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# Powering the machine

How a human-centric approach is accelerating  
the digitization of work



By Royal Charter





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# Executive Summary

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Automation, artificial intelligence and digitization are transforming the way we work – and fast. Opportunities and anxieties around artificial intelligence and other technologies abound in equal measure. It is therefore more important than ever to focus on building trust in the workplace, by putting in measures for the psychological health, safety and well-being of the workforce, so that organizations can embrace the potential of the future, by unleashing the potential within their workforce.

Technological advancement is only one of the accelerants driving the speed of change. Globalization and a greater move towards hybrid and remote working both have the potential to have a significant impact on the workforce – in terms of the way we work, where we work, and the way our work lifecycle progresses. In addition, growing demands by new generations entering the workforce, and the needs of a maturing workforce at the other end, plus continuing talent and recruitment challenges, means that organizations that want to succeed are prioritizing their people.

BSI's experts believe that by taking this human-centric approach, organizations can seize the opportunities, and address the potential challenges associated with accelerated technological change. This in turn will help society at large realize the opportunities digitization offers.

By investing in training and skills development, working to shape policy for social good, and analyzing the risks around mental well-being, personal data and occupational health, safety and well-being, organizations can build trust and resilience, which can in turn be the keys that allow organizations – and the people in them – to flourish into the future.

This report is based upon a Future of Work webinar held in June 2023 on Digitization and the Workforce, featuring the expertise of four contributing experts:

**Siddhartha Bandyopadhyay**, Professional of Economics at the University of Birmingham

**Avik Chanda**, author of *From Command to Empathy: Using EQ in the age of disruption*

**Ali Khan**, Global Leader of Information Security and Privacy Management at ZS Associate

**Harsha Peter**, Global Director of India Total Rewards Program and Head of Pune HR at ZS Associates

**Kate Field**, Global Head of Health, Safety and Well-being at BSI



# Accelerators of change





Robotics is not new; automation is not new. What's different is that the pace of change is faster than anticipated – in 2020 the World Economic Forum predicted 85 million jobs would be displaced by automation by 2025. Our experts identified three trends that are contributing factors towards rapid digitization.

The first is **technological advancement** itself. As the development of new technologies accelerates further and new applications are found for existing technology, the world of work is transforming in ways we could have never imagined. The second is **globalization of the workforce**.

### Digi Yatra: technological advancement applied

Digi Yatra uses AI to automate biometric and face recognition for people travelling through India's main airports. The system uses multiple new technologies, applying them in combination. The impact is twofold: moving through the airport is now a much more efficient and streamlined experience for the passenger, and human workers who were employed to check ID and passports are relieved of a monotonous, time-consuming task by technology.







The second is **globalization of the workforce**.

When employees don't have to be present in a particular location, people (in some sectors and roles) can base themselves anywhere with an internet connection. The rise of the digital nomad is testament to this – there are estimated 35 million people who'd describe themselves as digital nomads. Just over half (52%) are from the US, where the numbers of nomadic workers has grown rapidly from 7.3 million in 2019, to 16.9 million in 2022.<sup>1</sup> This means that organizations can access talent from all over the world, and that individuals who may not have been able to access an set location (perhaps due to physical disability) are now able to bring their expertise to the virtual workplace. Just as technology has changed the way we conduct business, it is reshaping the where and how we work.

This leads to the third – **an accelerated shift in policy towards hybrid, flexible and remote working**.

Pre-pandemic the shift to remote and hybrid working had begun, albeit slowly. But as Siddhartha Bandyopadhyay, Professor of Economics at the University of Birmingham, explains:

“The whole world became a policy laboratory during COVID where people were almost forced towards remote working. Now the assertion that it's possible to work without a workplace has been tested, both government and business are asking whether we need to burn fuel and eat up the miles, when we can be eco-friendly and still work.”

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.projectuntethered.com/digital-nomad-statistics/>



# The four impacts of workplace digitization





The question of what this leap in technology means for individuals, organizations and society more widely goes to the heart of who we are as humans. “AI is already able, to some extent, to do things that we thought were at the heart of what being human was,” says Bandyopadhyay, “such as writing poetry or painting in the style of the master.” Our webinar experts see the impact in five distinct arenas.

## 01 The workforce comes to know its unique, human value

While concerns have been raised that AI and automation could diminish the number of available jobs, the rapid emergence of these tools in the workplace is also highlighting how essential people are.

As business advisor and author Avik Chanda explains: “If you’re using AI for hiring, performing background checks and mapping this data against your criteria for selection, the question arises – who is making sure that checks are fair, equitable, inclusive, accurate and transparent?” When AI can decide crucial things like who gets a job, who goes to prison, who’s released early and so on, he argues, human checks become critical.

The rollout of technology can also lead to an upskilled workforce, able to become more strategic and analytical, and, in some cases, can create new jobs. Harsha Peter, Global Director of India Total Rewards Program and Head of Pune HR at ZS Associates, explains: “We’re able to use AI for our regular operations. While mundane jobs are becoming automated, we’re also hiring more people [for more complex work].”

This can create a shift in expectation among the workforce too: “People come to us with the necessary skills and background, but also with an aspiration to continue learning,” says Peter. Upskilling doesn’t necessarily mean giving people greater technological expertise. “It used to be that if you were a great technical coder you didn’t have to be people-centric,” says Chanda. “Similarly, if you were a great people-person, you could become a business development manager, without having technological skills. Now, you need both skill sets.”

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Harsha Peter, Global Director of India Total Rewards Program and Head of Pune HR at ZS Associate







02 Business leaders move beyond risk

New technology presents an opportunity for C-suite and senior leadership teams to identify the key areas of focus within their organizations and invest in them. “Whenever we talk about digitization and technology, I hear about risks, fear, and challenges, and that’s often where we focus all our energy,” says Ali Khan, Global Leader of Information Security and Privacy Management at ZS Associates. “But instead, leaders need to start managing the risk and to think about the solutioning around it.”

Making sure the new ecosystem of work is human-centric is a responsibility that falls on leaders, according to Chanda, who warns that market forces looking for entrepreneurs and disrupters won’t automatically create this. “Government agencies, NGOs, the not-for-profit sector, and individuals who are sociological or ecologically minded have to come together and collaborate in a cohesive manner to make sure we’re able to capitalize on the opportunities new technology offers.”

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Ali Khan, Global Leader of Information Security and Privacy Management at ZS Associates



### 03 Cybersecurity and privacy become people-centric

One example of how vital it is to consider the impact on people is in the increasing interdependence between information security and occupational health and safety. Employee occupational health records, for example, should be confidential and held with integrity from an information security perspective. Then there is the question of what technology is being used to monitor people's health and / or productivity within the workplace. SMART PPE for instance requires both robust cybersecurity and privacy management to be in place.

Looking at risk multi dimensionally, rather than choosing only to protect one element of importance, can help organizations navigate digitization effectively. The COVID pandemic was an obvious example where security, health and safety, finance and risk expertise came together. Organizations will be best placed to thrive when their response to change is comprehensive, and considers how multiple risk processes are shaped, integrated and implemented into a business.

"People are the common elements creating those interdependencies," says Khan. "Even if your primary goal is to protect personal data and information, you can't do it without people. As information security experts we always used to have this common notion that people were our weakest link. Now we're evolving our thought process to consider people the human firewall. People are the crown jewels."

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"Even if your primary goal is to protect personal data and information, you can't do it without people."

Ali Khan, Global Leader of Information Security and Privacy Management at ZS Associates





04 Psychological health and safety becomes paramount

The psychological impact on people from the changes to technology should also be considered. “Depending on which study you look at, between 40% and 50% of the workforce are going through some mental health challenges,” says Chanda.

But there are obstacles to addressing this in the workforce, as he explains: “As an employee, I may be struggling, but the technology I use can make me anonymous, making my psychological safety hard to account for.”

“As an employee, I may be struggling, but the technology I use can make me anonymous, making my psychological safety hard to account for.”

Avik Chanda

He continues: “For those whose jobs are now obsolete and who don’t know what to do, no one is explaining they might be experiencing general anxiety or depression linked to their situation. It becomes that person’s normal state of being, ergo, they don’t reach out.” Even if workers feel free to talk about their mental health, that isn’t enough to shift the needle of their well-being from something that’s negative to positive, an area he feels businesses will need to address in the near future.

This is one of the reasons the World Health Organization and International Labour Organization developed a joint policy brief on mental health at work. The brief illustrates practical strategies in relation to mental health for governments, employers, workers, and their organizations. It starts with preventing psychosocial risks (those workplace hazards that can cause mental harm), and then goes on to outline the general protection and promotion of mental health within the workplace. Taking a proactive approach to mental health within the workplace ensures that the potential harm caused by digitization is removed or minimized, and that workers are equipped to deal with a world – and workplace – that is transforming at an unprecedented rate.

Creating trust is at the heart of this approach. BSI’s Organizational Resilience Index Report 2021 found that prioritizing the health, safety and well-being of employees (along with clients and communities) to create a culture of trust, strongly indicated a positive impact on building organizational resilience. Best practice resources like ISO 45003 on psychological health and safety management in the workplace and BSI’s Prioritizing People Model®, offer the expertise and guidance organizations need to develop psychological health and safety management and a culture of trust among their workforce.



BSI Prioritizing People Model

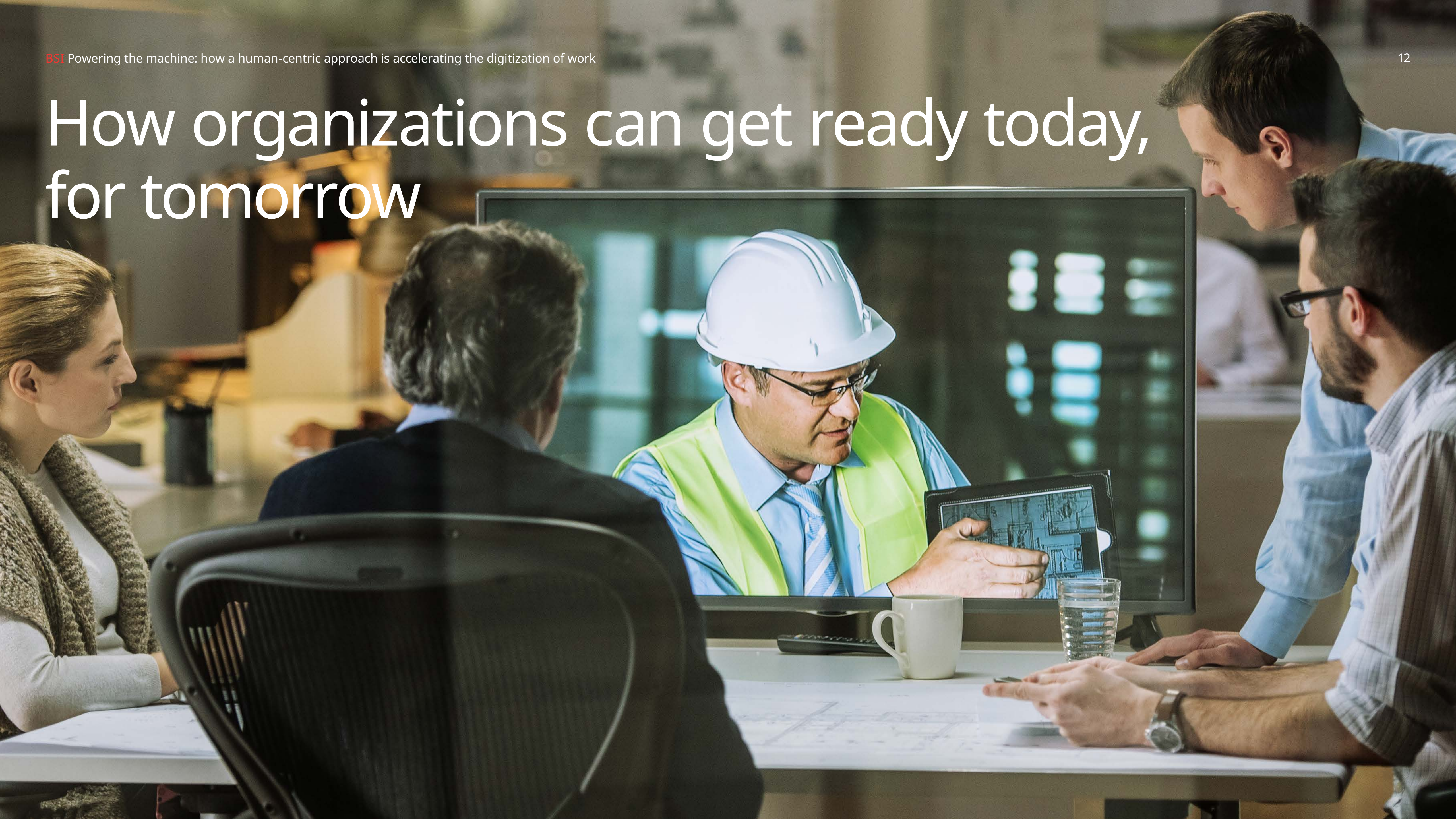
BSI’s Prioritizing People Model® is a best practice framework for human high performance, focused on culture, engagement and well-being over the whole career cycle. Inspired by Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs, the model describes the best practice approach to workplace well-being, using the principles of basic, psychological and actualization needs to create a framework for unlocking the full potential of people.

ISO 45003 Psychological health and safety at work

ISO 45003 is the first global standard giving practical guidance on managing psychological health and safety at work. It provides guidance on the management of psychosocial risk, as part of an occupational health and safety management system, including how to recognize psychosocial hazards that can arise from home working, and actions that can be taken to manage these and improve employee well-being.



# How organizations can get ready today, for tomorrow





## Adopt and embrace a human-centric approach

People are everything. “AI is developed by people and has been trained by people, and if you want to go on the digitization journey, you can’t do it without people,” says Khan. “Human minds are the minds that are creating the technology.”

## Invest in education and skills

“What we are today is because somebody invested in us yesterday,” says Khan. Upskill people, keeping their aspirations in mind as well. “That has to be initiated by the leadership,” says Peter. It might be that leaders need to skill themselves, in order to be able to talk about it. “To be able to speak from your own experience, builds trust.”

## Embrace the opportunities

### ... for occupational health and safety

There’s an obvious occupational health and safety benefit to the workforce that comes along with technology, as Kate Field, Global Head of Health, Safety and Well-being at BSI, points out: “One of the things that is really exciting about AI is that it enables us to have better quality work. While other technology is replacing people where humans are at the greatest risk, for instance, using robotics in nuclear environments where there’s a really high risk to human personal safety.”

### .... for social and economic growth

There’s also an opportunity for growth in the social economy, by sharing learning with clients as well as the workforce. As Peter explains: “The biggest impact of digitization on our organization has been the demand from our clients. When technology is undergoing a change every second, our clients feel that, since we consult for them, it’s necessary for us to be at the forefront.”

### ... for engendering greater trust

Organizations that are both compliant with regulation and conscientious about creating safe and healthy workspaces, especially if they are transparent about their processes, will be well placed to engender trust, not just with employees, but also with clients and consumers. “If you are going to make any change in the goals of the organization, clarify these to people as early as you can,” says Peter. “Every person should know what they are working for, how their work is impacting clients, and how big that impact is.” Evaluate and manage the risks, so that you can work out what’s best for your organization and are able to stay stable among technological change.





# About this report

This report is based upon a Future of Work webinar held in June 2023 on Digitization and the Workforce. Watch it [here](#).

The experts contributing to this report are:



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Professional of Economics at the University of Birmingham, leader of the multidisciplinary Centre for Crime, Justice and Policing, and of the 21st Century Transnational Crime theme at the Institute for Global Innovation. He recently coauthored with Avik Chanda *Work 3.0*, a book charting the future of work.



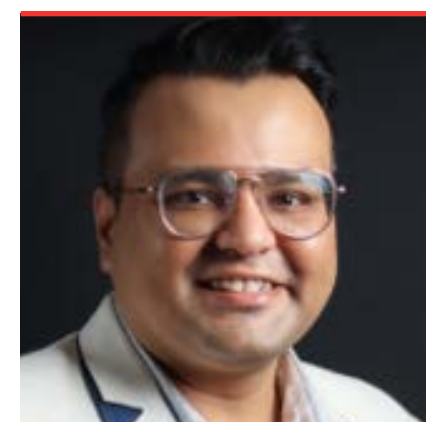
**Avik Chanda**

A columnist and business advisor, with two decades of Global Big 4 consulting experience. In addition to *Work 3.0*, he is also the bestselling author of *From Command to Empathy: Using EQ in the age of disruption*.



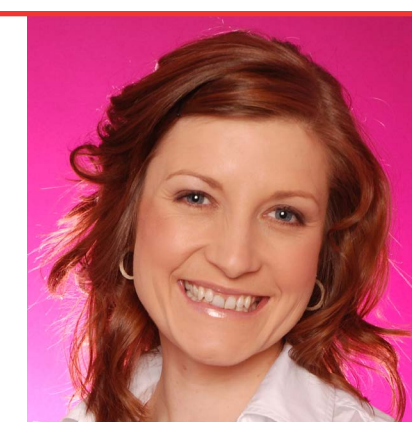
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Global Leader of Information Security and Privacy Management; Delivery Excellence; Governance, Risk, Compliance and Audit; Occupational Health, Safety Management at ZS Associates. He is also Chairperson of ZS India's Occupational Health, Safety, Psychosocial Well-being Committee.



**Kate Field**

Global Head of Health, Safety and Well-being at BSI. She has over 20 years of experience across all sectors, and is the author of the BSI's Prioritizing People Model®, which has now reached an audience in excess of four billion.



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