

# TALENT MANAGEMENT

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## TALENT MANAGEMENT

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### FULFILLMENT

# 'Great resignation' quitters aren't just out for the money

The Covid crisis has prompted many of us to switch jobs. People's reasons for moving have been varied, but the pursuit of financial gain ranks low on the list

#### Nick Martindale

There has been much talk lately about the so-called great resignation – a wave of employees quitting their jobs. Research by recruitment company Randstad has found that almost a quarter (24%) of employees in the UK are planning to change employers in the next six months.

What are the key factors fuelling this trend? For many people, this is about far more than money. It's a direct reaction to how employers have responded to the Covid crisis.

A lawyer who's recently changed firms explains his decision. "I was not really happy with how my [previous] firm had treated staff during the lockdowns," he says, referring to the redundancies and pay cuts it had chosen to enforce.

"There was also a lack of clarity about paths to career progression and promotion. That combination prompted me to start looking at other employment opportunities," he says, adding that all he wanted in terms of pay was parity with his previous reward package.

A customer service manager in the software sector recently moved to a similar job at a different company. He was motivated by a mix of frustration with his former role and a change in circumstances.

"During the first lockdown, we sold our property and relocated two hours from our hometown to be nearer to extended family," he says. "At the end of 2020, I was promoted and promised a pay rise. But, owing to Covid's impact on the business, there was a pay freeze. As you can imagine, that was demotivating."

The main attraction of the new job he landed was the fact that it's a fully remote role, he says, adding that he probably wouldn't have quit if it hadn't been for the Covid crisis.

One designer who was working at an agency in London moved back to his native Scotland in the depths of the Covid crisis. He explains that he soon started feeling disconnected from his employer, because "there was a lack of support, social interaction or collaboration. I realised that, for my career to progress, it couldn't happen there."

He now works for an agency in another part of England. The flexible working provisions it offered was a key attraction.

"I was looking for an opportunity that would allow me to move whenever the time was right, giving me scope to find somewhere suitable to



live," he says. "But I also wanted to be going into a studio, as I had been missing the social and collaborative aspects this offered."

Dissatisfaction with an employer is far from the only factor that's been motivating people to move, of course. Others have used their time on furlough to reassess what they want from their careers.

Among them is digital marketing executive Amy Williamson. She has moved from Structherm, a

manufacturer of wall insulation, to Xpand Marketing, a digital agency based in Saltaire, West Yorkshire.

"I was put on furlough until construction was classed as essential work," she says. "This gave me a lot of time to think. There was a realisation that life is short. I wanted to ensure that I wouldn't have any regrets about my career when I look back on it. Personal development has always been important to me, but I'd lost sight of wanting to do

more in my previous role because I was happy in it. I realised that there was a desire to do things that would be better for my mental health. They included following my dream to work on the agency side."

At the beginning of the pandemic, Barry Hicks had been working in the construction industry for more than seven years. Like Williamson, he used his time on furlough to reassess his career.

"Construction is the harshest industry I have worked in," Hicks says. "Extremely long hours come with the job – I'd often leave for work at 5.30am and not return until 8pm."

Having been inspired by his own young family to work with children, Hicks found a role with Kibble, a young persons' care support service, where he obtained a higher national certificate in social services.

"I can honestly say that this has been the best move I've ever made," he says. "I'm now able to spend more time with my family and manage my shifts around my life with them. I reflect much more on the impact I've made during a day's work and believe that the role has made me a better person."

Some movers have been driven by practical necessity, with the economic fallout from the Covid crisis pushing them into new roles. Melissa Hull previously ran her own consultancy, but work dried up after the pandemic started.

"I drew on my savings and hunkered down at home, using the time to read and take courses," she says. After being approached by tech marketing firm Fox Agency, Hull accepted the position of CFO. The flexibility on offer was a big pull.

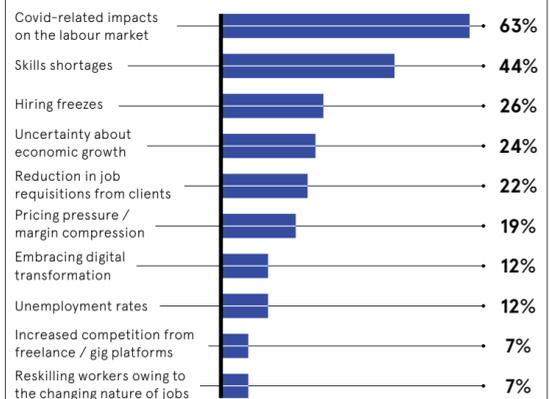
"The job doesn't tie me to London, which meant that I was able to work from Italy in the summer," she says. "There's so much to see and do in the world. Working for a firm that understands this is so refreshing."

Others have taken the opposite route. Patrick Southwell, co-founder of PR agency Five Not 10, left a full-time job and fulfilled his dream of starting his own business.

"I wanted to be the master of my own destiny, free of the complications of a big organisation," he explains. "Life suddenly seemed too fragile and short to keep doing something that wasn't quite right. I realised that the only way to get a job that was as close to perfect as it could be would be to create it myself. Without the pandemic, I'd probably still be in the same role as before, not feeling fulfilled."

### THE DIFFICULTIES THAT RECRUITERS ARE FACING

Main challenges cited by staffing and recruitment firms worldwide





Jung Getty via Gettyimages

SKILLS

# How recruiters can bridge the shortfall in labour and skills

Bolder investments in learning and development, combined with imaginative approaches to recruitment, could help employers to tackle an increasingly serious blockage in the talent pipeline

Cath Everett

Many developed economies around the world are facing widespread shortages of labour and skills as they reopen for business. A case in point is the UK, which is experiencing a perfect storm. While 15 out of 18 sectors are reporting record vacancy levels, according to the Office for National Statistics, a decrease in the supply of labour is causing problems across the economy. The Resolution Foundation and the Centre for Economic Performance at the London School of Economics recently published a study on the impact that Covid-19 has had on the labour market. Their *Begin Again?* research report reveals that the number of people in the UK who are economically inactive – that is, neither working nor seeking work – has increased

by 586,000 since the start of the Covid crisis. This growth has been particularly marked among people aged between 55 and 64. That bucks a decade-long pre-pandemic trend in which over-50s accounted for 88% of the growth in the overall size of the labour market. Men aged 25 to 34 constitute another group to have become significantly less economically active. The loss of EU workers is also being felt, reports Gerwyn Davies, senior adviser on labour market policy at the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD). While Brexit had already deterred many of them from working in the UK, EU-wide migration restrictions prompted by the pandemic have likewise taken their toll. This situation has had a particularly serious

impact on low-paid sectors such as food processing and social care, which the UK's domestic workforce tends to view as unattractive. "It feels as though the shortfall is much higher than it is, as the number of older and EU workers rose sharply over the decade to 2020 in line with an increase in employment, so that supply met demand," Davies says. "But, because there are fewer of them now, it's come as a big shock. Employers are scrambling to fill jobs." While he believes it was always a "problem waiting to happen", Davies adds that it couldn't have come at a worse time, with recruitment activity being so intense. Skills shortages are also a drag on the UK's economic growth. While these are nothing new, they are being exacerbated by the general lack of labour. The expertise available on the market is increasingly failing to match employers' needs.

“People want to work in places where both their role and their organisation have meaning and purpose

Another important factor, which has tended to go under the radar, is the so-called skills mismatch. Davies explains: "The vast bulk of jobs created in the UK over the past decade have been professional and managerial, but educational attainment levels have not risen in line with that growth. There is still a relatively high proportion of young people who haven't attained A-levels, which means that employers are having difficulties filling those positions." Corina Forman, HR director at delivery network APC Overnight, views the skills mismatch as a growing problem. "Some of this is down to the way that technology is reshaping our world. It is creating different ways of working, changing employees' expectations and leaving everyone running to catch up," she says. "If we as employers continue defining skills and talent as relatively fixed attributes that people either have or don't have, the skills shortages will continue." When recruiting, it's important to define skills more broadly, considering how adaptable and innovative people are and evaluating their propensity to learn, Forman argues. As an example of this approach, which values aptitude as highly as experience and transferable skills, she cites the company's new recruitment manager, who

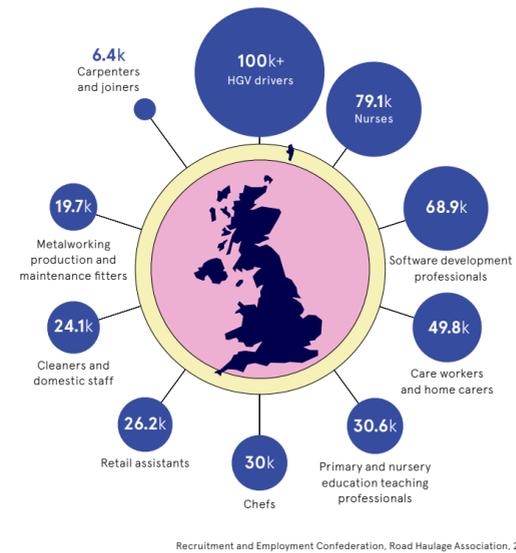
has a background in sales rather than HR. "If you define skills more broadly, you can create workplace learning cultures that are able to deal with continuous change as part of working life," Forman says. This kind of approach will only become more important over time, according to the *UK Skills Mismatch in 2030* research paper published by the Industrial Strategy Council, a body that advises the government. It indicates that, because 80% of the workforce in 2030 is already in employment today, reskilling will be vital until the end of the decade if employers and the wider economy are to avoid constraints to their competitiveness and growth. The key problem is that levels of government and employer investment in adult training, which were already low, have "remained flat at best", the paper states. This means that, if no significant changes are made, up to a fifth of the nation's workforce could lack the ability to do their jobs properly in nine years' time. That's particularly true with respect to competence in technical fields, but management skills such as decision-making could also be in extremely short supply. To ensure that APC Overnight's workforce has the required skills, Forman has introduced a range of learning and development pathways. These include a two-year

“For many years, employers have been able to do what they wanted, but the shoe is now very much on the other foot

leadership programme, a dedicated learning academy and a mobile app that enables employees to undertake their training in "bite-sized chunks". Samantha Edmondson, head of talent at quantum computing start-up Universal Quantum, has identified informal learning events as an effective way of closing skills gaps. For example, one of the company's quantum physicists offers an hour-long drop-in session once a week to take people through the subject's basic concepts at their own pace and answer their questions. Learning and development opportunities of this nature also help to build employee engagement, which in turn aids staff retention. This is particularly valuable in an employment market where "everyone is competing with everyone else for talent" and wage inflation is starting to mount. So says Steven Kirkpatrick, CEO for the UK and Ireland at Gojob, a digital recruitment agency. The best approach for employers, he argues, "is to focus on engagement, engagement, engagement. This entails doing everything you can to build a connection with employees and looking after the talent you have. For many years, employers have been able to do what they wanted, but the shoe is now very much on the other foot." Other ways for employers to ensure that their workers are fully engaged include having a leadership team that prioritises people, developing a culture of inclusivity supporting flexible working and promoting the notion of "purpose", as Edmondson explains. "People want to work in places where their role and their organisation have meaning and purpose," she says. "So this is about creating an environment in which everyone knows their true contribution." This is not to say that employers should forget about the potential of external recruitment. "Employers need to try as wide a range of tactics as possible to offset the current situation, in which the demand for labour vastly exceeds the supply," says Davies, who suggests measures such as expanding the number of recruitment channels they use and widening opportunities for groups such as older returners or people with disabilities. "This is about taking a more imaginative approach." Is the labour and skills crisis just a pandemic-related blip or will it persist? It's impossible to know for sure, Davies says, but improvements are unlikely while immigration problems continue and many older people stay economically inactive. One thing is clear, though: employers need to act urgently. "We're competing with countries such as China every day. If we continue letting the situation worsen, this country could become unattractive as a destination for global investment," Kirkpatrick warns. "So we have to be agile and creative. This is survival of the fittest." ●

## HELP WANTED

Worker shortages in the UK's 10 most in-demand occupations, August 2021

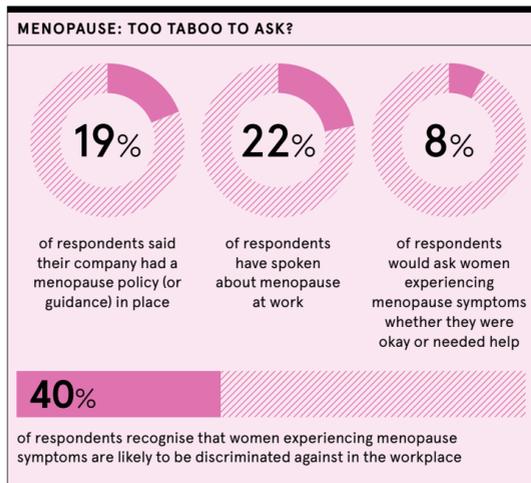


# New app helps employers support their people going through menopause

If you think menopause is just a women's issue, think again. It's a workplace issue. Women of menopausal age are the fastest-growing demographic in the UK workforce today

Women account for just under half the UK workforce and millions of them will go through the menopause during their working lives. Support for women experiencing menopause is still very limited; even talking about the menopause can often be off limits at work, despite recent attempts to break down barriers. Startlingly, about 63% of women going through the menopause say their symptoms have had a negative impact on their work, according to a survey. Perhaps more worrying is that a third take sick leave because of their symptoms. One in four considers leaving their job because of symptoms – and one in eight actually does.

Employers are beginning to respond to the need for change in the workplace, spurred on by high-profile campaigns fronted by celebrities including Davina McCall and Karren Brady. Santander UK, the financial services group, is now providing menopause support with Peppy, an app that connects employees to expert healthcare practitioners for under-served areas of healthcare. When Santander took part in a pilot with Peppy there were 50 allocated places – yet more than 200 women applied. 90% said they felt more positive about Santander as an employer as a result of receiving menopause support with Peppy and 76% said their symptoms had improved. Following the success of this pilot, Santander made Peppy Menopause support available to all 21,000 UK employees. Theresa Winters, senior HR manager, employee experience at Santander UK, says: "Menopause isn't just a women's issue, it's a workplace issue. Our aim as an organisation is to normalise discussion about menopause at work and provide the right information, guidance and practical support to those needing help to manage their own menopause journey."



Kathy Abernethy, Peppy's director of menopause services, says: "There's a huge appetite for change at work. People are recognising that women going through the menopause are likely to be discriminated against in the workplace and are taking action to support them. Employers are realising that menopause support is vital to improving employee wellbeing and gender diversity." Peppy works with organisations of all kinds across the private and public sectors to give their people access to remote, specialist support in some of the most under-served areas of healthcare. As well as its menopause service, the award-winning app offers expert support for all stages of fertility, pregnancy, early parenthood and common men's health issues. Peppy is a first-of-its-kind healthcare app, delivered as an employee benefit, that gives employees access to highly-trained experts via one-to-one chat and virtual consultations, at the touch of a button on their smartphone. The company also offers specialist video call appointments, targeted mental wellbeing programmes, an extensive library of premium content resources and live events. The app service was created when its three founders – Mridula Pore, Evan Harris and Max Landry – all experienced

“Menopause isn't just a women's issue, it's a workplace issue

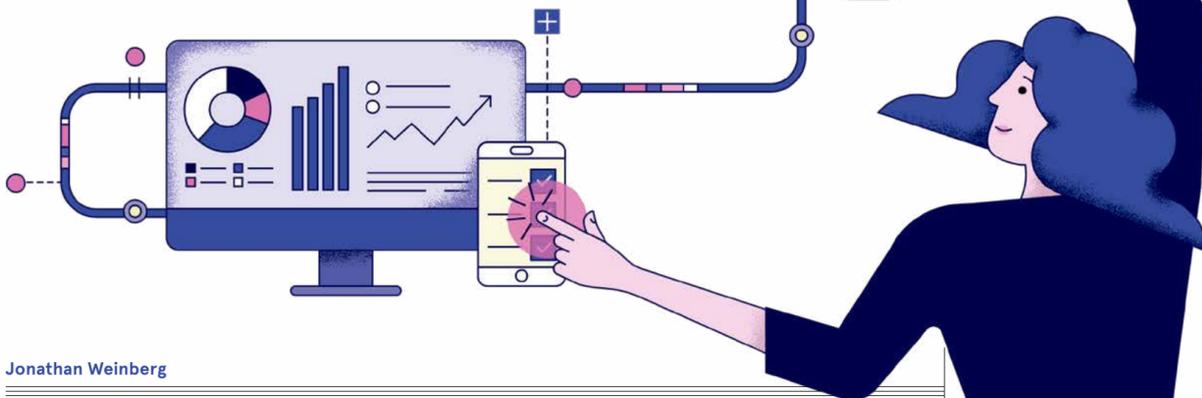
For more information on Peppy, please visit [info.peppy.health/thetimes](http://info.peppy.health/thetimes)



## FLEXIBLE WORKING

# Outsiders' insiders: meet the chiefs of remote work

Companies are creating senior roles focused on getting the best from their dispersed workforces. What are the key demands of this exacting, yet exciting, new position?



Jonathan Weinberg

Talent management is completely different from how it looked only two years ago, with some level of remote working becoming essential in many industries, rather than the nice-to-have option it was before the Covid crisis.

The pandemic-driven upheaval has led many businesses to consider creating a dedicated role with responsibility for defining how such flexibility should work – now and in the future – and the best way to achieve this.

At the end of last year, Annie Dean became Facebook's director of remote work. She told delegates at a conference hosted by GitLab in June 2021 that her job was to ensure that "the playing field stays level and that every person can meaningfully participate". GitLab itself was ahead of the curve in this respect, appointing its own head of remote work, Darren Murph, in 2019.

LinkedIn created the role of vice-president of flexible work in April 2021. The incumbent, Shannon Hardy, says that her department was created when the company decided to trust its staff to choose "when and where they work best", largely to ensure that its change of policy was "managed thoughtfully and carefully".

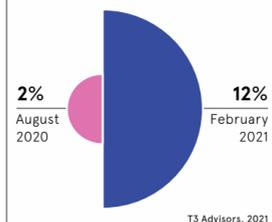
She explains: "We are focusing on a variety of things. Our work includes updating the company's talent policies; supporting managers in leading their hybrid teams effectively; and ensuring that hybrid working is equitable for all. We are constantly listening, learning and

adapting our approach to improve our employees' experience."

Hardy was previously LinkedIn's senior director of HR business partners, a role in which she worked to nurture new talent. Despite having that experience under her belt, she admits that, while she relishes the challenge of designing the future of work, there is "no rule book for navigating this level of change".

Decisions taken now "could affect everything from company culture to talent acquisition for years to come", Hardy adds. "Given that a

## SHARE OF TECH COMPANIES WITH A DESIGNATED LEADER OF REMOTE WORK



**“This is a great role. It will definitely gain traction quickly on the job market”**

hybrid workforce brings with it so many new considerations, it seems only fair to create a new team to focus on these, rather than expecting someone to add them to their existing priority list."

Given that the head of remote work could potentially be responsible for aspects ranging from inclusiveness and wellbeing to logistics and IT, the ideal candidate will possess a wide range of skills.

Wendy McDougall, founder and CEO of recruitment platform Firefish Software, believes that a successful chief of remote work would need to straddle two distinct areas, as "head of talent meets head of tech support".

McDougall – named by *Recruiter* magazine as one of 2021's most innovative women in recruitment – says that firms creating such posts are "making a statement to the world that they're taking the needs of hybrid and remote workers seriously. Having someone in this job enables the logistics of remote working and the issues that pop up randomly all the time to be handled swiftly. This keeps the focus on ensuring that the remote workforce is as productive as possible."

McDougall sees the post as ideal for fast-growing firms with 30-plus employees of whom more than 40% are working remotely. Stressing that this needs to be a permanent role because "the remote workforce is permanent", she adds: "This is a great role. It will definitely gain traction quickly on the job market."

The findings of a recent survey by consultancy Actual Experience

suggest that she could well be right. When it polled senior executives including CEOs and HR directors in Europe about hybrid working, 65% of respondents reported that there was no single executive in charge of the future workplace, largely because the subject was so broad. Indicating how important having a dedicated head of remote working could be, only 19% of respondents said that they were "very effective" in understanding the link between digital tools and employee wellbeing, while 24% admitted that they were either "not very" or "not at all" effective in this respect.

Alex Graves is CEO of Silicon Reef, which has helped the likes of the Met Office, Unilever and Sega to develop remote working strategies. He stresses that candidates need to have a background in operations or HR, and that the role should be a C-level position to ensure that remote working remains on the boardroom agenda.

The post-holder needs to "lead the charge", Graves says. "They will need lots of emotional intelligence to understand why people work, not just how. This will enable them to build remote working infrastructures that serve everyone concerned. This is definitely a strategic role, not a tactical one. They will be planning and communicating, rather than implementing tech."

With hundreds of its employees working remotely around the world, HR technology startup Remote lives and breathes this topic. It recently worked with Distribute Consulting to publish a report entitled *Do You Need a Head of Remote?* While this concedes that the role will not be necessary in every organisation, it argues that "all companies do need someone to advocate for the wellbeing of their remote workforces".

Nadia Vatalidis, Remote's vice-president of people, believes that having a dedicated executive to take the lead on remote working issues can pay dividends, because this should help the company to develop a culture that's focused on the needs of its remote and hybrid workers. The role would also maximise the "incredible potential" of cross-border recruitment, she suggests, given that many companies have grasped the advantages of hiring the best people, regardless of their location.

Vatalidis describes the position as "an exciting evolution", but warns that it may not be easy to fill.

"Individuals with the right mix of skills and the mindset to build an entirely new way of working are still rare," she says, "so they will command a premium." ●

## OPINION

## 'Organisations must embrace the new normal or reckon with the great resignation'

The pandemic has given rise to a multitude of changes in our daily lives. For two years now, people have spent a great deal of time stuck in their homes. Shifts in our personal schedules and daily routines inevitably lead to better performance, fewer burnouts and a higher retention rate. Allowing such flexibility also sends a positive message that your organisation is willing to adapt to its employees.

Workers now have different needs and expectations for their work lives. According to Bankrate's August poll, 55% of the workforce will search for a new job within the next 12 months. What's more, the polling predicts that companies will face significant unaccounted for costs arising from employee turnover. These include offboarding for the person leaving, recruitment and onboarding for the replacement hire. Turnover costs for one employee could be twice as much as that employee's monthly salary. The question for organisations of all sizes is, How do you overcome an increasingly high employee turnover rate? The answer is simple: you need to improve your company's employee engagement through organisational change.

Organisations must evolve and adapt to survive. If your company's vision is to remain the same over the next five years, then your company will not be around in five years. The need to adapt is especially important given the profound changes in the needs and expectations of employees. Companies that refuse to embrace change will likely find that their most valuable asset – their workforce – has become incompatible with their organisation.

Employee turnover is a fundamental problem, but it is not unsolvable. An important step toward enhancing employee engagement is to let the employees – the people who ultimately define the organisation – know that they are part of the organisation. The requisite change can be something as simple as altering your company's mission statement; making sure that workers can see themselves in the company's mission and can find purpose in their work.

Companies must also develop a sense of trust and flexibility. The way to do this in the current market is to allow for remote work. Leaders may at first be weary of managing

employees from a distance, but careful and attentive listening goes a long way toward effective remote management. The other side of the coin is that attentive listening results in higher employee engagement. This in turn leads to better performance, fewer burnouts and a higher retention rate. Allowing such flexibility also sends a positive message that your organisation is willing to adapt to its employees.

In most cases replacing a single employee can take place without much harm. It's not always difficult to find talented candidates in the job market. But it is difficult to find multiple talented candidates all at once. It becomes even more challenging in a job market with talent shortages. Once you find yourself in a situation where more than one employee is quitting, you might be witnessing a more fundamental problem that could be tremendously consequential. In the worst-case scenario, workers might start leaving at a faster pace than you can hire. High and consistent turnover can dissolve a company's culture, and, in some cases, it may even dissolve the company.

Preparing for the future workforce is essential for the success of an organisation and HR should play a vital role in developing this strategy. Building strong employee engagement is the new normal in organisational culture. It's about making sure that workers feel valued and trusted and can develop a sense of purpose in their work. Organisations must embrace the new normal or reckon with the great resignation. ●



**Oliver Damgaard**  
Managing Director,  
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WELLBEING

# Man down: a mental health crisis at work

Research suggests that men often defer seeking treatment for mental health conditions until they become severe. What can firms do to encourage male employees to obtain support sooner?

Rose Stokes

**D**ave had never really struggled with his mental health before. He loved his job as a restaurant manager and gained particular satisfaction from his interactions with the public.

But suddenly everything changed: Covid-19 arrived in the UK and the ensuing lockdown restrictions in March 2020 hit the hospitality industry hard. Dave and his wife were both obliged to go on furlough. When he returned to work in July, a shortage of staff and the consequent increase in his workload quickly took their toll on his mental health.

"I was given a whole department that I'd never worked in before," he recalls, adding that the stress of the extra work became almost too much to bear. "It was awful, taking me to dark places. I couldn't sleep and I wasn't eating, but I started drinking a lot after work."

When he approached his manager for help, he broke down in tears in front of him – and felt ashamed of that afterwards. Yet nothing much changed until Dave felt so depressed that he believed he had no other option but to seek medical help.

**“In our culture, men are conditioned to believe that showing emotion is a sign of weakness**

"I was eventually prescribed antidepressants and signed off work for what I thought would be a couple of weeks," he says. "But that turned into months."

At that point, the company's HR department stepped in. The situation did start to improve, but its intervention was too late to prevent Dave from leaving the company in early 2021. He's now pursuing a completely different career, which is giving him the scope to look after his mental wellbeing properly.

Dave's experience is not at all rare. According to research published by digital health platform Peppy, 39% of employers say that their male employees will wait until a health problem becomes serious before mentioning it to their line manager or HR team. This propensity to soldier on without telling anyone in a position to help at work will often cause disruption in the organisation. More than a quarter of employers (26%) in the study report that presenteeism – continuing to work when unfit, physically or mentally, to do so – is a problem among their male employees.

So what is going on? The pandemic has hit all of us hard, underlining the duty of care that employers have to their workers. According to the *Health and Wellbeing at Work 2021* survey by the Chartered Institute of Personnel Development (CIPD), 45% of employees have experienced a deterioration in their mental health since the start of the Covid crisis. A fractionally larger proportion of women than men have been affected this way. Yet data published by the Office for National Statistics confirms that about three out of every

four suicides in this country are by men. Suicide is in fact the biggest cause of death for men aged under 35. Also, men are far more vulnerable to alcoholism: according to charity Drink Aware, 8.7% of men in the UK are alcohol-dependent, compared with 3.3% of women.

There's a clear discrepancy between the number of men who are struggling mentally and the number who feel able to talk about this, especially at work. Dave puts much of this down to a deeply ingrained macho culture that encourages men to 'man up', keep calm and carry on, however much they may be suffering inside their heads.

Jess Baker, a psychologist and women's leadership coach, agrees. "Men have always been socialised to show strength," she says. "In our culture, they are conditioned to believe that showing emotion is a sign of weakness."

Baker believes that progress is being made in this respect, albeit slowly. "There seems to be a growing number of famous men talking about mental health issues, while a lot of women I know are encouraging their sons to discuss how they're feeling. But, despite such anecdotal evidence, the data indicates that we still have a long way to go," she says.

Given that we spend much of our lives in the workplace, employers can do a lot to help accelerate the culture change. The CIPD has found that three-quarters of employers are already offering confidential counselling services and/or employee assistance programmes. But these will be effective only if everyone feels comfortable accepting that they need help and empowered to



Edwin Tan via Gettyimages

seek it. So what more can be done to ensure that this is the case?

Stressing the important role that managers can play in supporting employee wellbeing, the CIPD's senior policy adviser on employment relations, Rachel Suff, recommends that all relevant support services are well signposted.

Baker concurs, stressing that it's crucial for employers to highlight the fact that anyone will be able to use such services discreetly and anonymously if they so choose.

"If you're considering how to support your male workforce better, start by asking them what they might use and when and where they would prefer that to be delivered," she advises, adding that line managers need to stay on the lookout for changes in behaviour among their team members.

"Perhaps an extrovert becomes quiet and withdrawn in team meetings, or a highly productive person delays completing work," Baker suggests. "In such cases, the most obvious – but sometimes the hardest – thing to do is speak directly with the individual concerned. You might start the conversation by saying something along the lines of: 'I've read this article on stress and I'm checking in with all of my team members...' You could try asking open questions, but do take the time to listen to their answers. Patience is vital, but it's often overlooked amid the time constraints of office life."

Baker warns managers that they may not receive a positive response. "It's common for people to become defensive in such situations and deny that anything is wrong. Try not to be offended by this if it happens,"

she says. "Instead, create opportunities for them to approach you when they're more ready to."

Most crucially, Baker says, be genuine in your concern. "We humans are very good at detecting inauthenticity," she says. "However you choose to approach someone showing signs of stress and/or mental ill-health, if your intention is clearly from the heart, not rooted in the desire to judge them as incapable or cajole them into being more productive, they'll be more likely to take up your offers of support."

Dave reports that stepping away from his stressful working environment has done wonders for his mental health. "I'm now in a really good place," he says.

He is also committed to raising awareness of the problems he has

**“The propensity to soldier on without telling anyone will often cause disruption**

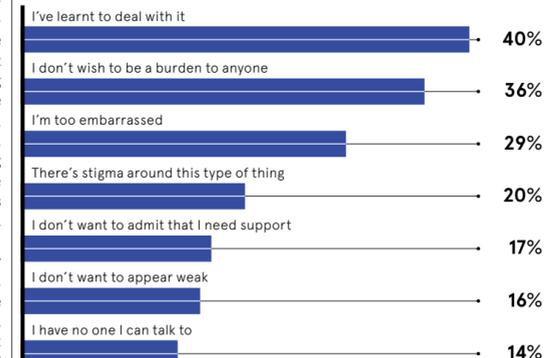
faced, in the hope that his openness will help more men to share their difficult feelings and ask for help sooner than he did.

"I will talk about my experiences with any man who would benefit from hearing them," Dave says. "I won't give up on this." ●

## MEN PREFER STOICISM TO SUPPORT

The main reasons why men don't talk about their mental health

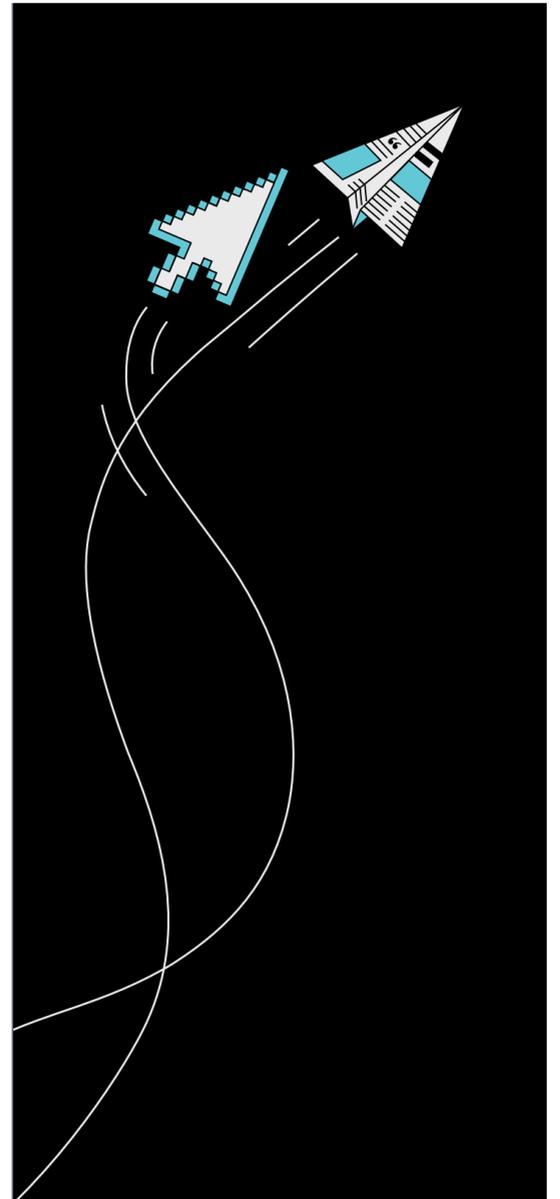
Priority, 2015



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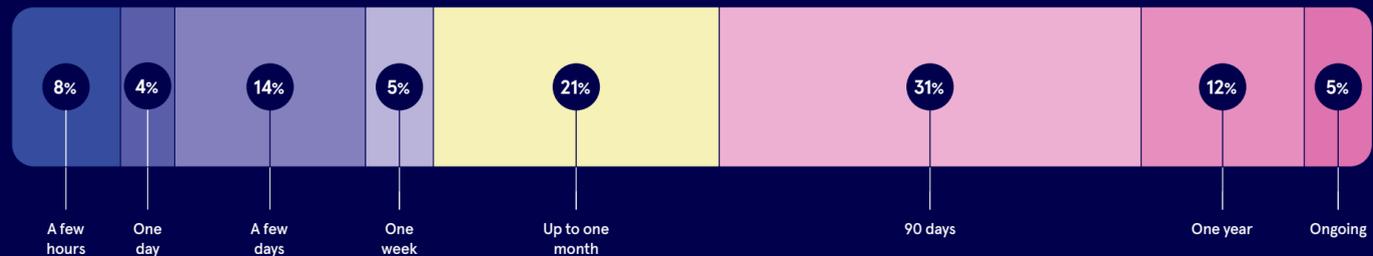
RACONTEUR



### HOW LONG SHOULD ONBOARDING LAST?

The length of time that HR practitioners worldwide believe the process should take

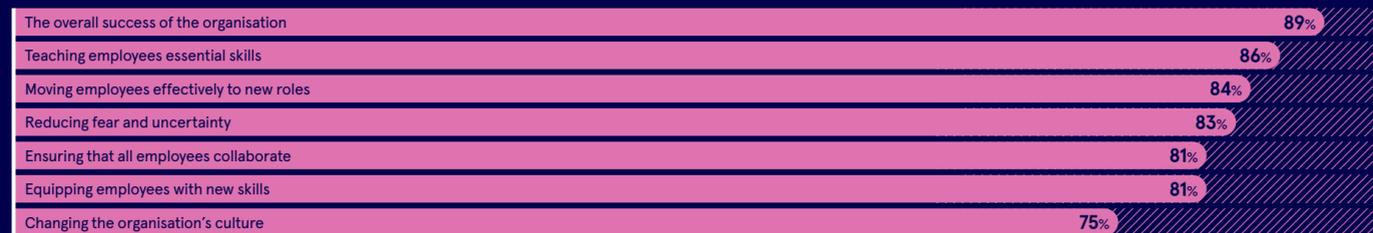
Talmundo, 2018



### WHY SHOULD EMPLOYERS CARE ABOUT ONBOARDING?

As more AI/automation is introduced in the workplace, onboarding will play an important role in the following

SilkRoad, 2019

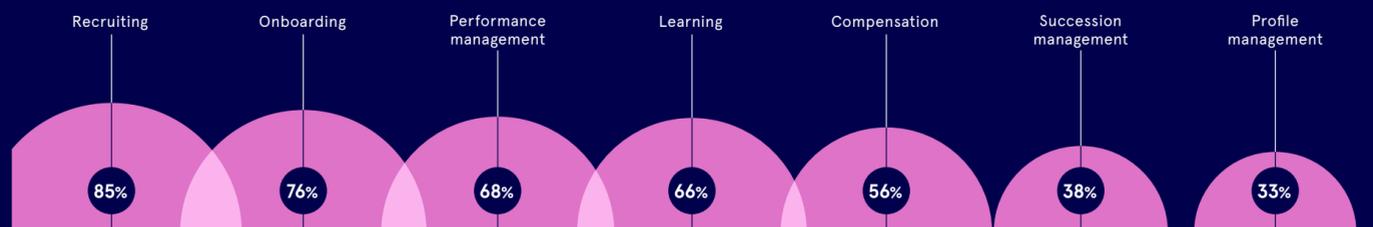


# ONBOARDING IN A VIRTUAL WORKPLACE

A spotlight has been shone on recruitment during the great resignation. Similarly, training has come into focus, partly as a response to the evolving needs of hybrid workplaces. But the importance of onboarding may have been overlooked by those outside the world of talent management. According to research by SilkRoad, nearly nine out of 10 HR and talent management professionals consider the induction process to be a crucial determinant of a company's overall success

### WHAT PROPORTION OF EMPLOYERS ARE USING DIGITAL ONBOARDING APPS?

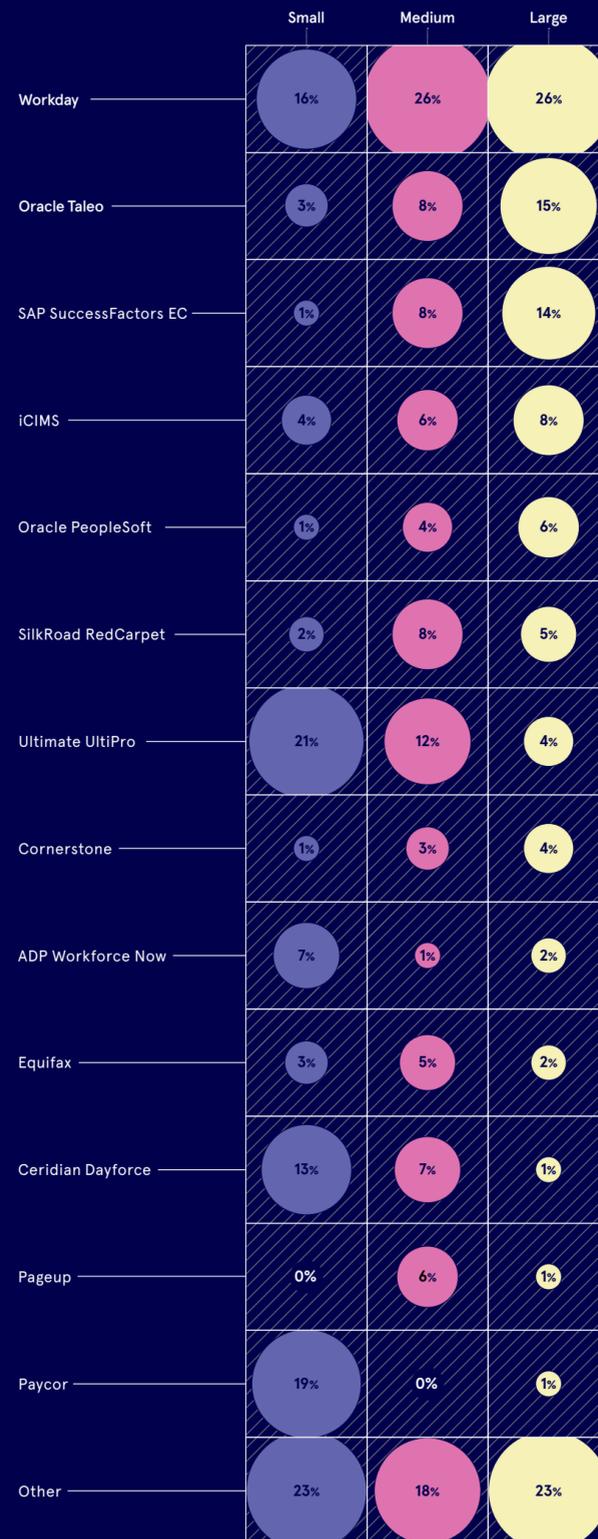
Share of organisations worldwide that are using talent management applications for the following processes



Sierra-Cedar, 2019

### WHICH ONBOARDING APP IS RIGHT FOR YOUR COMPANY?

Share of organisations using onboarding applications worldwide, by size

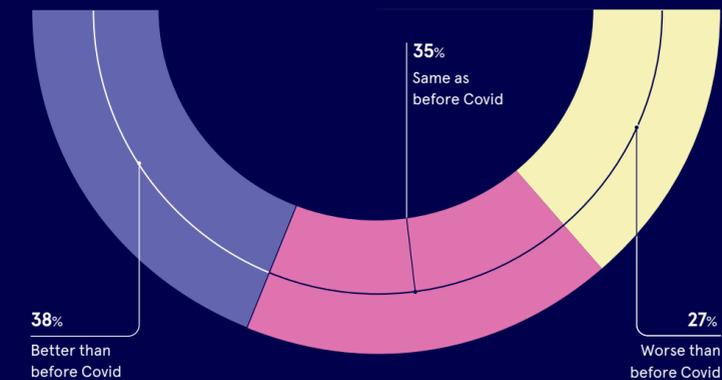


Sierra-Cedar, 2019

### HOW WELL HAS YOUR COMPANY HANDLED ONBOARDING IN A REMOTE WORKING ENVIRONMENT?

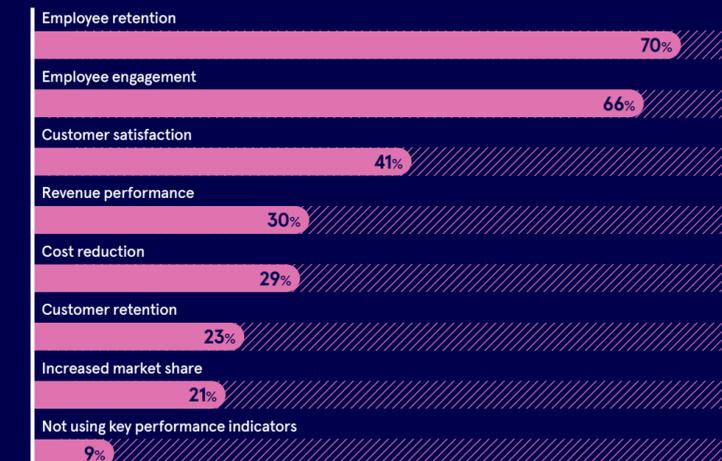
PwC, 2021

Perceptions of onboarding efficacy in the age of Covid



### IS YOUR ONBOARDING STRATEGY EFFECTIVE?

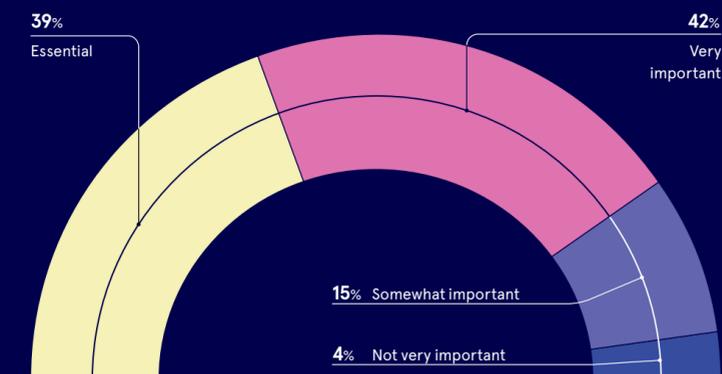
Key performance indicators used to evaluate onboarding programmes worldwide



SilkRoad, 2019

### IS ONBOARDING MORE IMPORTANT IN THE AGE OF AUTOMATION?

The importance of onboarding in training as AI/automation is introduced in the US



SilkRoad, 2019

INCLUSIVITY

# Employment benefits: improving access for applicants with autism

Neurodiverse people often struggle to find jobs. A range of schemes are tackling the problem, proving valuable for them, employers and wider society

Ouida Taaffe

**W**hat does the word 'neurodiverse' mean? For many of us, it might conjure up thoughts of autistic savants such as Dustin Hoffman's character in *Rain Man*, but the reality is far removed from a Hollywood film. The National Autistic Society estimates that about 0.6% of the world's population is on the autism spectrum. To be diagnosed with autism, a person will display "difficulties with social interaction and communication... restricted interests and repetitive behaviours", according to the Autism Research Centre at the University of Cambridge. They will also be at very high risk of mental ill-health, particularly depression and anxiety, the centre notes.

In the UK, only 22% of autistic people are in work, the Office for National Statistics reports. That is the highest unemployment rate recorded among disabled people. It represents a huge amount of wasted potential, particularly at a time of labour shortages.

There are lots of good reasons to recruit people with autism. For one thing, it's the ethical thing to do. Claire Cookson, CEO at DFN Project Search, which helps young people with autism and learning disabilities to find employment, says the number-one contributor to healthy adulthood is "a safe and secure job". Helping people into appropriate jobs will also benefit society. Adult social care can cost £3m over someone's lifetime. But an internship that leads to employment costs about £20,000.

What's good for individuals and society is also good for firms. "We always find that productivity goes through the roof," Cookson says. "Our interns are determined to succeed. They have real energy. Within 48 hours of being treated like everyone else and being allowed to contribute to society, they change the way they walk, talk and feel." This will boost the morale of the whole enterprise, she adds. "People want to work for an organisation that shows kindness and inclusion and community."

The interns whom Cookson supports have learning disabilities. While they won't live the cliché of becoming highly paid computer programmers, 70% will obtain permanent jobs "with full-time contracts paying at least the prevailing wage", she says. "Businesses often wouldn't have looked at their CVs because they don't include at least five GCSEs. We give our interns the opportunity to show that they can do a particular job."

Even when neurodiverse job candidates tick all the boxes and more, they can still struggle to get through a standard recruitment process. In 2018, an employment tribunal made BT pay compensation to an applicant for its graduate training programme who had Asperger's syndrome, dyslexia and dyspraxia – and a very high IQ – for "failing to make reasonable adjustments" for his disability.



**“A person doesn't 'have' a disability. It is something they experience typically because society creates barriers**

One problem for employers is that standard aspects of the selection process – such as being expected to make eye contact with strangers – can be an insurmountable barrier for someone on the autism spectrum. But because most people making recruitment decisions are 'neurotypical', they often won't realise that such barriers are there. BT actually has a long history of disability support. It appreciates the focus and pattern-recognition skills that some neurodiverse people can bring to roles in areas such as coding and billing. But it clearly hasn't always got things right. Giles Barker, diversity and inclusion lead at BT Group, says the company now "tailors" its processes and working environments to support disabled colleagues and their managers.

BT's thinking is informed by the social model of disability, he says, explaining that "a person doesn't 'have' a disability. It is something they experience typically because society creates barriers. Those barriers could be established by factors ranging from policies and processes to the way that decisions are made and how buildings are designed.

BT provides support for a variety of needs, from help with reading, writing and grammar to dealing with sensory overload, social cues and socialising, as well as the physical environment. At least a quarter of employees have more than one condition or impairment that the firm can help with, Barker says.

But BT hasn't adopted such policies simply to be nice, he adds. "Diversity, including neurodiversity, brings us different perspectives and aids innovation in relation to how we design products, solve problems and serve customers."

One of the company's objectives is to "build bridges from academia into industry through our community training programmes and specialist disability portals", says Barker, although he stresses that BT wants to "welcome and support neurodiverse colleagues at every level of the organisation".

DFN Project Search has narrower goals, but its ambitions are arguably bigger. It's trying to transform pre-conceptions of what someone with learning disabilities can do.

"We tell employers: 'You don't even know what "five GCSEs" means.' Having a GCSE in English literature doesn't necessarily mean that you can do a job," says Cookson, who's a former headteacher.

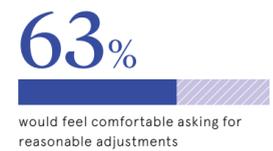
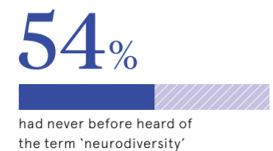
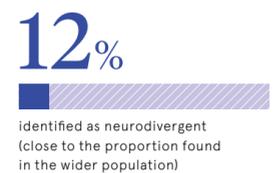
She cites the example of "one young man who did an internship at Charing Cross Hospital. He is on the autism spectrum and has limited speech. He worked in the laundry and was so productive and reliably consistent. He did a brilliant job – his communication barriers were neither here nor there."

Not one company that has tried the scheme – which includes careful assessments of the talents of the interns and systematic instruction by coaches – has found that it didn't work for them, Cookson says.

Indeed, employers often learn a lot from it. Systematic instruction means breaking down a task into its constituent parts and practising until each is done right. "That often creates efficiencies in the business," she says. "When firms are asked: 'why do you do it like that?' it makes them stop and think." ●

NEURODIVERSITY IN FOCUS

Responses from employees working in a range of industries



Adecco Group, 2020

# Managing the risks of your future (remote) workforce

Remote and hybrid working is likely to outlive the circumstances of the Covid pandemic. As the recruitment market comes to terms with the needs of the future workforce, HireRight's Peter Cleverton, managing director, EMEA, offers advice on how to manage your team remotely

**T**he pandemic has undoubtedly changed the future of work. Earlier this year, HireRight conducted its 2021 Global Benchmark Survey, asking over 3,000 HR and risk professionals worldwide for their views on background screening, talent acquisition and talent management. The results show that 49% of the respondents from Europe, the Middle East and Africa (EMEA) believed at least a quarter of their workforce will be working remotely in some capacity by January 2022, up from 30% who said this was the case in January 2020.

While there are some businesses for which remote working is not viable, our research, like many others, suggests the current increase in working from home is here to stay. But how will the pandemic's legacy impact the way businesses manage talent many years from now? What risks do leaders need to consider if their future workforce continues to be primarily, or at least partly, home based? Here are some of the issues I am focusing on within my teams.

Preventing employee disconnect

Remote working can often leave employees feeling 'out of the loop' or disconnected from others in the business. Isolation in the workforce may be felt more widely than ever now that so many individuals are working from home. Without those in-person interactions, there could be fewer opportunities to chat with colleagues from other departments, making it easier for your employees to feel disengaged.

REGARDING REMOTE WORKING IN EMEA AFTER THE PANDEMIC



Global Benchmark Survey, HireRight, 2021

which could ultimately impact their productivity and performance at work.

While the weekly Zoom quizzes may have dwindled, the importance of going the extra mile to stay connected with your entire workforce cannot be overstated. Employees may prefer to communicate in different ways, so by utilising a mix of tactics you will increase the likelihood of getting through to everybody in a way that works for them. Our Benchmark Survey found many EMEA respondents were utilising group chat channels (68%), virtual social events (50%) and email updates from their leadership team (50%) as ways to help reduce the risk of a disconnected workforce.

Reducing attrition by driving retention

As the so-called great resignation is impacting companies around the world, businesses are having to reconsider their employee value propositions. They must now ensure they are industry leading, not just competitive, to help attract the best talent in this candidate-led market. With vacancies often going unfilled for months, and many industries seeing high turnover since the start of the pandemic, it is vital to keep your staff happy and engaged, to keep them in your employ.

More and more businesses are opening the door to employees from around the world, not just within commuting distance of their local offices, as the location of their workforce becomes less significant than the quality and availability of talent. Launching initiatives to drive retention within your organisation's remote workforce may help to relieve the strain on your talent acquisition team and reduce the number of open roles left to fill.

Prioritising mental health

Boosting morale was seen as the top talent management challenge for EMEA survey respondents, with over half (55%) listing this as one of their top three challenges in 2020. However, in 2021 boosting morale only ranked as a top priority for around a third of respondents (34%), suggesting some employers saw it as less of an issue this year.

In March 2020, many employees found themselves working remotely for the first time in their lives, and, for some, little has changed more than 18 months later. While many have embraced the change and have been able to reset their work-life balance,



**“With millions of office-based workers now working remotely, employers could be less aware of any changes in their employees' circumstances that might impact their ability to perform their jobs**

for others, working from home may still feel strange and challenging, particularly if they do not have a dedicated office space to work from.

Despite many EMEA businesses quickly bolstering their employee well-being offering early into the pandemic – over two-thirds (68%) of Benchmark Survey respondents from EMEA said their company introduced internal wellbeing initiatives – the impact of working remotely continues to take its toll. It may be wise for organisations to stay focused on the mental health of their people and to think twice about cost-cutting measures to remove employee support, which may still be sorely needed.

Unseen pressures of working remotely

The pandemic has impacted people differently and, while some households have transitioned seamlessly to remote working, others have been impacted financially. Nearly a quarter (24%) of EMEA respondents said their organisation had conducted furloughs or redundancies, 24% had cut salaries, and 16% had cancelled bonuses during the pandemic.

With millions of office-based workers now working remotely, employers could be less aware of any changes in their employees' circumstances that might impact their ability to perform their jobs. In some cases, financial hardships may even make employees vulnerable to corruption. The risks facing an employee working on-site are different to those facing that same employee working remotely, possibly from anywhere in the world. As such, you might wish to rescreen your home-working employees to address this potential gap.

Rescreening your employees can help to mitigate business risks such as data theft and reputational damage, show due diligence is taken seriously within your company and encourage employees to be transparent about changes of circumstances that may

impact the business. It can also help employers to recognise previously unseen pressures affecting their employees so they can provide the support those employees need.

Final thoughts

Now that you're not seeing team members in the office every day, it is arguably more important than ever to safeguard against risks in the workforce. Employers must ensure nobody is falling through the cracks, and everybody feels fully supported regardless of their working location.

Whether your workforce is fully remote, office based or a hybrid of the two, it is important to focus on employee engagement, retention and wellbeing, and perhaps consider introducing employee rescreening to help look after not only your workforce, but also your business and its bottom line.

For more information please visit [hireright.com/emea/](https://hireright.com/emea/)





REMOTE WORKING

# Out of sight, out of mind?

Proximity bias is a real risk facing firms that employ both office-based and remote workers. What's more, it's likely to affect women disproportionately

Bradley Gerrard

Words such as 'hybrid' and 'flexible' might make the world of work seem more desirable to some people than it was before the pandemic, but employers need to understand a key risk associated with remote working.

A growing problem for people who work remotely is so-called proximity bias. This is the tendency among managers to rate those employees who sit alongside them in the office more highly than those they see mostly on their computer screens during video meetings.

This inequity is likely to affect women disproportionately. Female workers bore the brunt of hardships when the pandemic started and could well be at a disadvantage when it ends too. The Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) estimates that they were about a third more likely than men to have worked in an industry that ground to a halt during the UK's first Covid lockdown. The IFS's research also suggests that, even in cases where mothers in heterosexual couples were in higher-paid jobs than their partners were before the pandemic, they still had to interrupt their paid work more to perform childcare duties during the school closures.

A recent survey by FlexJobs has found that 80% of women, compared with 69% of men, rank the option of working remotely as one of the most important factors when

considering a new employer. Companies will increasingly have to cater for this demand in order to attract talent. But, in so doing, they need to be aware of the potential ramifications and must implement strategies to ensure that all workers feel connected to their organisation.

Communication is the key, according to Rohan Maheswaran, associate director of technical recruitment at Futureheads Recruitment. He says: "If there is good communication

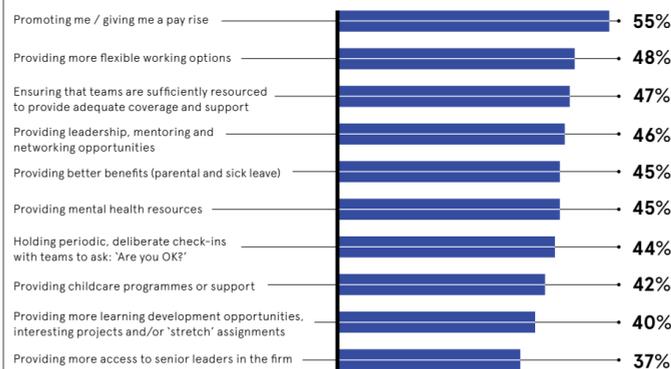
between employer and employee, there is likely to be less bias and a better relationship."

To help employers stop assuming that presence equals productivity, Maheswaran recommends that they evaluate all employees objectively, using data-driven metrics to measure outcomes rather than getting hung up on how many hours each person has spent in the office.

Gemma Gordon is group people director at real-estate firm Urban

## SUPPORTING FEMALE EMPLOYEES

Women's preferred measures that would ensure they stayed for the long term in light of Covid



Bullhorn, 2021

“Being explicit about expectations and trusting people to work when they feel at their most productive has had a positive impact on staff retention

Splash, which specialises in regenerating residential and commercial buildings. The company has long allowed flexible working, but it has recently formalised arrangements to ensure that all employees know exactly what's available to them and where they stand.

"We offer flexibility that matches people's lifestyles," she says.

In the early days of the pandemic, Urban Splash offered staff who were parents 10 days' extra leave – a perk that's still in place. Gordon reports that six female members of her team who'd been on part-time contracts before the Covid crisis are now full-timers because they can now work whenever it suits them, providing that they hit their targets.

The company has also recruited 38 people – split equally by gender – over the past 12 months. A recent staff survey has found that all but 2% of respondents believe that working remotely has either improved or not changed their productivity, compared with working at HQ.

Gordon agrees with Maheswaran that managing the remote workforce effectively hinges on good communication. "Not communicating is a really dangerous thing," she warns, adding that her firm ensures that line managers are in regular contact with their team members.

Eliane Lugassy, co-founder and CEO of proptech firm Witco, says that her organisation has minimised the risk of proximity bias by implementing a clear framework for remote working.

This uses "key performance indicators, so that everyone knows exactly what's expected of them" and how they can progress in the business, says Lugassy, who also highlights the importance of effective communication – in both directions. If it's difficult for your line manager and other colleagues to communicate with you, remote working "can complicate things", she notes. "But, if you're highly responsive, it shouldn't have a negative impact on you as an employee."

Lugassy says that, when the lockdown restrictions were lifted and people were permitted to return to the office, that she made her requirements of them clear. After consulting her employees, she settled on asking them to come in three days a week, largely to develop some cultural cohesion.

Being explicit about her expectations and trusting people to work when they feel at their most productive has had a positive effect on staff retention, she says, but recruitment is another matter.

"Employees are seeking a lot of flexibility. As an employer, you must decide if that's good for your business and be clear about what you can and cannot offer," Lugassy stresses.

Awareness training could help to reduce the risk of proximity bias. Diane Gilhooly, a partner and global head of HR and pensions at law firm Eversheds Sutherland, says that it's important for employers with remote and hybrid workers to recognise the danger, which "will be a fairly new to a lot of sectors".

Employers also need to have a strategy, she advises. This should address the expectations of all employees, ensuring that meetings include everyone, regardless of their location. It should also include technology and skills audits to make sure that everyone is appropriately equipped to work remotely.

The task of running a remote team will be new to many managers, so they are also likely to need support. So says Cheney Hamilton, who started Find Your Flex (originally called mummyjobs.co.uk) in 2016 after struggling to find the kind of flexible employment she needed anywhere else. Now she helps other employers to develop inclusive work cultures.

Hamilton says that minimising proximity bias is about "putting people first" and ensuring that all workers, regardless of their location, have equal access to things such as career development opportunities.

Employers need to be transparent about what types of flexibility they can accommodate and must ensure that their employment contracts don't unintentionally remove flexibility, she adds.

Hamilton believes that flexible working should no longer be viewed through the prism of parenthood, given that it has become relevant to all kinds of people, not just those with young children. She notes that some enlightened companies are "altering their reward mechanisms and turning their businesses into outcome-focused entities", citing them as blueprints for the future.

Before such approaches become the norm tomorrow, moves such as those being made by office leasing platform ShareSpace are likely to attract and retain talent today. The firm permits parents to bring their children to the office, for instance, and is recruiting for roles that offer predominantly remote work.

ShareSpace's HR manager, Olimpia Kicielińska says: "We believe that, whether they are working at home or in our offices in Warsaw, Budapest, Berlin or London, all of our team members should have access to career growth opportunities."

If an employer can make good on such aims and prove itself to be truly inclusive to all staff, whether they're office-based, remote or hybrid workers, it will show that it has proximity bias under control. This in turn could give it a crucial advantage in a war for talent that's showing few signs of abating. ●

Commercial feature

# The key to coaching is to foster a culture of learning

Coaching is essential to the success of any organization. Yet as business cycles accelerate, many struggle to deliver it. As Patrick Brigger, co-founder of knowledge provider getAbstract, explains, the answer is to develop a learning culture



Coaching – both receiving and delivering it – has never been so important. According to the Institute of Coaching, 80% of those who receive coaching report increased self-confidence, while more than 70% benefit from improved work performance, relationships and more effective communication skills. Meanwhile, 86% of companies claim they more than recouped their investment.

Providing coaching to employees helps ensure that everyone performs at their best and that teams work as cohesive units. It can also enhance the leadership and interpersonal skills of business leaders. Once they recognise the value of coaching, they begin to incorporate

it into their organisational framework. Empowering your employees to deliver coaching can increase their self-awareness and help them develop a more entrepreneurial mindset. Overall, this can improve the working environment and, ultimately, company performance.

### Boosting the self-reliance of staff

Coaching can enhance employees' self-reliance and their ability to take the initiative. They are more likely to find answers to problems and to solve challenges themselves as they make more of their own decisions. They will feel safe asking questions and expressing their ideas freely in a supportive environment. All of this improves productivity and alignment.

Yet despite the manifold benefits it offers, coaching is often seen as the responsibility of specific individuals. Many of these are senior managers who struggle to find the time in their busy working lives to actually do it. Yet a growing number of organisations are starting to recognise that coaching can be applied across all areas and through all levels of management, from senior executives to middle managers, and from face-to-face teams to remote workers. Whoever delivers it, coaching should

be personalised to meet individuals' needs and reflect their evolving roles and responsibilities.

The key to delivering coaching effectively and reaping its extensive rewards in today's fast-moving corporate world is to create a learning culture. This means fostering a curiosity-driven environment that supports a growth mindset. Organisations benefit from improved employee engagement and talent retention. Employees, in turn, benefit from development opportunities that can support vertical or lateral growth, as well as the chance to pursue new and relevant skills. Organisations that base coaching on a learning culture adapt better to change, suffer lower staff turnover rates and experience higher employee satisfaction – a particularly important consideration as companies struggle in the current climate to recruit and retain talent.

### Lifelong learning

Coaching that is based on a learning culture motivates employees to become lifelong learners who can adapt to change quickly and effectively. This type of learning requires easy access to relevant information and a culture that promotes information sharing. Coaching thereby reinforces a company-wide quest for knowledge. Learners need access to pertinent information at the point and time of need. Online platforms, meanwhile, foster knowledge sharing and collaboration. "People are our greatest asset" is the proud boast of many organisations. Today, with

### Coaching and a learning culture

- Coaching empowers decision-making and problem-solving
- An accessible, relevant learning tool can help support these skills
- Coaching supports a leadership pipeline and extends to skills beyond technical and professional capabilities. The can include soft skills, company culture values
- Coaching doesn't need to be hierarchical. It can include cross-functional and reverse mentorship

talent in greater demand than ever, organisations that encourage coaching based on shared learning experiences will be best placed to make that aspiration a reality – and to benefit from it.

For more information please visit [getabstract.com](https://getabstract.com)



## Learn, develop, inspire – the best content on coaching

### BOOK

**The Coaching Habit: Say Less, Ask More and Change the Way You Lead Forever** by Michael Stanier  
Nearly 75% of managers have received training in how to coach their employees, yet 73% of employees never receive coaching and when they do that coaching usually doesn't help them. Coaching involves much more than just talking to people; it requires posing intelligent questions that inspire employees to talk about their thoughts, their work and their concerns. Michael Bungay Stanier, the first person honoured as Coach of the Year in Canada, uses the construct of seven essential coaching questions to teach managers how to coach effectively.

### PODCAST

**Brené Brown's Dare to Lead: episode on Reverse Mentorship with Patrice Gordon**  
What comes to mind when you think of a workplace mentor? It's probably someone older, with years of managerial experience. But junior employees – particularly those from underrepresented backgrounds – have a lot to teach their supervisors. Leaders, after all, must understand the challenges their employees face before making executive decisions. In this episode of Brené Brown's Dare to Lead podcast, Patrice Gordon, a personal development advocate specialising in inclusive leadership, reverse mentoring and women's development programmes, discusses how to use reverse mentoring to build trust and foster inclusion in an organisation.

### BOOK

**Coach the Person, Not the Problem – A Guide to Using Reflective Inquiry** by Marcia Reynolds  
Marcia Reynolds helps coaches and leaders work with clients to create transformative conversations. In this book she promises the key to transformational coaching: being fully present. She teaches readers to focus on individuals rather than their problems to draw out their coaching clients' true feelings and get to the root of their concerns. Packed with easy-to-grasp tips and case studies, Reynold's book includes the five techniques of reflective inquiry to help coaches expand their clients' perspectives and help them gain the power and confidence to move forward.



## TECHNOLOGY

# Zooming in: virtual interviews pass the screen test with flying colours

The pandemic has obliged many employers to start interviewing job candidates on video. Given the benefits it has offered, the process could become a permanent fixture

Katie Byrne

The virtual interview is edging ever further into the HR mainstream, thanks to the huge increase in remote working since the Covid crisis started and the flexibility this practice has offered to all parties. The latest annual *Resourcing and Talent Planning Survey* from the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) has found that 54% of organisations have been using video in recruitment, with two-thirds of these saying that the technology has accelerated the hiring process.

While virtual interviews offer several benefits, convenience is their main attraction. They can expedite a process that is often delayed by the process of coordinating both parties' schedules to arrange an in-person meeting.

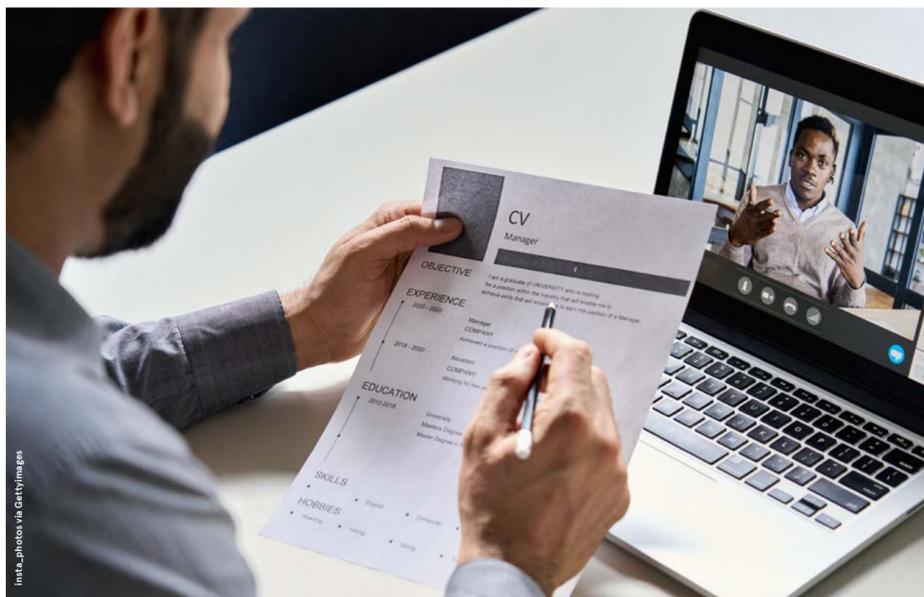
"Video interviews will become a permanent part of recruitment," says Lucy Bisset, director of the Liverpool and Manchester offices at recruitment firm Robert Walters.

"The ease with which two parties can jump online, with no travel required, and keep it to 30 minutes – which can often be tricky in person – helps to speed things up. At a time when job candidates are thin on the ground, employers are keen to keep the hiring process slick."

Video could increasingly feature in the application process as well, Bisset predicts.

"It's almost a replacement for the first-stage interview, with applicants initially being sent a series of standardised questions to answer on video," she explains. "Within a few hours, a hiring manager can compile a shortlist by making quick-fire judgments based on candidates' communication skills and their cultural fit, as well as the detail of their answers."

The key to incorporating video successfully into job interviews is ensuring that the process goes as smoothly as possible. A few fundamental techniques will help here.



Infra photos via Gettyimages

Building rapport with a candidate remotely will involve several of the tactics that you'd use for a face-to-face interview, only with a screen-friendly twist, Bisset says.

"We'd usually shake hands when first meeting in person. On a video call, try to use more hand gestures to add warmth to your greeting," she suggests.

Another tip for keeping the conversation personable is to use the candidate's name more often than you normally might and ensure that you look engaged throughout the meeting.

"Interviewers should start with some small talk rather than launching straight into their questions," says Claire McCartney, the CIPD's senior policy adviser on resourcing and inclusion. "Before starting the interview proper, they should check that the candidate's audio and video feeds are working and that they're happy with the set-up."

If you can, be somewhere where you don't need to blur the video's background, which can feel like a "subtle barrier," according to Bisset. Also be sure to remind candidates that they're not going to be judged on their skill at using videoconferencing software.

Khyati Sundaram is the CEO of Applied, the creator of a recruitment platform that's designed to remove bias from the process. She says interviewers "should make a conscious effort to be open-minded and accommodating of all candidates, always bearing in mind that some will take to virtual interviews better than others. If being calm and articulate over Zoom isn't a

core skill for the role, how people perform on camera should not be used as a benchmark for success."

An awareness of diversity and inclusivity in virtual recruitment is vital for building a team that encompasses a breadth of voices, experiences and skills, Sundaram adds.

"As the great resignation wears on, this is a smart move," she says. "Our research shows that debiased hiring drives employee retention rates of up to 93%. I expect that

**“If being calm and articulate over Zoom isn't a core skill for the role, how people perform on camera should not be used as a benchmark for success**

more businesses will adopt a skills-based approach to hiring in the coming months to select the best people and feel confident that they're going to stay."

McCartney says that interviewers should ensure that they ask each candidate beforehand if they need any reasonable adjustments to the process – if they have a disability, for instance – just as they would for

an in-person meeting. Making the experience as consistent as possible for all applicants is key to ensuring that the process is fair.

"Digital tools can aid fairer remote hiring processes," Sundaram adds. "Centralised software can enable several members of a hiring team to score the same candidate independently based on the same set criteria, without knowing that person's identity or previous employers. This makes the process as objective as possible."

Following up with each candidate promptly after the interview, whatever the outcome, is also important, McCartney stresses. Providing feedback "demonstrates an appreciation of the candidates' time and enhances their experience", she says.

Whether a candidate advances to an in-person interview or not must be "determined by an objective scoring process", Sundaram says. "This should be based on the extent to which someone's skills match the role, as determined by different members of the hiring team."

And where should the next interview take place? Bisset envisages the humble coffee shop playing a greater role in the process.

"This has always been an interesting technique," she says. "It's a great way for a hiring manager to see the level of confidence and ease that a prospective colleague displays in a neutral environment. With office space declining, I can foresee coffee shops becoming increasingly popular locations for second or final interviews – somewhere a candidate can talk without their surroundings feeling too clinical." ●

## Q&A

### The growing job exodus and how to avoid it

Paul Devoy, CEO of standards body Investors in People, outlines the talent crisis facing organisations and why overcoming the accidental management problem is key to survival



**Q How has the pandemic affected the jobs market over the last 18 months?**

**A** There were different phases of impact. When the UK first entered lockdown and the Treasury devised the furlough scheme, the big worry was there would be mass unemployment. Very few people predicted that 18 months on we'd be seeing the labour shortages we're seeing now. It just demonstrates the volatility in the labour market, and it shows little signs of slowing.

The pandemic has also masked some of the impacts of Brexit. Coming out of the lockdowns, we no longer had the same flexibility when it comes to importing labour from other countries. It created a double whammy – a sudden rise in demand coupled with a really tightening labour market.

But the underlying skills gaps and shortages have actually been there for two decades. There's always been

a shortage of chefs. There's always been a shortage of people with STEM skills. As a country we haven't fixed the structural issues in skills development which have been masked for decades by immigration. Now, because of Covid and Brexit, the mask is slipping.

**Q An exodus of jobs is causing the media to report on the 'great resignation' – what are the key drivers of this?**

**A** The key drivers are both demographic and lifestyle related. Lockdown was a hugely impactful event which caused people to reflect on and reevaluate what they were doing with their lives. Through that period of reflection, many people identified that they can manage their home commitments and work commitments in a different way. As a result, a lot of employees are seeking employers that can offer the work-life balance they desire, or shortening their hours with their current employer. Some people are also retiring earlier than they previously planned. That's particularly prevalent in the NHS at the moment. Organisations are having issues with labour supply because they can't attract enough talent and existing staff are doing less hours.

**Q To what extent is the 'job exodus' exposing flaws in leadership and management?**

**A** I've always been of the view that I don't care where you work or how you work, as long as you've delivered the outcomes that were agreed. If you do your best work on Sunday morning and you want to pick your kid up from school at 3pm each weekday, that's up to you. The only

ground rule I lay down in our organisation is your flexibility cannot come at the expense of a colleague delivering on their objectives. As long as what you're doing doesn't negatively impact somebody else's work, you can organise your work in a way that helps balance your life.

However, I still hear endless stories of companies struggling to accept that paradigm. If every organisation adopted proper flexible working, it would enable 3 million people, predominantly women, to come back into the labour market, according to the CIPD. There is a huge labour and skills layer that can be unravelled simply by allowing and empowering people to balance their work and home commitments. But too many leaders still aren't open to flexibility.

**Q What are the key components of a great employee experience today?**

**A** There will be some very interesting insights in our next Job Exodus Trends report which is released in the new year. Ultimately it's about understanding how you can adapt your organisation and what you need in terms of skills and accessing those skills. A key element is flexibility in how you design and organise work. If you can be more flexible and creative in the way that you design jobs, you're opening up a wider pool of labour than if you don't. I constantly hear from recruitment consultants that people are now making decisions about which job they're going to accept not necessarily on pay but on the degree of flexibility it provides for them. That's a clear sign flexibility should be a more central part of people strategy than it has been before.

**“If organisations don't deal with their accidental management problem they're going to fall behind organisations that are better at people management**

**Q What are the risks to companies which fail to close their skills gaps and how does Investors in People support organisations in this area?**

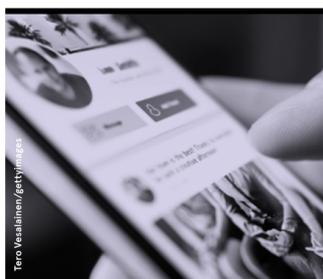
**A** If organisations don't deal with their accidental management problem and create a better employee experience, they're ultimately going to have lower productivity, higher costs relating to sick leave and recruitment and they will struggle to grow. Ultimately, they're going to fall behind organisations that are better at people management.

Investors in People has built a very well-researched framework that helps organisations to benchmark their own people management strategies. We reviewed over 300 pieces of academic research and consulted over 1,000 high-performing companies to identify what good people management looks like, and we help organisations benchmark themselves against that. Then once we've done that benchmarking, we help them to develop action plans to improve how they lead, manage and develop people.

Over the past 30 years, we have supported over 50,000 businesses in 66 countries, so we're confident that we have the insight and experience to help more organisations to make work better.

For more information, visit [investorsinpeople.com](http://investorsinpeople.com)

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#### What can a candidate's online presence reveal?

Is there still a need to scrutinise an applicant's social media profiles before offering them a job, or even before inviting them to an interview? While doing so might sound as dated as the old holiday albums we all have lurking on our Facebook profiles, an awareness of a candidate's online presence can still help in filling in some of the blanks on their CV.

"In a world that's becoming increasingly virtual, trust is often missing," says Hannah Power, an independent business and personal branding coach. "It's hard to build a relationship of trust with

someone you don't know 'in real life'. Social networks enable the employer to take a look at the person and they offer a little accountability for how that individual behaves."

A scan through someone's tweets, for instance, will give you a chance to see how a person interacts with friends and strangers online. But most candidates are wise to the risk of being investigated this way and have set their profiles to private, protecting them from the critical gaze of a potential employer. LinkedIn is, of course, the exception. It offers people a platform from which to sell themselves and gives recruiters a chance to find the most exciting talent to approach.

Power suggests a few things to look out for when scanning a potential employee's LinkedIn profile. "If they discuss their activities outside work, this gives them the opportunity to show that they have things they really care about," she says, adding that any content they have shared can offer insights into the topics that make them tick. "It's also interesting if they have made a lot of connections, as this demonstrates that they're actively networking."



RECRUITMENT

# In today's jobs market, candidates are in control

With a growing number of firms fishing in a shrinking talent pool, it's a great time for prospective employees. How should recruiters respond to this situation?

Sam Forsdick

It's rarely easy to find the right candidates for your company's jobs. But the tight labour market has made life even harder for HR chiefs, with applicants holding all the cards.

While labour shortages in the hospitality and haulage industries have attracted most media attention, vacancy rates either match or exceed pre-pandemic levels across all sectors of the economy. The overall number of job vacancies in the three months to October in the UK hit a record high of 1.17 million, according to the Office for National Statistics. Over the same period, the unemployment rate shrank by 0.2 percentage points to 4.3%.

“How you hire is a really strong signal of what it will be like to work in your organisation”

These conditions are reflected on employment sites, which are witnessing a jobs boom. According to Reed.co.uk, the number of jobs posted on its site in September was 143,000, equating to a 150% year-on-year increase, while the number of companies advertising was at its highest level since January 2020. TotalJobs has observed a similar trend, with the number of job advertisements on its site 29% above pre-pandemic levels in early September and rising 18% week on week. The competition for talent is at “fever pitch”, it says.

All of this means that the market has tipped in favour of employees, with some candidates reportedly doubling their earnings in a single move. Gaëlle Blake, head of permanent appointments at recruitment firm Hays, is seeing extremely high demand from her clients, with vacancies at a 20-year high and job-seekers at a 24-year low.

“What we're feeling is a tension in the market. There's a great supply, in terms of the choice of jobs for candidates, while there is also the least amount of people available to fill these positions,” she says.

More than one factor has contributed to the situation, which many

HR practitioners have never faced before. Approximately 1 million foreign-born workers have left the UK since Brexit, for instance. There has also been pent-up demand from businesses for labour, which has been building up over the course of the pandemic.

As a result of the intensifying competition for talent, there is a clear recognition that recruitment strategies will need to adapt. For example, Eventbrite has observed a 44% increase in attendance at events relating to attracting, retaining and motivating employees.

Joy Nazzari, founding director of design agency dn&co, says that other entrepreneurs in her sector are using a shared channel on Slack to discuss their recruitment problems and share advice.

Louise Gilliland is global head of coaching at Refound, a specialist in leadership development. She has noticed a significant shift, with “a much greater level of expectation from both prospective and existing employees. So I believe that organisations have to be a lot more intentional about their employee value proposition in the current market.”

While many companies are dangling sign-on bonuses, new perks

and higher salaries, these aren't the changes that businesses should be prioritising, Gilliland argues.

“Companies that are more reactive and see the issue in terms of scarcity are often the ones that are already experiencing systemic cultural challenges,” she says. “They will try to put a sticking plaster on things by offering new job titles or more money in the hope that this will convince people to stay.”

Gilliland recommends that they focus instead on improving their corporate culture. “The companies that have a more cohesive cultural identity, which is reflected in how they operate and develop talent, are in a much stronger position and won't be suffering as much from attrition at the moment.”

Many businesses have accelerated their recruitment processes amid stiff competition for talent.

Andy Dodwell, chair of steel galvanising company Corbetts, says his business has to make near-instant choices when hiring in this environment, as “you don't have time to kiss the frogs any longer”.

Still, not all companies should feel pressured to take quick decisions. Although it may be advisable to streamline some elements of the process – reducing the number of interview rounds, for example – it's more important to sell the company

and its culture to the candidate, Gilliland says. “How you hire is a really strong signal of what it will be like to work in your organisation,” she stresses. “The interview should be as much about giving candidates the opportunity to interview the employer as it is about the employer interviewing them.”

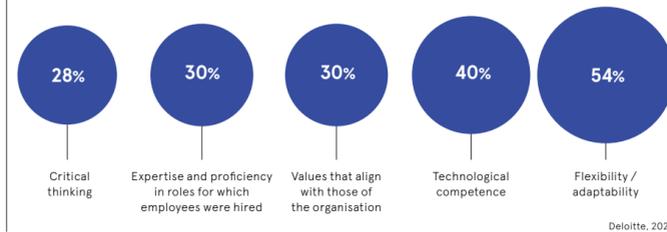
This is one of the biggest changes in the recruitment power dynamic. Interviews are no longer simply a case of candidates selling themselves to employers. Employers must now sell themselves too.

So when will the power shift back to employers? The situation is unlikely to change any time soon. The Bank of England's Monetary Policy Committee estimates that unemployment will keep falling until 2024, while 80% of UK firms are planning to hire over the next 12 months, according to a survey by Hays. The competition for talent is expected to remain high or even increase over the course of the year.

Although this shift in recruiter-candidate relations is likely to be felt across the board, firms will opt for different responses. In some cases, meeting the financial demands of prospective employees may provide a quick fix. But a more lasting solution entails providing the best cultural fit for the talent you really want. ●

## THE TRAITS OF THE FUTURE WORKFORCE

Top five employee qualities that have become most important to organisations worldwide



# Auditing holds key to banishing recruitment bias

Putting recruitment practices under the microscope through an inclusivity audit that uncovers hidden bias can help promote diverse hiring that brings tangible benefits to the bottom line

Diverse teams operating in inclusive environments bring different perspectives and fresh ideas that promote innovation and growth – giving shareholder value a boost.

The focus on discrimination through movements including Black Lives Matter and #MeToo also means brands are under scrutiny from an increasingly diversity-conscious public.

“Diverse hiring is a business imperative, not just a moral argument,” explains Tom Lakin, director of innovation at Resource Solutions, a global recruitment and advisory consultancy with a footprint across 31 countries.

“A company must actively seek ways to reduce barriers for all potential candidates or current team members. This means re-engineering the recruitment process, which is likely to be introducing bias.”

Recruiting a diverse team, while fostering an inclusive workplace community, is powerful.

In its latest report into diversity in business, McKinsey found the most diverse companies are now more likely than ever to outperform less-diverse peers on profitability.

Forensically examining the recruitment process to unearth hidden biases is critical to making the seismic shift towards an inclusive and accessible culture, urges Lakin.

Heading up the advisory group at Resource Solutions, the team has devised an end-to-end inclusivity audit, which analyses the impact of recruitment processes through seven different lenses, before providing a to-do list for making change.

“It is easier to achieve success and visibility of bias than is often perceived,” he explains. “We typically complete an end-to-end audit in around 30 days.”

The audit – which has been used by companies including HSBC and AXA UK – goes beyond the typical diversity markers of gender and ethnicity to examine the recruitment journey through the lens of age, disability and neurodiversity, faith, LGBTQ+ and socio-economic status.

“The murder of George Floyd was a catalyst that meant many of us, as individuals, started questioning ourselves,” says Lakin. “But it also made businesses and leaders question their role. We needed a research-based methodology that isn't just a finger in the air.”

“The key question to answer is whether the way an organisation finds

and brings on talent advantages or disadvantages certain groups based on these diversity dimensions.”

During the fully remote inclusivity audit, the team at Resource Solutions analyses more than 250 data points, blending academic research and case studies from at least 100 sources. Recommendations are then made for purposeful changes.

“All humans possess bias, so it's safe to assume your hiring managers and recruiters are no exception,” adds Lakin. “Recruitment has largely been managed in a standardised way, so this is about changing something heavily embedded.”

The deep-dive audit approach resulted from a surge in organisations' interest in improving diversity and inclusivity in their talent management. Diverse hiring had been a key pillar of Resource Solutions' client advisory programmes since its innovation team formed in 2015. It now comprises more than half of the advisory work undertaken by that team.

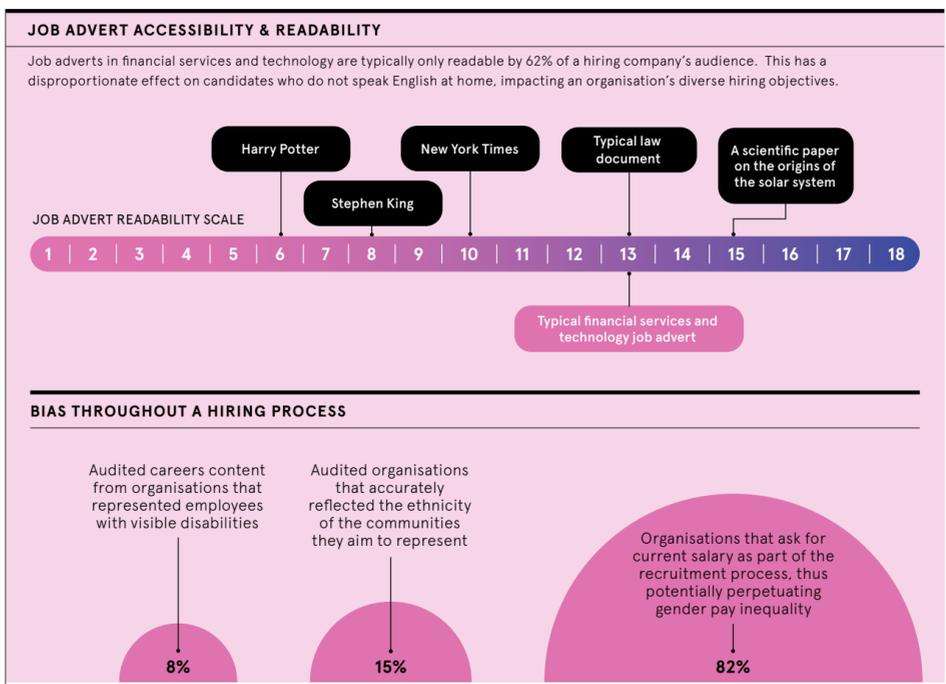
“Historically, our diversity and inclusion work was largely driven by the UK and US, but over the past 12 months there's been a significant rise in demand from emerging markets such as India, Mexico, Sri Lanka, Poland and Romania,” says Lakin.

Despite this desire for change among some companies, more widely the pace of reform is still achingly slow.

The most recent results from the UK government-backed Parker Review, which set all FTSE 100 companies the target of at least one ethnic minority board director by the end of 2021, show there is still work to be done.

And while representation of women on boards has increased to more than a third across FTSE 350 companies, the Hampton-Alexander Review into women leaders points out “structural and cultural barriers still exist for women, as well as other under-represented groups”.

Meanwhile, a new study conducted by the Chartered Management Institute (CMI) in October found just



47% of managers said their organisations were taking active steps to increase the proportion of employees from diverse ethnic groups through recruitment practices.

“Often the biggest issue is that people don't know what their biases are, yet every stage in a recruitment process has the potential to introduce bias,” points out Lakin. “An end-to-end audit is about holding a mirror up to that process using fact and validated research-based methodology. Auditing is the only way to truly identify bias and change how you hire.”

Examples of bias might include strict time slots or short notice for interviews that could disadvantage care givers, or prove problematic for neurodiverse candidates.

Specifying only one technology option can also mean unintentional bias as “most technology has an ethnicity bias in it”, adds Lakin, highlighting that Android devices tend to be more widely used by black candidates.

“We need to audit all these hidden biases, and there are hundreds of them,” he explains.

“Almost all careers pages we've audited under-represent specific

communities, typically black candidates, while many still visually under-represent female talent.

“Some organisations might ask, very well-intentioned, whether a candidate is male, female or trans. That is massively offensive to many in the trans community because it restricts a person's answer so they can't identify as male or female but must identify as trans.

“It could be an organisation asking candidates their current salary. All the research shows that approach is the single biggest factor in perpetuating the gender pay gap. That will continue if we keep basing new salaries on previous ones.”

The audit covers 12 stages of the recruitment process, from pre-application content that might be found through sites such as Glassdoor, to the referral process, addressing reasonable adjustments for candidates with a disability, through to interview and offer stage.

Stripping back every element of the process allows Resource Solutions to compile scores identifying areas of strength and opportunities for improvement.

“Part of the solution is holding the mirror up, the next part is how to change it,” adds Lakin.

Diverse hiring advisory modules provide the toolkit to make meaningful changes to the recruitment process, including creating accessible job adverts through wording and video, running inclusive hiring events, and using behavioural science to minimise bias.

“These are really practical tools, based in research, to re-engineer the recruitment process,” advises Lakin. “All these changes give benefits to investors, as well as bolstering reputation among your customers and employees.”

Find out more about Resource Solutions' inclusivity audit and diverse hiring practice at [resourcesolutions.com/what-we-do/advisory-services/diverse-hiring.html](https://resourcesolutions.com/what-we-do/advisory-services/diverse-hiring.html)

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