The Future of Work podcast is a weekly show where Jacob has in-depth conversations with senior level executives, business leaders, and bestselling authors around the world on the future of work and the future in general. Topics cover everything from AI and automation to the gig economy to big data to the future of learning and everything in between. Each episode explores a new topic and features a special guest.

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Jacob Morgan:	Welcome everyone to another episode of the Future of Work podcast, my guest today is Peter Walmsley, the Chief People Officer at GSN Games. And prior to that, he was the VP of HR at Electronic Arts. Peter, thank you for joining me.
Peter Walmsley:	No, it's a pleasure, very delighted to do so.
Jacob Morgan:	So, you must love games.
Peter Walmsley:	Yes and no. Yes, I do, but one of the things I think a lot of people who work in the games industry will say, at senior levels, they probably don't have enough time to play games, so, [00:00:30] I think yes, I do. But I don't have enough time to actually spend playing games as I would like.
Jacob Morgan:	So you get to work for the company that makes all these fun and addicting games, but you yourself don't get a chance to take advantage?
Peter Walmsley:	I sneak moments when my wife's not looking to actually quickly go on my phone but I usually get caught out.
Jacob Morgan:	Ah, yes. Well why don't you give listeners a little bit of background information about you.
Peter Walmsley:	Okay.
Jacob Morgan:	So how did you get in to the space that you're in now? And what is a day [00:01:00] in the life of Peter like?
Peter Walmsley:	All right. Okay. Well, I guess my background has been ... I started in learning and development for a number of companies based in the UK. That was insurance and other financial services, companies ... before I joined American Express, both on the private bank side and then American Express business travel. I learnt a lot there and started to take on a more European type of role. Before joining [00:01:30] a small management consultancy in the UK where I designed, delivered management development programs for two, three years. And actually went through the selling process for potential clients.

And then I joined Fidelity. Fidelity, at the time, owned, and still does, a company called Cult Telecom. Telecoms company based in London. In a learning |

development role, which then morphed in to more of an HR director role. At the time, the company was going through a significant [00:02:00] change. And I guess since then a lot of my career has been around working for American owned companies, either working in a pan European way, or over the last few years, having global responsibility from an HR perspective.

I was fortunate enough with Fidelity to get an opportunity to work in Paris for one of Fidelity's companies, HR Access. And then moved with them to Madrid, when we moved the company's head office. [00:02:30] And then, was headhunted to join Electronic Arts in 2013, based in Geneva in Switzerland. So I then moved my family again to Switzerland. Within two or three years, we had the opportunity to relocate to Redwood Shores in California. Again, with Electronic Arts.

Up until July ... June of last year when I joined GSN, initially in San Francisco, but then got moved here to Boston, where I'm now the Chief People Officer, [00:03:00] as you kindly said in your introduction.

Jacob Morgan: I forgive you for leaving the Bay area, Peter.

Peter Walmsley: Thank you very much. Well, you know, there's only so much sun you can deal with. When you've lived most of your life in England, three years of California sun is enough for me, so I had to get back seasons, that's what drove us.

Jacob Morgan: Sick of the sun.

Peter Walmsley: Yeah, sick of the sun. I'll probably be ridiculed now for that statement, but that's...

Jacob Morgan: Yeah.

Peter Walmsley: That's where it was.

Jacob Morgan: Very cool.

Peter Walmsley: Day in the life. Well interesting about [00:03:30] having a global role, quite often what I do is when I first get up in the morning, I usually spend an hour or so at home, on e-mail, addressing some of the responses to our teams in India. We have teams in Bangalore, and in London, Israel, in Tel Aviv, as well. And also in Kiev, in the Ukraine. So typically I would try and deal with a number of those queries, and they may well be early morning calls [00:04:00] I have with India, given at the moment they are 10 and a half hours ahead of us here in Boston.

What I will then do is come in to the office, and there's either a series of meetings, conference calls, series of exec team meetings during the course of the week. One on ones with my own team. A chance just to catch up with what's going on across the business. And then round about this time, if not earlier, probably round about 12 o'clock Boston time, San [00:04:30] Francisco emerges and then there's stuff to deal with, meetings with the teams down there.

That continues during the course of the afternoon. Six, seven o'clock, home. And quite often there's e-mail all the way through, or interaction during the course of the evening, depending on what's going on within the business.

So, I'd say it a combination of an early start, get stuff done, and probably a little bit of a late finish when trying to just make sure I can complete most of the things for the people who've got requests of me during the course of the day. [00:05:00] Or if I need to progress something. So yeah. [crosstalk 00:05:03]

Jacob Morgan: What about GSN Games? So for people that are not familiar with GSN Games, maybe you can let us know. How big is the company, what do you guys do, where are you based, all that sort of fun stuff?

Peter Walmsley: Okay. So based primarily ... probably 40% of the company is based in the US. 60% of it is not in US in places. We have a large studio in Bangalore, in India, employing [00:05:30] around 200 people. Have a studio in London with 40 to 50 people, based in the center of London, we've just moved offices, which is good. What else, we are here in Boston, about 90 people, San Francisco, about 40. We have some developers in Kiev, some team in Barcelona in Spain as well. So, effectively, GSN Games in part of GSN, people will know it from the [00:06:00] TV side, Wheel of Fortune on the game side, it's predominantly making games on social casino and skill games and bingo games. And, those are on mobile, predominantly, there is web based games as well.

Size of the company is around 500 people and, effectively, it's the design, development and implementation of those games. We have five key studios, [00:06:30] led by General Managers, back up with a support team, including HR, finance and all the usual functions that you would have. Been going since 2019, GSN is ultimately owned through a combination of Sony and AT&T. And, I'm delighted to say is very profitable.

Jacob Morgan: Did you say, 2019?

Peter Walmsley: No, I said 2009, sorry.

Jacob Morgan: I was going to say, are you from the future, what's going on?

Peter Walmsley: I am actually, I took a trip back just for this.

Jacob Morgan: [00:07:00] Cool, well, it's always fascinating to hear backgrounds about the individuals and the companies. So, now let's jump into the actual meat of the discussion and, I'm kind of curious, as a chief people officer, what are you paying attention to now? So, what's on your mind as far as people, technology, company stuff, what are you thinking about?

Peter Walmsley: I guess, from a company piece, we restructured the company [00:07:30] end of last year and into most of this year, spent a lot of time redefining our operating model, setting up the studio structure. So, a lot of my time this year, on my mind, is to ensure that all the actions that we've taken during the course of the year, have actually come to fruition and that we have a better structure as a

result. And also that the profitability is maintained and driven through, again, through some of those actions.

We also had a tough year from a people perspective, [00:08:00] both in terms of some of the restructures that we did and from my perspective, it's important to just keep tabs around the organization, just to see how people are thinking and feeling, in such a tumultuous year. And, that's really helping me think through what are some of the key programs and initiatives that we might need to put in place for next year.

So, I said, this year has probably been, and is continuing to be until [00:08:30] the end of the year, a year of inward reflection, really trying to restructure, make the organization more efficient and retain those key people that we've needed to during the course of the year, whilst we go through that process of change. So, that's probably kept me awake thinking that through and doing that on a global basis as well, yeah.

Jacob Morgan: Are you also thinking about the different technologies, like AI and automation or is that kind of maybe like a second priority for you, after you figure out this whole restructuring [00:09:00] and getting through this year and next?

Peter Walmsley: I think that's a secondary thing for me, although it's in the back of the minds of the studio heads. I think refocusing our attention this year, ensuring that we are delivering the profits that we know that we need to, ensuring that people are focused and delivering and are engaged through all that change, that really has been the priority and will probably continue as we get into the early part of next year.

Jacob Morgan: Got it. [00:09:30] I'm actually really curious, what it is like to work at GSN Games? So, for people that have never stepped foot in the company, have never read about the company, maybe you can give us a sense of what it's like to work there. Is it open offices or closed, flexible work or cubicles. What is the overall just general work environment?

Peter Walmsley: Yeah, I think it's a great place to work, very much it's open. We have games consoles around and we have opportunities for people to play games in [00:10:00] and around the office. I think, what we have done, is consolidated some of our space so we've got a great opportunity for people to get to know each other, mix and engage with others in the office. From a leadership perspective, it's very much an open culture, very open and transparent. If you've got questions of any of the senior team, they're always visible, always around and are available for any kind of conversation. It's not a formal structure from that perspective. I particularly like that.

[00:10:30] I think flexibility wise, there's always been... there's a balance there, I think historically, we were probably more flexible than we are right now and I think the reason why we are probably not as flexible at the moment, has been because we're really refocusing the companies efforts on driving the business forward. But, we have unlimited vacation here in the U.S, we have a good range of benefits. And, in the main, we are not the same [00:11:00] as a Electronic Arts

that's really crunching to hit a major deadline for one of their big triple A games, we have a good healthy culture in terms of the balance of work and people's private lives as well, which is something that I do believe in.

Jacob Morgan: And, what about... you mentioned it's not a very strict hierarchy, it's a little bit more open and transparent, so, would you say that it's... let's say that I just started working, day one, at GSN Games and I see the CEO walking down the hall. Is it a type of [00:11:30] corporate culture where I can go up to that person and say, hey, how's it going? I have a question for you...

Peter Walmsley: You absolutely could, yeah. The CEO is based in Santa Monica, in California, as is our CFO. You have the CPO, chief people officer, here plus two or three of the senior execs here. And, if you were going anywhere and walking around, yes you could. You could feel comfortable doing that as well and we're trying to make sure that we are being much more accessible, visible [00:12:00] and open and transparent with people.

Jacob Morgan: Cool, and what about offices? Do executives have offices at GSN? Or is everybody kind of in the same place?

Peter Walmsley: We do have offices for some of the more senior folks, a lot of that is tied into the confidential nature of what they're working on or what I'm working on, for example. But you do tend to find that it's not a place where people are just sitting there with the door shut and nobody can see you or walk in. From my own perspective, [00:12:30] I'm always out and about talking to people in and around the office. I also put in place, on a monthly basis, that I have coffee with a range of employees, just to find out what's going with them and what are some of the issues that they have and how I can help.

Jacob Morgan: Oh, very cool, I like that. Okay, so we've got a sense of the environment there, what about some of the, I don't want to say benefits or perks, because I'm more interested in ... I mean, because I saw online, it looks like you guys do various socials, I think you have some catered lunches, you have some breakfast things that you offer, [00:13:00] various games that are going on. Is there anything that you're doing as far as perks and benefits specifically that you think other people or other companies are not doing?

Peter Walmsley: I think...

Jacob Morgan: It's kind of hard to think about now because it's like, everyone has done something.

Peter Walmsley: Yeah, I was going to say that. I mean, if you look at... if I compared the range of benefits at Electronic Arts, which is clearly a larger organization, to ourselves. [00:13:30] No, I think they are broadly similar, I think one thing that we do, do differently is around the unlimited vacation for people. I know a number of companies have gone down that route and we are one of those. That's probably one of the areas that we have been focusing on because it's ties back into some of that flexibility for people.

Jacob Morgan:	Okay, what about as far as talent practices go? So, [00:14:00] do you do an annual employee engagement survey, annual performance review, traditional on-boarding. What are some of the talent practices that you employ and how are those working?
Peter Walmsley:	Well, I mean that's getting right to the heart of something that's very close to my thinking for what we need to do differently. Yes, we do have an annual review, yes we do like to make sure that all employees have goals in place and then they have a regular [00:14:30] opportunity to review those with their line manager. What I am looking to do differently next year is move away from the traditional cycle of setting goal, maybe having a mid-year discussion, getting to the end of the year, having a year-end discussion and then having some kind of rating.
	Based on an experience I had at Electronic Arts, I'm looking to move away from that and to really ensure that we build capability in managers [00:15:00] to help set goals with employees. And then those managers have a regular dialogue, maybe it's quarterly, at the very least, to sit down and review those goals and how people are progressing, maybe along five key questions. How are you doing, what's working, what's not working, what help do you need and what are your priorities for the next 90 days?
	Because if you think about it, the pace of organizational life has changed so much, to have an annual review is completely out of line with the pace [00:15:30] and rhythm of the business. And, as we all know, goals change, peoples focus change and making sure that managers and employees have that more regular dialogue is actually very important. And, ultimately, what we'll be looking to do is tie that all together at the year end, with an overall summary so that if I was doing your review, nothing that we discussed during the course of the year, and I summarize, should be a surprise to you because we've tackled it and addressed it during the course of the year.
	And, that we will move away from having a rating and [00:16:00] making sure that we educate leaders and managers to think carefully about how they need to allocate rewards to their employees, based on their performance during the course of the year.
Jacob Morgan:	So it sounds like you can still give the bonuses and the salary increases once a year but the conversations happen throughout the year leading up to that?
Peter Walmsley:	Absolutely right and that there is much focus, and quite often you hear from employees that they don't necessarily have regular dialogue on how they're doing and what's working and what's not. [00:16:30] And, what this will do is just encourage employees and managers to talk together more regularly about how things are going and what help they may need whether it's career development opportunities et cetera or some advice or guidance along the way. And, actually, not get blinded when it gets to year end by a rating that drives compensation and actually really think about, how did we apply rewards based on individuals performance during the course of the year.

Jacob Morgan:	[00:17:00] It probably needs to be a little bit unscripted though, right, because it's... I would imagine you can't just give everybody ten questions and say, all right managers every 90 days ask these ten questions to your employees and take them for a cup of coffee. It seems like you need to have people in those roles who are genuinely interested in having those conversations. So how do you bring that like human element in there and make it feel authentic instead [00:17:30] of scripted?
Peter Walmsley:	Yeah I think there's a couple of things. My intent would not be to make it prescriptive, but just to give some guidelines and a framework in which people operate and to encourage people, as you quite rightly said, to go in practice and on their own. I think part of where this happened in Electronic Arts, for example, part of it was around giving training, educating line managers, particularly that those who perhaps not [00:18:00] used to, or as comfortable, having those kind of conversations. And the other side of it was moving away from HR policing, whether or not those conversations were done, what happened in those conversations and requiring heavy documentation.
	I think that's where you get people worrying about it being absolutely right, following those ten questions. But actually encouraging manages to go and have conversations where, yeah, there's a broad [00:18:30] outline of what they might need to do, but actually to go and experiment. And then from an HR perspective, our role is to coach and guide people and help leaders through those conversations.
Jacob Morgan:	So what does that part look like? Would you maybe give a series of topics to your managers and say these are the things that you want to make sure you want to address when you have discussions with your employees. And then do you just take notes throughout the year and then just have like a binder on each employee or is there some kind of tool and technology involved?
Peter Walmsley:	[00:19:00] I mean depending on the quality of the HRS that you use, one of the things that we did do at EA was to make sure that people had the ability to make their own notes online, during the course of the year. That's certainly what I used to do. That could actually build into the actual HRIS, just make a few notes. There are a number of good technology systems outside in the marketplace that can bolt on to things like your e-mail to enable you... if [00:19:30] you and I were having a conversation and it was a mid-year review and I just wanted to capture a few notes, I could just quickly just enter that on a note against your name and that's my record that enables me to then think through carefully at the end of the year how you know how you're doing.
	So I would say, to make this work having a technology solution to back it up that is simple an affective and not cumbersome, and that actually helps the manager, will actually this program, [00:20:00] this type of program to be successful. And I have seen it be successful in that way.
Jacob Morgan:	What do you do for managers that... I'm asking because people ask me this quite a bit, you know there are some managers that you can train and coach and they understand the world of work is changing. And then there are some other

managers who are just sort of traditional, old school. They think hierarchy is good. They put in the time, they should be telling other people what to do, they've earned [00:20:30] it. What do you do with those types of managers that are just not embracing these new ideas? Do you just fire them if you can't retrain them or what's the solution?

Peter Walmsley: No, one of the things that we built into the process in a previous life was, to, in the first year of launching, was to have a survey for all employees, few questions, that basically gave feedback around, [00:21:00] did you have a goal setting conversation with a line manager, if you had one to one conversations how effective were they et cetera. And that would come together in a mini report that was given to line manages. What we said in the first year, was almost like there was an amnesty in the first year, which was to say we would have this survey on two occasions, but the information that was contained in it wouldn't be shared with the managers, line managers. It was more there from an HR perspective to use as a coaching [00:21:30] tool to help people, who were struggling to think through... here's the feedback that says you're not doing as effectively in these areas. Well how can we address that with you, what help do you need et cetera.

And so we would give people every opportunity to embrace the new process and the new way of doing it. And there was always going to be good and bad managers. Ultimately I guess, the point is, if someone is consistently not delivering for that team then we do have some choices to make. [00:22:00] Do we put them into an individual contributor role or do we ultimately say, actually maybe you're not right for this organization because if you cannot make that step change then we have to ask ourselves the question and you have to ask yourself the question, is this organization the right organization for you. But ultimately that would be a point when we've exhausted giving people the support, guidance and coaching to enable them to be more effective.

Jacob Morgan: Got it, but in other words [00:22:30] if people are not embracing those ideas and concepts through the coaching and mentoring then, time for them to go, right? [crosstalk 00:22:38]

Peter Walmsley: At some stage, yes, because if you're very clear and sincere about the culture you're trying to create in the organization, and if you have a number of people who are resisting that, then yes, ultimately, that could be the conclusion.

Jacob Morgan: Okay, got it good to know. So you talked about... you do have an annual performance review, you're very keen on [00:23:00] changing and exploring new ways of doing that, you still do an annual employee engagement survey I'm assuming?

Peter Walmsley: We have done that, yes. The last one was 2015, I think it was here, at GSN, it's certainly on the radar to do that next year as well.

Jacob Morgan: And what are your thoughts on those? Because there have been some companies that have gotten rid of them, some companies do them regularly,

some do every two years, every three years. What's your take on the annual [00:23:30] engagement survey, three to three years?

Peter Walmsley: Yeah, I mean I'm much around, whatever you do that leaders listen, really take note of the feedback, and do something with it and take some kind of sustainable action that is going to mean drive, engagement differently. And very often, what you do see in organizations, and I've worked in organizations where that's the case, there's a big furor about getting the annual [00:24:00] employee survey completed. Focus groups are put in place, but it doesn't necessarily lead to sustainable change. So what I like, and this was something that previous incarnations, companies that I worked with, we're moving towards, is actually having a survey that's based more around, what are the things that... how is Peter Walmsley doing against the variety of measures that are [00:24:30] important to that organization.

And that therefore, I would get a report at the end of the year to say, these the areas where you're doing well, here are some the areas where you might need to improve, this is your overall engagement score within your team. Because my ability to drive change in my team is much more powerful if I'm getting feedback from my team to say, this is working, this is working, this is [00:25:00] not working, this is what we need from you. And I think that's where you can drive change because you are directly linking it to increasing manager and leadership capability.

Sometimes I have found, historically that the generic company wide employee surveys aren't as affective as a survey on, what's Peter Walmsley's level of engagement, what's Peter Walmsley's team level of engagement and what actions does Peter Walmsley need to take to improve that engagement. The view being, that if all managers are focusing on engagement, where you [00:25:30] should have a more focused and engaged organization as a result. So I'm in favor of doing that, maybe it's not every year, because your ability to drive change quickly does take a little bit of time. But I'm also in favor of quick poll surveys too, if you feel there's an issue or you just want to test to see how people are thinking or feeling, doing that at any time.

Jacob Morgan: So it sounds like a mix of a more in- [00:26:00] depth engagement survey with some poll surveys in there?

Peter Walmsley: Correct but very much aimed at the manager level and not generic across the company as a whole.

Jacob Morgan: Got it. So what do you mean by that?

Peter Walmsley: Well, very often, it's a survey that's driven... a lot of organizations have surveys that are driven across key dimensions that are about the company as a whole. What do you think of the vision mission of the organization, how do we think we address [00:26:30] subject x, y or z. Whereas what I'm saying is, let's look at how effective is Peter Walmsley as a leader in communicating the strategy of the organization, the strategy of the team and the strategy of his group to his team. How effective is he at leading across whatever dimensions it is. So it's very much

about feedback to Peter Walmsley, rather than feed back to the organization as a whole.

Jacob Morgan: Got it.

Peter Walmsley: Then I can [00:27:00] drive the actions that I need to improve engagement with my team, in my area and that should make me a better leader in the organization. That's the difference.

Jacob Morgan: Okay that makes sense. So, in your engagement survey that you guys do, and I'm curious if you think timing matters. Because there are some companies who say that if you do it once every year, or once every two years, by the time you collect the data and develop a strategy around it, 16 months can go by, or 18 months can go by and at that [00:27:30] point your company looks totally different and it doesn't make sense. And then there are a lot of companies who still do the annual survey, or maybe every two years, so what are your thoughts on timing? Do you think doing it once every year, or two years, or three years still makes sense or is that kind of trying to drive forward while looking in the rear view mirror so to speak.

Peter Walmsley: To a certain extent it is. I think you have to... what we have to do with a lot of these processes Is make them nimble and [00:28:00] close the, or shorten the timeframe, with which it takes to actually complete these kind of exercises, which is why, again, I like the idea of having a survey at a manager level because as soon as I get the report I should be reading it, talking to someone about it and then communicating it to my team, putting an action plan in place, and off we go. That does not require anybody else other than me to really think that through, maybe talk to an HR professional about some advice and guidance [00:28:30] about what I might needs to differently, and put a plan in place.

So to me, that is so much more effective and quicker than, as you quite rightly say, having focus groups, having action plans, communicating those action plans, agreeing it et cetera. That can take way too long. I am very much in favor of shortening the time frame with which results are communicated, analyzed, leading to the beginning of the action process. And if it means you do it every year that's fine, I guess my experience [00:29:00] over the years has been, if I'm going to do it, I would do it every couple of years, but I would actually have some poll surveys along the way and I would make sure that any actions that any leaders take are baked into their goals for the year so there's some accountability for driving change.

Jacob Morgan: Got it. You know, the other thing that I always find fascinating, is that some of these engagement surveys are like a hundred questions and they ask literally everything that you can possibly think [00:29:30] of. Now, I'm not sure what your engagement surveys look like, but do you think that they should be this long in detail and basically covering everything or how would you structure them?

Peter Walmsley: I guess it's also it depends on what the organization is trying to achieve through asking those hundred questions. As somebody, probably like you, who's taken

surveys many times in their life, after a while you lose the will to live when it's become too long and [00:30:00] you almost get into neutrality mode when you're actually responding. I much prefer, maybe it's 15, 20 questions, maybe it's five to ten questions. I'd prefer real targeted key areas of focus rather than a broad cross-section. Because, you can't address all of those issues all of the time. So you have to think through strategically what are the key things that we want to know about, in this kind of structured [00:30:30] way, that really are going to enable us to listen and then drive change if change is required. So I'm much more in favor of a shortened version.

Jacob Morgan: You mentioned that you have teams that are spread out in various parts of the world and I know, especially in a lot of larger companies, one of the big challenges is how do you deal with different corporate cultures? Obviously India, Kiev, the United States, you mentioned Barcelona, I think Madrid. I mean these are all very different parts [00:31:00] of the world with different cultures, how do you deal with that?

Peter Walmsley: It is a good question. I have been on both sides of the fence, I've been in U.S organizations where I've been at the center and then you try to drive culture out and I've worked on the receiving end of those cultures, in various places in Europe. I think what I've tried to encourage with the teams that worked for me, is very much that we put in [00:31:30] place a frame work, maybe it's a set of principles about how we would like to focus, for example, on performance management, should we say, across the organization. But actually give a degree of flexibility, a degree, of flexibility on how that is implemented, particularly if culturally there is a different way in which employers and managers talk together.

                    So... and accept and value the difference that exists [00:32:00] around the world. So I wouldn't want it to be so formulaic that you have to drive it exactly the same way in the US, in London and then, as you say, Kiev and India. There has to be some acknowledgement, a recognition, of local culture and local practices but there has to be an overall, overarching framework in my mind, of broadly, these are the key things that are important to us. If some of the nuances are slightly different, [00:32:30] from a culture perspective, any of the countries that we operate in, then that's fine on that. And I wouldn't want us to be too dogmatic about that, if that makes sense?

Jacob Morgan: No... it totally. I'm glad you mentioned that because I think a lot of companies, they say, well how do we standardize this across every... you know, how do we make everybody believe the same thing, and act the same way. And it's tough, I don't think you can necessarily do that nor should you want to right?

Peter Walmsley: No. You have to get the balance behind... you know, what's the culture of the organization, and how do we make it live [00:33:00] and breathe in a way that feels right in that local culture and environment in which you're operating in on that. And having done that, and been on the receiving end, et cetera, it also requires as organizations to listen and hear what is being said locally and then adapt accordingly if they're getting the feedback that it's not quite working,

rather than being absolute around it's either going to work or it doesn't work kind of thing.

Jacob Morgan: [00:33:30] Yeah, no I love that approach. So, in other words we should maybe focus on the big picture ideas of values, of what the organization stands for, but allow for some flexibility in different cultures because how India might perceive something, or want to do something versus the United States, are going to be very different and that's okay.

Peter Walmsley: That's okay. Again, back to you've got the core set of guiding principles to guide you but the manner in which you might get [00:34:00] to that point is going to be slightly different depending on where you are.

Jacob Morgan: Got it, okay. That's fair enough. I saw an article you were featured in, and you talked about this HR, CFO, CEO relationship. So maybe you can talk about that for a minute because I thought that was pretty interesting.

Peter Walmsley: That's interesting, it's amazing what you can find out these days isn't it? Okay, yeah I mean, I am a, I guess, the real relationships that I had [00:34:30] over the last few years whether it's being supporting senior leaders. I have found that in some organizations the CFO, and head of HR can be having different perspectives, which is understandable but can be a little bit at loggerheads because their perspectives are so different. I come from the other way, is that when I'm working with the CEO in this organization or any other [00:35:00] organization, that is a very critical relationship for me. But also the CFO is, for me, is my most critical partner in the organization in many ways because their view of the world, their view of the business, how successful it is, what are some of the key things that we might need to consider when thinking through from a people perspective, are important.

And whereas I might be trying to think things strategically looking at it from an engagement perspective, I've also going to look at the commercial [00:35:30] reality and really make sure that whatever I am thinking I can discuss it openly with the CEO and the CFO together. And I am a firm believer in really developing strong working relationships with my the CFO in any organization that I work with and obviously with that the CEO who'd be my boss. So here at GSN, you know we have a... I'd call it a holy alliance as opposed to an unholy one between the CFO, the CEO [00:36:00] and myself and we do talk regularly and we all have different perspectives. But we look to see how we can come up with a common approach and view or the CEO might call it, which is his responsibility and accountability. But he's got a couple of advisors who would have slightly different perspectives but he's prepared to listen to both. Yes, so I work hard at developing that relationship with the CFO.

Jacob Morgan: That's clearly because they control the [00:36:30] purse strings, right?

Peter Walmsley: Yeah it's not only that they control the purse strings, although that does help, it's also because they have a very unique perspective on the business strategic play, I guess you being in charge of the short, long term range planning, They... I just find it interesting that to make sure that whatever I'm doing is aligned to the

strategy of the organization. And that we're not doing things at a time when financially we can't afford it, or it's going to be a strain on the organizations So I'm just trying [00:37:00] to balance what I do versus the commercial realities of the organization.

Jacob Morgan: Fair enough. So how do you convince, or get budget for certain things? So let's say for example, I don't know, free food, or redesigning an office, or any of those types of things. How do you go about trying to get resources for that and trying to convince people for it, [00:37:30] because it sounds like the ROI stuff can be kind of tricky right? How do you justify the value of something like that to your CEO and CFO?

Peter Walmsley: Yeah, that's a good question actually. One of the things that I do is spend a lot of time with our studio leaders, our general managers, so if you like, each of the studios could be classed as a separate business so what I would do is talk to each of those GM's to see what's important to them. [00:38:00] And I'm a firm believer in thinking through what are they hearing, what's important in their side of the business, and what I tend to do is to use their collective input to actually start to build a case of why we should do x and y.

Because quite often the CEO or the CFO would say, so what do the GM's think, what's their view on this? So what would do is say, I've been thinking about this, I've been hearing some [00:38:30] thoughts that we should have some free food every day, what do you think? Okay, and then we'd just have a discussion one-on-one want, I may well put together a summary of that feedback, we'll probably kick it around a couple of times and then people would say, we know what, maybe we should, every Friday of the month. Something like that. And then we can have a little bit of a social afterwards.

And I would work with my facilities lead here to then put a cost against that and then that would be the opportunity to go share it with the CFO. So [00:39:00] I am not saying this is Peter Walmsley saying we must do this, I'm saying you know, here's some feedback from the business we think this is a critical thing. The GM's are thinking we should do this is like it's cost X, what do you think? So that I've become a facilitator of that process as much as I am an influencer of that process.

Jacob Morgan: Got it, so in other words you have some sort of anecdotal data to present to your team.

Peter Walmsley: Absolutely.

Jacob Morgan: Okay.

Peter Walmsley: [00:39:30] Anecdotal or data driven, absolutely. But actually use the power of the GM's and what's going on in their business, to say well look, actually maybe this is an opportunity for something... for us to do something on a global basis across the whole of the company.

Jacob Morgan:	Makes sense, makes sense. What about data and people analytics in general? Are you guys doing anything around that at GSN or thinking about doing anything around that?
Peter Walmsley:	We are not we're not doing enough, is the honest answers that question. [00:40:00] One of the budget discussions that will be very live right now, and I'm using all of my influencing repertoire, is around us looking at a different... potentially looking at a different HRIS for the organization, which will enable us to provide a system driven report for the company to use [00:40:30] for the leaders to make better decisions. Because at the moment, everything is manual, too much of it is manual or it's out of a system that's then downloadable, you've got to crunch it and put something together. So we do have data but it's not quick, nimble, effective, it's not the fingertips of our leaders and that's the kind of environment I would like to get to on that.
Jacob Morgan:	I'm sure many people would love to get to that environment, but it's not an easy thing to do.
Peter Walmsley:	It's not an easy thing to do. I'm fortunate coming from previous incarnations [00:41:00] where I could just tap into my screen and I'd get a quick profile of the number of levels in the organization, and what the span of control might be, where the open positions are. At the moment everything that we're doing is so manual, manually driven out of a system, that you know, I think we spend way too much time extracting data rather than actually thinking through what's the implication of what the data is saying.
Jacob Morgan:	Yeah, I'm sure that can be quite [00:41:30] a pain.
Peter Walmsley:	Yeah, and that's the cultural change that I will be bringing about.
Jacob Morgan:	Very cool. Well I'm curious how you see the role of HR in general, or the role of HR people, employee experience, people call it different things. How do you see your role evolving and what do you think the future of HR or people looks like?
Peter Walmsley:	Yeah, well I think that the role for me, has always been critical to an organization to be allying [00:42:00] to the business strategy, from my perspective, it's always been very important to be a partner with the CEO, understanding the business, understanding what some of the business changes might be and then thinking through what are the people implications of those. And addressing those in whatever location that we need to, whether it's individual locations or it's across the company globe as a whole.

I guess some of the challenges that are coming around, looking at the future of work, which talked about, [00:42:30] is I see more and more potential employees wanting greater flexibility in their life. I think the days of office standard, standard office environment, standard number of hours et cetera are going or have gone. People are online at various times of the day and night and I can see more and more of our labor [00:43:00] over subsequent years, maybe being remote. Maybe more flexibility around that labor than is the case today. |

So I can see there may well be lesser requirements to have an office that we have here of 90 people.

Maybe it's a small office that has a core number of people but the facility for people to drop in and connect if they need to, but I would expect a more distributed workforce. And [00:43:30] maybe that workforce is not necessarily permanent employees either. So I can see that changing over time as well.

Jacob Morgan: Yeah, the gig economy, I know a lot of people talk about that.

Peter Walmsley: Yeah and I can see that happening more and more, that you know you employ people for a focused set of deliverables at of a period of time, you may bring them together for specific pieces, but you just need to think about it differently and how we go about it.

Jacob Morgan: Got it.

Peter Walmsley: Yeah, telecommuting, remote working, a mix of freelance [00:44:00] contingent workers, probably more control over that to ensure that people are delivering and that we've got the right checks and balances in all of that but I do see that as a key driver going forward.

Jacob Morgan: Perfect. I have a couple of questions that people wanted to ask you from LinkedIn so let me get to the first one. The first one is from Bella Zanesco, hopefully I said her name correctly. What are the top things that you guys do [00:44:30] to drive increase shareholder value around employee experience, keeping in mind that you're gaming companies, so she's thinking that everybody's always just staring at screens. So what are you doing around that?

Peter Walmsley: Yes hopefully they're interacting with their screens.

Jacob Morgan: Hopefully yes.

Peter Walmsley: Hopefully, I'd better go and check actually. I think the shareholder value comes back to some of the things that we have been really focused on this year, is really getting that balance right between having the right model, the [00:45:00] right level of accountability at the studio level. So, for example, previously our general managers didn't necessarily have an end to end picture of all the resources that were providing input into their games. The design and execution of the games, they now have that complete accountability for the end to end process. From design through being alive and ongoing live operations on that. Which means [00:45:30] that they can have a greater handle on the profitability and every decision they make they know what impact it will have on the business.

Which ultimately, as we've set targets for the year, will enable us to try greater shareholder return because we've got a clear a sense of what we're trying to achieve, how we're trying to achieve it, and what actions and decisions that we might need to take along the way. So I think that's one of the actions was around, making sure that we had an effective [00:46:00] operating model. The

other was making sure that we have an effective workforce plan either by studio or by location. And that we've got a clear sense of what the costs of both of those might involve and are taking the right decisions about where we want to hire our talent.

We have invested in talent in other parts of the world, as I described earlier, and that is helping us to continue to improve the operating margin of the business and then [00:46:30] focus on that return back to the shareholder. So I would say ultimately everything that we're doing is trying to get that balance between having a great experience for employees who enjoy working on products and games where they can see the end result, as well as making sure that we can do that in a way that is cost effective and drives revenue and drives a return to the shareholder. If that answers the question.

Jacob Morgan: I think so yeah. And I kind of wonder if Bella was also curious about [00:47:00] how do you get people off of screens to kind of do things together, but it sounds like you guys do various socials, you do events.

Peter Walmsley: We do socials, we do events, we might have a game night when it's a launch of a new product, we'll get everybody together and have some fun linked to that. You know, we do also some work from a volunteering perspective and encourage people in the locations to go and volunteer in their local community and do that together. [00:47:30] But you also tend to find that within the studio, there's a high level of collaboration anyway. So you if you're an engineer, or production engineer, or design consultant, or an artist, you have to be in close collaboration with everybody in that team to ensure that we're designing the right game in the right way on that. So whilst people may be staring at their screens there is an awful lot of office, and interoffice, and inter-location [00:48:00] collaboration, by the very nature of what we do.

Jacob Morgan: Next question is from Chad Atwell and he said I'd love to hear how they structure HR internationally to deliver a consistent employer brand and drive these innovative practices, how do they balance a centralized and efficient operating model, with delivering services for the organization globally? That sounds like something right out of a business book.

Peter Walmsley: It does and the last word you forgot was, discuss, [crosstalk 00:48:33], [00:48:30] in less than 300 words. The reality, the way that I have always looked about HR is, you've got to balance a company like ours, you've got to balance the functional accountability that people might have, with the location. So, for example, we have a studio in Bangalore. I have an HR director who is based in Bangalore, she reports to me and to the local country manager [00:49:00] and she is accountable both for ensuring that the studio is supported from an HR business partner perspective, but she's also accountable for ensuring that we are compliant with any India legislation and any of the practices that we need to be aware of locally.

So that's back to what I said earlier, is there may be certain practices or frameworks that we want to put in place globally, well it's [00:49:30] her role to help us think through what that might look like in Bangalore and if there are

some nuances that we need to consider that will make it effective locally there. So she will partner with the studio lead for that part of the business, and she will work closely with me so I help with the business, set the direction from an HR perspective, but very much we have a triangle between myself, the studio general [00:50:00] manager, and my local HR person in each of the locations to ensure that we're all aligned and that we're clear about what we're trying to do and how effectively we are doing it on that.

And I think if you operate on that basis the actual sort of boundary between any kind of center and local, disappears because you are always having open conversations about what will it take to make it work on a global basis or on a logical basis.

Jacob Morgan: That makes sense. Then last question [00:50:30] for you is from Don C, who said, I'd be interested to know what IT, and in parentheses he wrote, HW and SW which, to be honest I'm not entirely sure what HW and SW stands for. But he said I'd be interested... oh hardware and software okay, duh. I'd be interested to know...

Peter Walmsley: I'm glad you said that and not me.

Jacob Morgan: It's been a long morning. So I'd be interested know what IT solutions they're using in exploring to support the visual [00:51:00] collaboration needs of distributed creative teams engaged in game design. That's actually an interesting question.

Peter Walmsley: Yeah, I'll be honest with you I am not the best person to ask that. I would certainly address that with the person who wrote the question, I did see it on LinkedIn and actually provided him with a bit of an answer. Because I don't actually have enough of that knowledge to answer that question right now.

Jacob Morgan: That's a CCIO question?

Peter Walmsley: Yes, [00:51:30] exactly. So I will make the commitment to get back to that person.

Jacob Morgan: Perfect, alight, well thank you very much. Well we have a couple of minutes left and I have some fun questions to ask you in just a minute, but before I ask you those questions, is there anything else you wanted to touch on that I forgot or neglected to ask you?

Peter Walmsley: No, not at all, only that having the job I do is a fantastic job and partnering with a business to help [00:52:00] drive change is what it's all about. And, I love the fact of anyone who is pursuing a career in HR, to ensure that they really are aligned to the business and understand the business and help drive change. And that will make your job very rewarding.

Jacob Morgan: Sounds like you're optimistic about the future of HR.

Peter Walmsley: I am always optimistic, absolutely.

Jacob Morgan:	Yeah right, well a couple fun questions for you now. The first one is, what's the most embarrassing moment you've ever had at work.
Peter Walmsley:	[00:52:30] Gosh, I don't think I've had many... being shouted at by my boss across an open plan office of about 60 people, where she was just shouting and screaming at me from one end to the other. I won't go into all of the ins and outs of what and why I but that was pretty embarrassing in front of 60 people who worked for me.
Jacob Morgan:	What did you do Peter?
Peter Walmsley:	I'm not telling.
Jacob Morgan:	You must have done something?
Peter Walmsley:	[00:53:00] Allegedly I may have, or I may not have. Who knows?
Jacob Morgan:	That's fine, that's a good one actually. See, some people listening to that might say, see, that's why you should have a closed plan.
Peter Walmsley:	I guess so.
Jacob Morgan:	But I guess if somebody's shouting across the office, it doesn't matter what kind of a floor plan you have does it?
Peter Walmsley:	It doesn't, it's loud enough, absolutely.
Jacob Morgan:	If you were a superhero who would you be?
Peter Walmsley:	[00:53:30] I think I would be, I'd be Superman and I'd go and solve situations before they occurred.
Jacob Morgan:	Fair enough. What's a book that you recommend, it could be a business book or a non-business book.
Peter Walmsley:	I've always liked John Kotters book on change, I can't remember the name off the top of my head. But it's his book on change. I've just found over the years it's something that I've gone back to [00:54:00] year... every year almost, to look at some of his principles about how to lead and manage change. And I just love it, it's become one of those things that I've used, but I just don't have it to hand to give you that correct title. But it's John... Leading Change, John Kotter, Leading Change.
Jacob Morgan:	I remember, I remember, I actually leveraged and had an opportunity to speak with John Kotter on the phone when I was working on my previous book that came out in 2014 on the future of work. So he definitely has some good stuff. [00:54:30] If you were doing a different career, what do you think you would have ended up doing?
Peter Walmsley:	I would've... I have to say this because I'm English as opposed to American, I would have loved to have been the Prime Minister of England.

Jacob Morgan: Wow, just a small little Prime Minister role.

Peter Walmsley: Absolutely, yeah, and I probably would have liked to have done it for about eight years, two terms.

Jacob Morgan: Are you into politics?

Peter Walmsley: I am [00:55:00] yes and that's...

Jacob Morgan: Prime Minister, Prime Minister, alright that's a good one.

Peter Walmsley: That's what I would have loved to have been.

Jacob Morgan: If you could have dinner with anybody alive or dead, who would it be and why?

Peter Walmsley: It would be Mahatma Gandhi and I would love just to understand how he could lead a group of people in a non-confrontational way to drive change.

Jacob Morgan: Fascinating, yeah, that's actually very interesting [00:55:30] thing to have a conversation with him about. If you could live anywhere in the world, where would it be?

Peter Walmsley: That's an interesting one. Oh gosh, I've lived in quite a few of the places that are...

Jacob Morgan: Yeah, you've kind of lived everywhere.

Peter Walmsley: I've lived in a few continents yeah. If my wife listens to this, she'd say, we're not moving again. [00:56:00] I would like to live, I think on an island somewhere, let me think, where would I go. I'd probably go to the Caribbean maybe on that. Or I'd go back and live in Spain, in a heartbeat.

Jacob Morgan: Yeah, Spain is gorgeous. Living on an Island isn't that bad either.

Peter Walmsley: No, quite.

Jacob Morgan: If you could get rid of one workplace practice at your company, tomorrow, what [00:56:30] workplace practice would you get rid of?

Peter Walmsley: I think, lengthy approval chains.

Jacob Morgan: So in other words...

Peter Walmsley: So when people are looking to spend some money or get something done, the approval process is too unwieldy and takes too long, so I would give people greater accountability and empowerment.

Jacob Morgan: [00:57:00] If you could implement one workplace practice, which one would you implement tomorrow?

Peter Walmsley: It would be a new performance management process. Get managers, employees talking together more often, more effectively.

Jacob Morgan: And that's one of the things that we talked about earlier so perfect. Well I think I've asked you everything I could possibly think of asking you, [00:57:30] so maybe last thing is, what advice do you have for individuals and organizations that are thinking about the future of work and people. Maybe let's start with an entry or maybe mid-level employee, anything that they can do or think about to help progress and further their career inside of a company?

Peter Walmsley: Yeah, I think couple things. One is embrace. Too often over my career [00:58:00] I've seen people resist change for all kinds of reasons and they're all good reasons. But I think keeping an open mind, thinking through how we can adapt and adopt, reinventing ourselves on a regular basis. I think that's what I would do. I would encourage people to do more often. It's almost, suspend where you are and think about how you can embrace a new way of working and operating and think about the new skills that you might need to be effective in that environment.

Jacob Morgan: [00:58:30] What advice do you have for executives that are running these global companies?

Peter Walmsley: It's to listen. Listen and hear and move away from, what might be perceived as the personal discomfort to themselves and the threat to their position, and just look to embrace change as well and take some risks. Take some good [00:59:00] calculated risks and have the courage to take those decisions.

Jacob Morgan: I like that, I think that's a great way to wrap up. Well Peter, thank you so much for taking time out of your day to speak with me. Where can people go to learn more about you, or GSN Games or to connect with you in any way.

Peter Walmsley: They can go to my LinkedIn profile, very happy to connect, to reach out. And for GSN, gsn.com. But if you want anything please come and talk to me, be glad [00:59:30] to help.

Jacob Morgan: Perfect, well Peter thank you again for taking time out of your day.

Peter Walmsley: Thank you so much, this was very enjoyable. I can't believe an hour's gone, so thank you very much. [crosstalk 00:59:39]

Jacob Morgan: That's the best feedback I can get. Well, thanks again and thanks everyone for tuning in to this week's episode of the Future of Work podcast, my guest, again, has been Peter Walmsley, the Chief People Officer at GSN Games. I will see all of you next week.