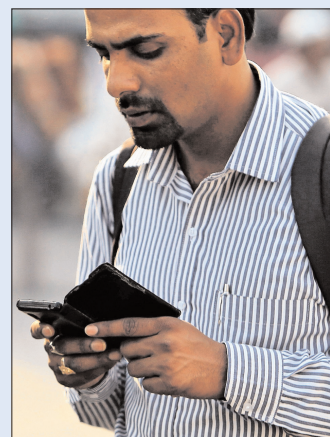
## PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

New, agile models for performance management are a core component of this year's focus on engagement, development, and leadership. How organisations manage, evaluate, and reward people largely needs rethinking.

## Hyper-connectedness

Barriers between work and life have been all but eliminated because employees are “always on” by being hyper-connected to their jobs through pervasive mobile technology.

Networking tools like LinkedIn, Facebook and Glassdoor allow people to easily monitor the market for new job opportunities. This means that details about an organisation's culture are available at the tap of a screen. Also the balance of power in the employer-employee relationship has shifted, making today's workers more like customers or partners than subordinates.



# Taking stock of SA in bite sizes

ANYONE with a keen interest in South Africa's political economy will be familiar with the work of Professor Raymond Suttner – his analysis is fairly widely published, and he has published a number of books on topics such as the Freedom Charter and the ANC underground.

Some of his more recent interviews and columns have been assembled in a new book, *Recovering Democracy in South Africa*, which provides bite-sized analysis and commentary on some of the key challenges facing South Africa since 2010.

The joy of reading Suttner's analysis is that even though it is a snapshot of today, it is deeply rooted in history. This, combined with Suttner's own personal experience in the ANC underground and as a United Democratic Front activist, puts him in a position to provide some of the most grounded contemporary analysis of current affairs.

Much of Suttner's analysis is founded on understanding the role and character of the ANC-Cosatu-SACP alliance, and how that has shifted in a post-apartheid society – both shaping society, and being shaped by it. Here, much of his analysis is informed by his time as a member of the ANC national



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executive committee and as part of the collective that worked around former president Nelson Mandela – as well as his time outside the ANC – or, as he puts it, “since I fell out with the ANC”.

Suttner describes the Zuma administration in a piece he wrote back in 2010 as being “half-sinking and half-sailing”, with the state “running on autopilot”.

But *Recovering Democracy* is not the latest in a long line of Zuma-bashing books. It is far more textured, and constantly focuses on the damaging attitude of the current leadership – in its entirety – on issues such as constitutionality, the abuse of power, patronage, gender violence and militarism.

In the “sinking/sailing” piece, for example, he writes: “There may be a systematic crisis because of ANC and government-tolerated irregularities and corruption. There is a constant invocation of violence and militarism. When law and order and the constitution are under threat, this is more than a party political matter.”

Because of this, he argues in a later piece that “the questions we need to ask are whether Zuma's departure would solve our problems, and whether they can simply be put at the door of one individual”.

“Undoubtedly, Zuma has

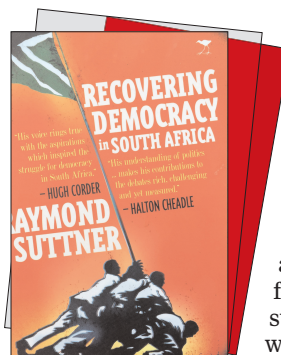
attracted levels of adverse publicity because of his patterns of conduct – not only his links to patronage and corruption, but also his identification with extreme patriarchal views that are opposed to constitutional views.

“But before we celebrate his removal, we need to ask what will be done about the environment within which Zuma has thrived. Whether Zuma stays or goes, we as citizens need to ask what we want in our country. What do we need to recover and safeguard our democratic gains?”

“Regrettably, that cannot be answered overnight, but we need to be active in deciding our own future.”

Ultimately, of course, if you accept Suttner's thesis that our democracy is battered and bruised, and that constitutionality is being eroded by patronage and corruption, the key question is whether South Africa's democracy can in fact be recovered.

Suttner believes it can, through new forms of conversation, new forms of mobilisation, and new forms of radicalism – all hinged around what he terms emancipatory politics. This, he argues, needs to be developed in response to a “marked



deterioration” in the ANC's “respect for legality and constitutionalism, signified by countless cases of corruption and fraud”, which is “accompanied by the increasing use of force against people protesting for basic human rights such as housing and clean water”.

For emancipatory politics to work, he says society needs to redefine “the front line”.

“Where is the front line, where is the first place where we defend and advance our rights today? For the homeless, it cannot be a theoretical question, since they are sleeping under winter skies.”

Equally crucial is a new form of radicalism and popular action.

“Reinvigorating democracy does not mean vacating spaces where people can exert influence. It does not mean abandoning the importance of the vote, no matter what its limitations may be.

“It gives due significance to the value of the courts and Parliament. And it also means community self-empowerment.

“In short, reinvigorating the power of people as political subjects can take multiple forms – all of which can make democracy truly meaningful.”

If it sounds as if Suttner is drawing deeply on his past for an understanding of a new future, it's

because he is. Positioned as he is outside the ANC alliance, the former UDF activist sees promise in the formation of new groups like the National Union of Metalworkers and the United Front, and possibly even a workers' party.

But the promise is limited, he says, as long as those involved in the discussion impose a narrow class formulation. Taking a “working class only” perspective could limit the new formations' potential, and he asks: “If the United Front is important in its own right, what are its founding goals, the common vision that is intended to unite those who form its own components? How does it conceive the organisational base? To what extent does it differ from the working class base of the potential workers' party it is also considering establishing? If different, will it seek organisational affiliates in order to create backing for the demands that motivate the front?”

These are all crucial questions, which remain unanswered even since the book's publication – despite the potential impact of a “new left” on the political landscape. For that reason, and many more, it will be worth keeping an eye on how Suttner continues to analyse the formative stages of the “new left”, and how the “old left” – ie what's left of the left within the ANC alliance – responds.

● *Recovering Democracy in South Africa* by Raymond Suttner is published by Jacana Media.