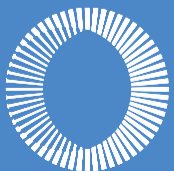


FUTURE OF HR

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FUTURE OF HR

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STRESS MANAGEMENT

Elastic band: how to relieve the strain on line managers

Feeling stretched even before the pandemic, many line managers are struggling to cope with the new set of problems presented by hybrid working. What more can HR do help?

Cath Everett

The widespread adoption of flexible and hybrid working in many industries is presenting novel challenges to line managers, who need more support from the HR function in handling these and their ever-expanding remit. Effective backing will prove crucial, because line managers are the “stewards of sustainable performance and employee experience”.

So says Dr Caitlin Duffy, research director at Gartner, who notes that their people management skills – or, rather, their deficiencies in this area – have become “the number-two driver of employee attrition behind compensation. When there are so many options for candidates in today’s talent market, managers are more critical than ever in getting the best performance out of their staff and retaining top talent.”

Line managers are often under immense pressure. Even before the pandemic, a research report published by the Institute for Employment Studies, *The Squeezed Middle: why HR should be hugging and not squeezing line managers*, revealed that they were taking on tasks that were traditionally part of HR’s remit, such as performance management and the career development of their team members. Senior executives were also counting on them to set targets and maintain quality standards, while also ensuring customer satisfaction, representing brand values and keeping abreast of industry developments, among other responsibilities.

As the uptake of hybrid working increases, the people management elements of line managers’ roles, which have been rendered more onerous by the Covid crisis, are expected to become trickier still. This situation, which is already reaching “tipping point”, according to Duffy, is leading many of them to feel overwhelmed.

She says: “Line managers have been rising to the occasion, but at what cost? They are starting to burn out – and their experience is in danger of causing attrition.” One of the biggest new challenges facing them is how to communicate effectively with members of their teams who may not be in the same place at the same time. Julie Brophy, principal consultant for organisational development consultancy



Hinterhaus Productions via Getty Images

offer flexibility for each member. Duffy notes that this imperative can cause problems for them from a capacity standpoint.

What can the HR function do to lighten the load? Brophy suggests removing “organisational blockers” that make it more difficult for line managers to do their jobs. Such factors will vary from employer to employer, of course, but an example would be a reward structure that is unintentionally incentivising sub-optimal behaviour.

It may also be necessary to redesign line managers’ roles. Employers that operate a project-based organisational structure could split managerial roles into ‘leaders of work’ and ‘leaders of people’, for example. Assigning each employee a permanent people manager will provide consistency, even when the project teams they work in, and the project managers they work under, change regularly.

Another way in which HR can help is by supporting soft skills development. This could come in the shape of providing formal management training, but other interventions include creating networking groups that enable line managers to share their insights and providing access to coaches and mentors.

One employer that has taken such an approach is sustainable food producer Ecotone UK. The company has introduced a formal coaching scheme for all middle managers. Some of its managers have trained to be coaches so that they can support their peers, but external help is also provided.

But this isn’t simply about skills development, notes Ecotone’s HR director, Ann Chambers. It’s also about ensuring that line managers feel supported, particularly when operating in testing circumstances. Just as important is giving them explicit permission to make space and time for their own wellbeing.

Chambers adds that HR professionals should also aim to act as role models for line managers, always exhibiting the appropriate behaviour, whatever the situation. Most of all, HR should be there for line managers in much the same sense that line managers should be there for their staff.

“Our job as HR professionals is to act as mirrors,” she says. “If we support line managers in the right way, they will have the confidence and experience to support their teams in the right way too, which means that everyone benefits.”

OE Cam, points out that doing so “requires more intentional focus and perspective, which takes more effort” than it does in the case of centrally based teams.

Important issues in this context include guarding against distance bias, she says. Failing to do so can not only lead to unconscious discrimination; it can also damage the sense of belonging and engagement of remote workers who feel left out of the loop.

Line managers also need to find ways to empower their teams so that they can work out for themselves the most effective ways of achieving the results expected of them.

“It’s an approach based not on how you deliver but on what you

deliver, which means that how and when something is done is more under the control of the individual doing it,” Brophy says. “Enabling this kind of autonomy requires more of a coaching style of management – which is more demanding for the manager.”

Another challenge for line managers is supporting the health and wellbeing of an increasingly dispersed team and creating a psychologically safe environment that enables people to be themselves and speak out if necessary. The new world of work is rendering the standardised, one-size-fits-all approach to team management obsolete. Managers must increasingly provide individualised support and



Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, 2021

Q&A

The talent shortage is a myth

Companies perceiving talent shortages in their local market must rethink their workforce models and talent acquisition strategies. Hiring global remote teams is a vital evolution in business ideology explains **Mark Hedley**, vice-president of talent recruiting at Globalization Partners



The pandemic has created a paradigm shift in the way we work, and numerous analysts and commentators have noted its role in giving rise to the so-called 'great attrition'. In a recent study by Manpower Group, seven in ten companies reported talent shortages and difficulties in hiring.

There is no doubt, organisations are facing a much tighter labour market in many countries, but contrary to conventional wisdom, positions aren't vacant because there is a shortage of talented people – there is talent everywhere. So what's really going on and what's the solution to these challenges? We ask Mark Hedley, vice-president of talent recruiting at Globalization Partners, the world's leading global employment platform whose recently announced funding valued the company at \$4.2bn.

Q Mark, we've heard a lot about the 'great attrition' or 'great resignation'. Is there really a talent shortage at the moment?

A It's a somewhat controversial viewpoint but, in our opinion, there is talent available, but companies just need to start thinking differently – globally. What we're actually seeing are local talent shortages in location-specific roles or certain industries like retail, hospitality and manufacturing. There is a clear demand and supply imbalance because those roles are location-dependent. But if you look at it from a global perspective and knowledge worker perspective, the talent is out there.

Q What does this tell us about how companies should be changing their approach to work?

A Organisations that have returned to a pre-pandemic workforce model have run into a lot of hiring challenges over the last 12 months. They almost draw a perimeter around their office locations and when somebody leaves, they look to replace the same chair with a different person. In these instances, the talent pool has certainly shrunk because employee behaviours

and preferences have changed and a lot of people are not interested in office-based roles anymore. For companies adopting a hybrid model, which is two or three days in the office and two or three at home, we're seeing that the talent pool has roughly remained the same. But companies that are thriving in the talent market – and there are plenty out there – are those that have completely embraced remote working. For them, the talent pool has significantly expanded. That tells us that issues finding people are not because of supply, they are because the workforce model you are deploying is restricting you from accessing the biggest and best talent pool.

Q For companies that do want to unlock talent in new jurisdictions, what are the common obstacles they face?

A There are a few barriers to overcome. The biggest is a lack of understanding around their options. For over 10 years at Globalization Partners we've been educating people that you don't have to invest in entities, infrastructure, offices or even expertise in a particular region in order to hire people there. Now, the pandemic and the rise of remote working as a result, has proven that remote working can be very successful. Most people don't need convincing of that anymore, but they do need more awareness that through a company like Globalization Partners they can hire 10 people in 10 different countries seamlessly.

Once you're past that, it's really about understanding where you want to hire and the costs. If you're looking for a specific skill set, where is the best place to look? What is the supply and competitor activity in that area, and what's the total cost of compensation and statutory benefits? If the numbers work out, the next challenge is not having a brand in that location. Often a company is very well-known in its home region and has the backing to expand internationally, but its

“The companies that are thriving in the talent market – and there are plenty out there – are those that have completely embraced remote working. For them, the talent pool has significantly expanded

brand equity is much lower elsewhere. Finally, your recruitment team might be great domestically but not experienced with international hiring and don't know local market nuances.

Q How is Globalization Partners helping organisations overcome these challenges?

A Globalization Partners makes it fast and easy for employers to hire anyone, anywhere, without having to set up international branch offices or subsidiaries. By using Globalization Partners' proprietary, AI-enabled and compliant platform, companies can improve their access to global

talent while minimising risk. Users enjoy around-the-clock access to the industry's largest and most experienced team of global HR experts who can assist with questions about hiring talent in over 187 countries.

We've been doing this for over 10 years now, and recently we elevated our offering further through the launch of G-P Recruit, which leverages Globalization Partners' extensive recruitment partner network to give customers access to an unprecedented selection of recruiting specialists in key markets around the world. With G-P Recruit, companies can find the perfect fit based on their unique combination of requirements including hiring location, industry sector, functional area, expertise or prior roles, all through Globalization Partners' industry-leading global employment technology platform.

Q What role will technology play in the future of talent?

A The future of talent is remote and dispersed around the world, and technology is the enabler. We've already seen that the move to global remote working has been driven by the democratisation of collaboration and communication tools. Now companies need to leverage technology to expand their talent pool. That's where Globalization Partners comes in because our global employment

platform provides end-to-end technology enablement for all of the processes required to tap into global talent pools.

However, we are also aware that recruitment can be a personal and sensitive activity which is where our people on the ground come in. We use technology to enable organisations, their candidates and recruiting agency partners to spend more time on their conversations and relationships rather than onerous background work. If a company decides to hire a business development manager in Singapore, within five minutes they can go onto our platform, complete the information and it's automatically sent across to our recruitment agency partners with expert local knowledge. A HR manager or business leader sitting in London, with teams in six different locations and time zones, has everything in the platform to be compliant. It's totally seamless and how companies will attract and retain thriving workforces in the future.

For more information, visit globalization-partners.com



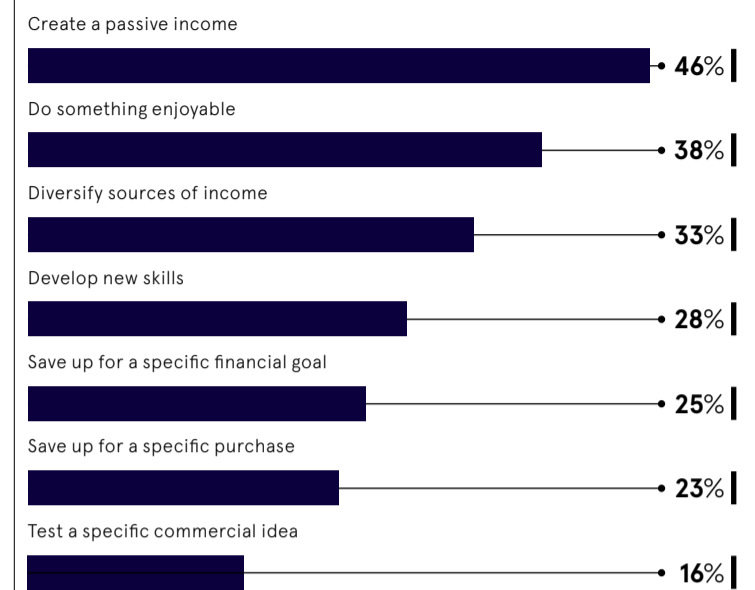
Globalization Partners, Global Employee Survey, 2021



Oscar Wong via Gettyimages

WHY START A SIDE HUSTLE?

Percentage of Americans with side hustles who cited the following as their main motivations for pursuing them



Zapier, the Harris Poll, 2021

ENGAGEMENT

Don't blame it on the moonlighters

The pandemic has spawned a legion of side hustlers who are running businesses and pursuing other passion projects alongside their day jobs. Could actively encouraging such activities boost employee engagement?

Megan Tatum

At the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations, side hustles are practically the norm. The London-based not-for-profit research body has an administrator who takes time off to work as a touring opera singer. One of her colleagues juggles her job at the institute with delivering TED talks and pursuing academic and charitable projects on disability. There are actors, physiotherapists and even a farmer on the payroll.

Such activities have been encouraged at the institute for as long as Rachel Kelly, who joined it more than 15 years ago, can recall. Kelly, who has a part-time job here as a senior consultant, researcher and engagement manager, also works as an instructor of the Alexander

technique, which teaches people how to improve their posture.

Enabling people to devote enough time to all their professional interests is a win-win for employee and employer, she says. "This is about your whole self being in the work. For the organisation, it makes for happier employees. People who are really into what they are doing will be your brand ambassadors without even thinking about it."

Traditionally, employers haven't always agreed with this view, preferring that staff focus fully on their salaried role. Some have even required employees to sign contracts to that effect, precluding their pursuit of any other paid work without first obtaining the HR department's express permission.

But is that approach starting to look outdated? After all, the Covid crisis has created a generation of side hustlers. A survey of UK workers with a side hustle by the Fiverr job site in January found that more than half had started theirs during the pandemic. Many of the respondents cited economic reasons for doing so, such as the increasing cost of living and decreasing job security, alongside the extra time that many furloughed workers had suddenly been granted to explore their entrepreneurial side.

Thousands more people in the UK are running their own businesses while also holding down a full- or part-time job than there were prior to the pandemic. At the same time, record numbers are reportedly quitting their employers in search of more meaningful work in the so-called great resignation.

With these trends in mind, might HR teams that encourage staff to pursue other passions alongside their day jobs have found themselves a simple method of boosting employee engagement?

Holly Stephens is a firm believer in such an approach. The founder and CEO of subtitle and translation service Subly has established three businesses as side hustles, two

alongside a full-time job. She actively encourages her team of 13 at Subly to follow her example.

"It was important for me to give my team members the opportunity to continue their side hustles, just as I was able to," Stephens says. "In fact, the reason I wanted to work with some of them was that they had one. Their side hustles made it attractive for me as an employer to build a team of people who understand the problems I'm trying to solve, as they're dealing with similar issues themselves."

If the company's graphic designer were to build a profile on YouTube, for instance, she could give great feedback on Subly's own subtitle service for videos. Or if the marketing manager were to start a podcast series, that process would contribute to the company's audio-to-text know-how for podcasters.

Such activities would "benefit the company just as much as they would serve their personal aspirations", Stephens says.

Molly Masters, founder-director of Books That Matter, a subscription service that promotes the work of female authors, has taken a similar approach. Among her team are artists, potters, photographers and novelists, all of whom are able to balance their professional pursuits with their work for the company.

"Our subscription boxes require creative visions to be responsive to the latest consumer trends. While our office is a hub of ideas, inspiration often strikes when we're not at our desks," she says. "We therefore know the true value of encouraging creativity in our staff and the positive effects it has on our business."

The pandemic-era "work ethic is learning much more towards an understanding of the multi-hyphen mentality", adds Masters, referring to Emma Gannon's 2018 book, *The Multi-Hyphen Method: work less, create more and design a career that works for you*. "This is where employers choose to respect and admire the range of skills their employees have. Allowing them to

work on finessing these will benefit the business."

What does an employer's active support for side hustles look like in practice? Books That Matter sets aside what Masters calls an "employee inspiration" budget that team members can spend on attending events and courses. Whatever developmental activity they choose to invest in, it "will inspire them and nurture their creativity, side hustles or passion projects", she says.

At Subly, meanwhile, it's all about honesty and clarity. The leadership team has striven to establish a culture that makes it plain to everyone that it is OK to have professional aspirations outside their day jobs. But it has also set clear boundaries. For example, there is a requirement that no side hustle competes directly with the business.

"There must be openness on both sides," Stephens stresses. "Employees have to be transparent about their career aspirations. It doesn't work if someone feels that they need to keep these a secret."

With the right guidelines in place, though, the benefits can be significant for employer and employee, including increased engagement and job satisfaction, reduced staff turnover and higher productivity.

For anyone who's yet to be convinced, Masters recommends books such as *The Multi-Hyphen Method* and Otegha Uwagba's *Little Black Book: a toolkit for working women*.

"These both explore how making time for creativity, passions, hobbies and side hustles will benefit both our mental wellbeing and our professional prospects – and how employers can respect and encourage this," she explains.

Kelly accepts that firms competing for scarce skills in a tight recruitment market might have the urge to exert more control, not less, over their workers' extracurricular activities. But her argument is that "the more you let go, the more control you have. Give people the freedom to develop their talents and blossom, and they will respond." ●

“It was important for me to give my team members the opportunity to continue their side hustles, just as I was able to



Maskot via Gettyimages

REWARD AND RECOGNITION

Remunerate, liberate, celebrate: going beyond pay to retain talent

Salary increases are becoming an increasingly blunt retention tool. Flexibility is now crucial to many workers – for whom a simple ‘thank you’ from their employer wouldn’t go amiss either

Andy Jones

Faced with an exodus of talent from their profession, even the most conservative of corporate law firms are thinking about adopting innovative recruitment and retention tactics.

Take Clifford Chance, for instance. Jonathan Kewley, co-head of the magic-circle member’s technology

practice, recently submitted an emoji-sprinkled plan to the partners that recommended several novel measures. These included bringing in a four-day week, sponsoring staff to pursue “passion projects and hobbies” and allowing people to take “micro-retreats every six weeks in cool places we might not have thought of.”

The policies that Kewley proposed would be overseen by a senior executive assuming the new position of chief happiness officer. The incumbent would bring in a host of further retention measures, such as ensuring that employees receive the latest books by their favourite authors on publication.

Another of his recommendations included removing the job title ‘trainee’. Given that starting salaries for Clifford Chance trainees are in the region of £50,000, this proposal – alongside all the other recommended changes – is a strong

indication that pay is not all that matters to employees. And, while it’s likely that at least some colleagues of the partner who told the *London Evening Standard* that Kewley’s proposals were “utterly deluded” would agree with that verdict, it’s also a sign that there may be a revolution afoot in recruitment and retention practices even in the highest-paying sectors.

Many firms have found that the flexible working regimes they have been obliged to adopt since the first UK-wide Covid lockdown was imposed in 2020 haven’t reduced the quality of their output. So says Nic Marks, who worked as a statistician studying quality of life for 25 years, including as an adviser to both Labour and Tory governments, before co-founding workplace data company Friday Pulse.

“If you have a client that’s paying you for your employees’ time, it won’t want to buy the time when

they are knackered. It wants to pay for their best work,” Marks stresses.

To continue delivering work of a high standard, employees want to retain the flexibility that they were granted during the early stages of the Covid crisis. Indeed, they are actively seeking employers that are offering staff the most freedom to do their work where and when it best suits them.

Flexa Careers, a platform on which employers can advertise only genuinely flexible jobs, started operating in February 2020. It has since attracted more than 400,000 users.

For Molly Johnson-Jones, one of Flexa’s co-founders, the business was born of necessity. In 2016, aged 26, she was working at an investment bank when her career was derailed by an auto-immune illness that would at times render her unable to walk. Instead of letting her

work from home when she needed to, the bank’s response was to offer her a settlement package and show her the door.

Her resulting search for a more supportive employer led her to create a resource to help others in a similar position.

“One user we helped now lives in the mountains and has skydiving as a hobby,” says Johnson-Jones, who reports that 86% of Flexa’s users are searching for employers that operate a ‘work from anywhere’ regime.

“They can make a primary search – for accountancy jobs, say – but they can also make a secondary search for features they want from an employer – from a dog-friendly office to an enhanced parental-leave entitlement. That secondary search is becoming more demanding.”

Flexa practises what it preaches. Its staff work four-and-a-half-day

weeks, with core hours of 11am to 3pm and an annual leave allowance of 36 days. The London-based company also allows employees to work wherever they like. Johnson-Jones herself recently spent six weeks working in the West Country.

HappyOrNot is a Finnish-based multinational that asks people exactly that question on behalf of the companies to which it sells its distinctive terminals. These feature four coloured buttons that customers can press to indicate whether they’re very happy, happy, unhappy or very unhappy with the service they have received. It has also conducted a large-scale employee satisfaction survey, polling 2.8 million people in a range of industries last year. The results suggest that flexible work is happy work.

Respondents in industries offering more flexibility – IT, for instance – were significantly more likely to declare themselves very happy than those in sectors such as healthcare, which tend to require employees to be on the premises while working.

With 83.5% of tech workers saying that they were very happy overall, it’s notable that they maintained this level of satisfaction at all times of the day and week. Those who worked Sunday shifts in less flexible sectors became far less content. For instance, the proportion of healthcare staff saying they were very happy working on that day was 51.9%, compared with their overall average of 63.5%.

The Covid-enforced shift to remote working for many people has not only given them a taste for a different way of operating; it’s also detached them from the hive mind of the office. That’s the view of Eric Mosley, the co-founder and CEO of Workhuman, a provider of employee recognition schemes.

“We have been observing a huge amount of disconnection between employees, their companies and their colleagues,” he reports.

This indicates that many people are “looking for jobs with meaning and for employers that accommodate different working preferences, all the while maintaining a sense of community. If that’s not the case, they will walk.”

Mosley continues: “Workhuman’s latest research report, *Two Years into Covid*, reveals that the great resignation is still a massive disruptor. Of the workers we surveyed across the UK, the US, Canada and Ireland, four in every 10 are planning to look for a new job over the next 12 months.”

The study also found that people who had simply been thanked by their manager for their efforts in the previous month were half as likely to be seeking a new job as those who hadn’t had such acknowledgement. “At a time when people are quitting their jobs in unprecedented numbers, ‘thank you’ has never been so powerful,” Mosely says.

Marks notes that most bosses are what the Chartered Management Institute calls “accidental managers”, by which it means they have been promoted for their technical knowledge and/or length of service, rather than for their people skills. A lack of know-how in this area can be

“At a time when people are quitting their jobs in unprecedented numbers, ‘thank you’ has never been so powerful

problematic when it comes to motivating people and making them feel engaged with their organisation.

He believes that all line managers should hold review meetings with their staff at the end of each week “where they ask: ‘What went well for you? What didn’t?’ Too often, we simply move on to the next thing. Businesses are concerned that they would be opening Pandora’s box by doing that – they worry about what would come out. But they don’t see that so much good stuff can come out simply by asking.”

One company that has opened the box is Fishbrain. Its popular app helps anglers to locate the best swims, exchange tips and find fishing pals. But what it couldn’t necessarily do was help the company lure more female talent to its 130-strong workforce – a tricky task, given that both coding and angling are male-dominated pursuits.

It signed up to Pink Programming, a not-for-profit organisation that runs coding events for women and celebrates female successes in the tech industry, to see if it could help to attract and develop more female programmers. Another important move it made was to simply ask its employees for ideas to make the workplace more inclusive to women.

Lisa Kennelly, Fishbrain’s chief marketing officer, explains: “If we can’t make women feel welcome in the office, how can we make them feel welcome in our app? One thing that kept coming back from staff was that they would like the bathrooms in the building to offer free sanitary products. Making this small change has made a big impact here. Our female joiners always say how valued this makes them feel compared with previous workplaces.”

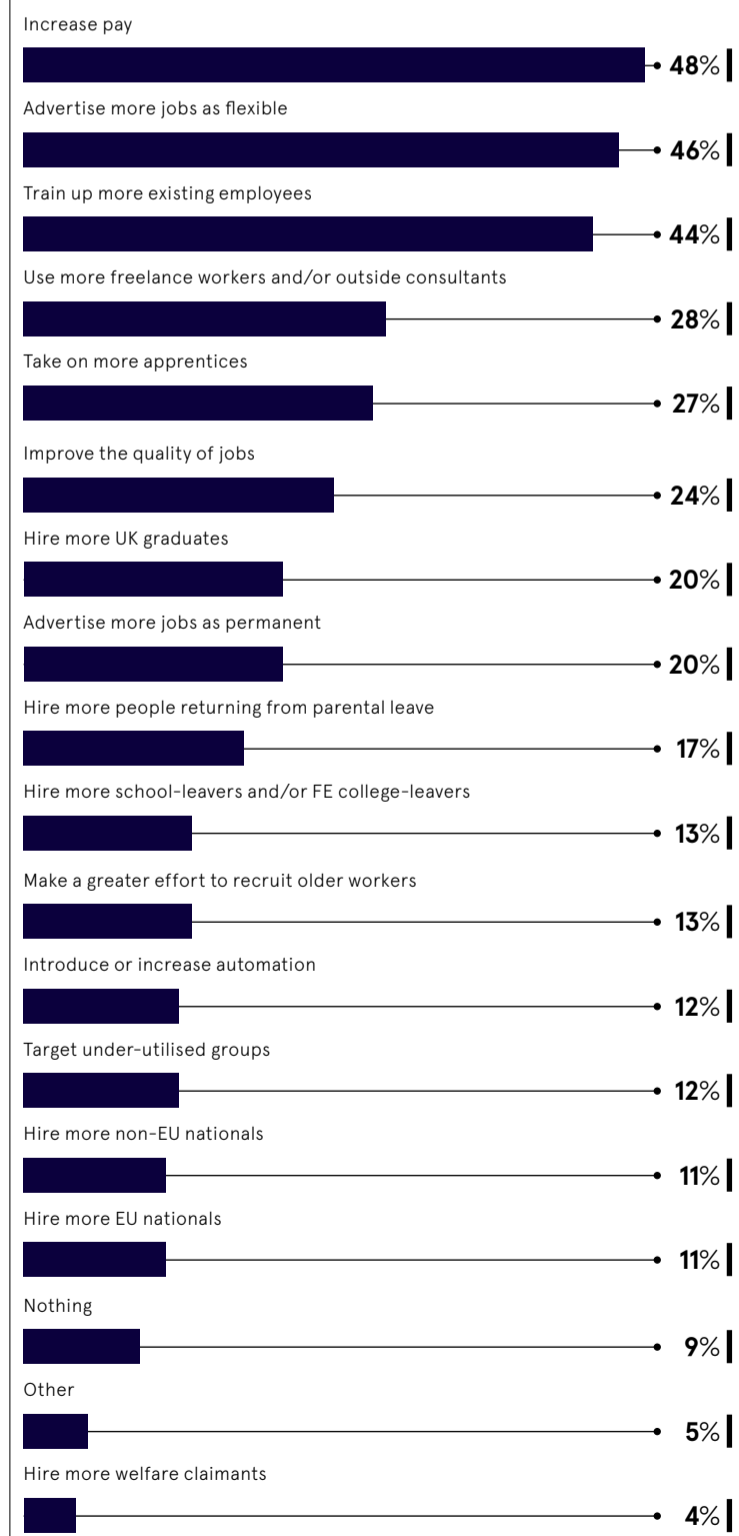
Fishbrain also now supports flexible schedules for employees who need to work outside typical office hours. Such minor concessions can make all the difference in retaining the services of valued employees.

Johnson-Jones is confident that a positive change is coming at even the biggest of corporations. “It is absolutely possible for office-based companies, even those with thousands of employees, to at least offer hybrid working. Any firm saying that it isn’t is lying.”

Not that her old employer has started offering such flexibility, she notes. Such firms may be able to offer the most generous financial rewards, but they have yet to realise that, for the latest generation of candidates especially, it simply isn’t just about the money. ●

EMPLOYERS’ KEY TACTICS IN THE WAR FOR TALENT

Percentage of companies that say they have dealt with hard-to-fill vacancies in the following ways over the past six months



Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, 2022



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APPRENTICESHIPS

FE lifting: how to stop companies from being snobbish about further education

Many UK employers still consider apprenticeships and vocational learning generally as the poor relations of academic qualifications. What can be done to change this unhelpful attitude?

Josh Sims

The fact is that people with vocational qualifications are at a disadvantage. That's the stark verdict of Helen Johnson, head of apprenticeships at the Science and Technology Facilities Council, a government agency that funds research in fields such as nuclear physics and astronomy. "Some employers have lost touch with the way in which vocational qualifications have changed, especially older managers who still view them as they were in, say, the 1970s," she argues. "They do not understand the changes." Johnson's assessment is supported by the results of a 2021 Ofqual survey of employers, which found that only 43% felt they had at least a "quite good" understanding of vocational qualifications. A fifth of



respondents, comprising mostly smaller employers, admitted to having no understanding at all. It's little wonder that, while 70% of providers of vocational qualification in the survey agreed that these prepared learners well for work, a considerably smaller proportion of employers (31%) agreed with them. "Moves to overhaul vocational qualifications in recent years have caused complexity, which can be challenging from an employer's

perspective," observes Jude Owens, interim global people operations director at digital advertising platform LoopMe. "There are lots of vocational schemes of differing quality being offered by many providers. That can be a hindrance if you want to hire good-quality talent quickly." She continues: "There's also the problem that people still recruit in their own image. Those with a traditional academic background

“There are lots of vocational schemes of differing quality being offered by many providers. That can be a hindrance

perceive someone with a vocational qualification as taking longer than a university graduate to get up to speed. The government and educational institutions could also do better in promoting the value of vocational qualifications, so that employers don't automatically favour candidates with degrees." Johnson agrees that "some businesses still have an element of stuffiness in their outlook on vocational qualifications". As social commentator David Goodhart notes in his 2020 book *Head, Hand, Heart: the struggle for dignity and status in the 21st century*, different cultures place differing values on vocational training. In some nations – including the UK – it's widely viewed as a poor relation to academic study.



Lights, camera, traction! Apprenticeships in the arts

The creative industries may be one of the UK's economic success stories, but they certainly aren't known for their accessibility. For potential entrants, getting on the first rung here has long been a question of knowing the right people and having

enough financial backing to enable them to work as extremely low-paid interns. Might apprenticeship schemes – as well as the proposed T-levels, due to start from September 2023 – enable these industries to access a whole new pool of talent and shed their elitist reputation? Such initiatives have had a troubled history – participation in creative apprenticeships fell by one-third over the three years to 2018, for instance. But there are grounds for optimism. For instance, a 2021 review by the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IATE) noted that, in a win for social mobility, the theatre sector's adoption of apprenticeships in recent years had encouraged many more people who might not have seen it as a potential employer to consider the opportunity. And the IATE – a non-departmental executive body sponsored by the Department for Education – is upping the ante. It has

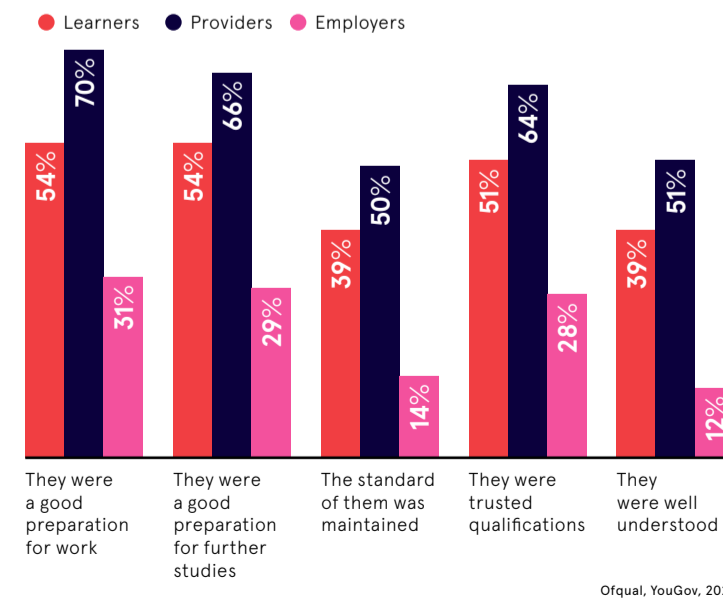
added five creative occupations to the list of jobs that are accessible through technical education and proposed that a further 10 – from milliner to wig-maker – be considered. It has also sought to address long-term factors militating against apprenticeship schemes in the creative industries. One of these is that 80% of employers in the sector tend to be very small businesses with workforces of no more than two people, which would find it hard to take on a full-time apprentice. Consequently, a more flexible creative model, which would enable apprentices to move from project to project and employer to employer, is under consideration. There is £7m of government funding attached to the initiative. Industry-led skills body ScreenSkills is piloting just such a model. But it has noted that the system remains "so complex" that it is still deterring companies in the creative industries from taking on apprentices.

Research last year by the Social Market Foundation (SMF) think-tank found that higher education had received two times more mentions than further education had in the British media over the preceding decade. By contrast, a 2016 Eurostat study revealed that almost half of all secondary-school pupils in the EU were going on to take vocational qualifications. In the US, states have broadly cut funding to vocational training programmes over the past decade, partly because they are seen as expensive to run. Nicholas Wyman, president of the Institute of Workplaces Skills Innovation America, believes that "job snobbery" applies widely in his country. This is the

fallacy that vocational qualifications exist to equip people for manual work, rather than being relevant to many highly skilled occupations. "It's born of the misconception that a university qualification is what you need to succeed in life," he says. "I don't think employers set out to disadvantage any candidate with a vocational qualification, but many have systems in place that mean they recruit in a certain way that's hard to change. The task of reassessing the value of vocational qualifications typically requires a champion at director level." William Clouston is the leader of the UK Social Democratic Party, which is planning to publish an education policy this summer that will encourage the rebalancing of academic and vocational training. He agrees with Wyman that British employers' general "lack of respect for vocational qualifications is all about status in the end. Compared with say, German culture, we don't vilify people for being ignorant in maths, yet we do if they haven't read the right novels. In the UK, there has been an over-expansion of university education, while an easy labour supply has hitherto disincentivised firms from offering apprenticeships. We need a rebalancing, so that not having a degree doesn't work against people." Offering a Continental perspective from his base in Oslo, Even Bolstad is president of the European Association for People Management, an umbrella organisation incorporating HR institutes from 35 countries. He believes that, in thriving industrialised nations with high employment in particular, businesses generally look down on vocational qualifications. "That is problematic, because where they'll probably lack labour in years to come is in jobs requiring the very skills that people learn when taking these qualifications," Bolstad says. "Employers that don't open themselves up to vocational training are, in the longer term, really digging their own graves." The government of Australia, for instance, has calculated that its economy will need one million extra workers with vocational qualifications by as soon as next year. "Germany is always cited as the exception – the go-to example of a country that has got it so right in finding a flexible approach to both vocational and academic education," he adds. "But it seems that strong business cultures are generally the most challenged when it comes to changing attitudes." Yet there are some positive signs that things may be changing in the UK, at least. While British firms' appreciation of vocational qualifications is limited, would-be students and their parents are starting to think differently. Among this group, the status of further education has grown relative to that of higher education, according to the SMF's research. Just under half (48%) of UK parents said that they would prefer their child to gain a vocational qualification over an academic one. Even those respondents who described themselves as middle class – the traditional wellspring of university graduates – ranked the two options equally on average. Does that leave employers behind the curve? Johnson believes that the economic uncertainties that lie ahead are prompting companies to see vocational training in a more favourable light. "Considering the future is forcing employers to catch up. They want core skills of adaptability, the ability to learn and so on, precisely because they don't know what work will look like in the coming years," she says. Bolstad notes that arguments about the respective merits of further and higher education may soon prove moot in any case, given how quickly the world of work is evolving. The advance of tech such as robotics, big-data analytics and artificial intelligence is likely to cause profound disruption, he says. "Learning will be democratised. It will be shorter, screen-based and ongoing, delivered on a just-in-time basis," Bolstad predicts. "Such is the pace of change at work that the debate among employers pitting academic qualifications against vocational ones is set to become dramatically less relevant." ●

WHAT DO PEOPLE THINK ABOUT FURTHER EDUCATION?

Percentage of learners, providers and employers who agreed with the following statements about vocational and technical qualifications in 2020



Invest in L&D to reverse the post-pandemic talent drain

As organisations feel the effects of the Great Resignation, a robust workplace training strategy can tackle employee burnout, improve retention and productivity, and create a culture of innovation to attract new talent

The seismic shift in the workplace dynamic means an urgent need to address the post-pandemic talent drain. Hybrid working, the rise of digital and data, and a fundamental change in employee expectations are reshaping the world of work. With forecasts that as many as 40% of the global workforce could leave their jobs as part of the great resignation, a people-driven strategic approach to attracting and retaining talent is essential.



Workplace training delivered through robust, engaging and meaningful learning and development programmes is key to creating a careers-focused culture that gives organisations a distinctive edge. "The pandemic has created a unique set of challenges, ranging from employee burnout to issues with hybrid working and the expectations of the workforce changing significantly and rapidly," explains James Kelly, chief executive of Cornedel, a specialist training provider working with large corporate organisations. "The UK is facing the highest number of vacancies in recorded history, and 2022 looks no different. Businesses are losing top talent, but workplace training can help to re-engage and retain employees."

A desire to kickstart career growth and the chance to reflect on personal and professional goals are among reasons for the exodus, but workplace training, upskilling and a focus on some of the soft skills needed in the hybrid world can stem those issues. Research from Cornedel, which works in partnership with organisations including BP, Asda, The Adecco Group and Zoopla, found 84% of clients reported L&D programmes were effective at reducing turnover and retaining good employees. However, with figures showing sharp increases in experienced employees leaving their jobs, there is a fresh challenge facing firms as 'accidental managers' struggle to cope with new demands. "The great resignation will have a direct impact on employees as their roles expand to take on additional work," points out Kelly. "Marketers will now have to be data professionals too; project managers

will need leadership skills to take on new challenges – the impact will be felt across all departments and levels. "There is a real need for quality, bite-sized learning, as employees will need to learn at speed." At the same time, concerns that hybrid working and a lack of in-person mentorship could lead to proximity bias and hamper development opportunities must be addressed through empathetic leadership training. Part of a robust strategy that embeds L&D into organisational culture are apprenticeships. The Open University found three-quarters of organisations reported increased retention as a result of apprenticeship programmes, while almost half of all apprentices are aged over 24. The productivity benefits of skills development are recognised by the government, which has pledged to increase funding for apprenticeships by £170m to £2.7bn in 2024-25. Cornedel's own research highlights that 88% of employers also believe the skills crisis can be effectively mitigated through apprenticeships. Meanwhile, a new online service launched in September to make it easier for large employers that pay the Apprenticeship Levy to spend their funds, and for other employers to apply for funding. BP currently has more than 300 people undertaking career apprenticeships and Robbie Watson, the firm's future skills and learning manager for digital, said the strategy showed a "commitment to development". "When we look at attracting talent, it's about offering so much more than a job," explains Watson. "Someone that joins BP starts their job on day one, but they also start their learning journey on day one. "We are trying to change the culture within BP to a continual learning environment and career apprenticeships really feed into that." As societal and economic changes created by the pandemic continue to impact employee burnout and issues with retention and attraction, a high-quality workplace training strategy can help build a culture of lifelong learning and a curious, innovative workforce. "It can't be understated how significantly the world of work has changed in the last two years," concludes Kelly. "All these issues require clear, strategic planning that recognises that shift rather than incremental changes to an organisation's L&D strategy."

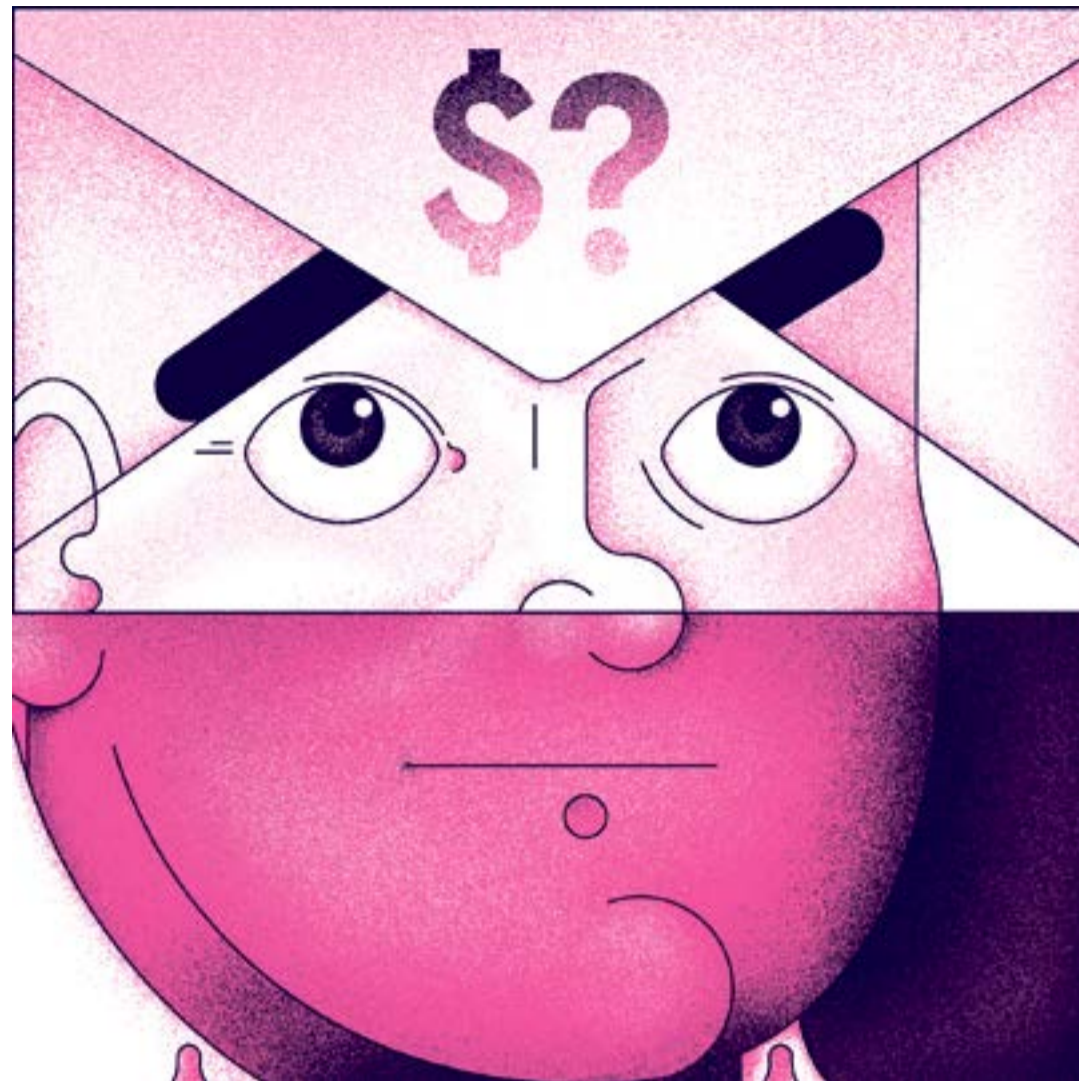
Find out how your organisation can make the most of your Apprenticeship Levy funding and solve skills gaps within your business - [cornedel.com](https://www.cornedel.com)





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RECRUITMENT

Let's talk about cheques (maybe)

Employers in New York City will soon have to state salaries on job adverts by law. Is it time for all businesses to be more open about remuneration?

Sam Forsdick

When you're applying for a new job, it can be difficult to know when to ask the all-important question: what does the role pay? In some cases, the salary can remain a mystery right up to the point at which the job offer is made.

In an effort to remove some of this uncertainty, New York City Council has legislated to oblige employers in the city to publish the expected salary range for any vacancy they advertise. It's hoped that the regulation, which is due to take effect on 15 May, will help to reduce gender and ethnicity pay gaps, while also giving candidates more agency during salary negotiations.

Some employer groups have been vociferous in their opposition to the law, arguing that it is "unfriendly to business". The Partnership for New York City, whose members include

CEOs from some of the country's largest businesses, claims that it will prove "burdensome and time-consuming" to implement, which would in turn create problems for their recruitment teams.

Sally Bendtsen, the founder of independent consultancy LimeLight HR, offers a different perspective. Such attitudes are "old-fashioned", she suggests, stressing that employers need to be as open as they can be about the rewards they're able to offer, especially when the recruitment market is overheating.

"It is very much an applicant's market at the moment," she notes. "People want clarity from employers. If you want to be getting the best people to fill your vacancy, you need to be transparent with them from the very start."

One company that has pioneered extreme pay transparency is social

media management platform Buffer. The multinational, based in San Francisco, publishes its employees' salaries online, although people can opt out – for reasons of personal safety for example.

The company's director of business operations is Jenny Terry, who is based in Louisville, Kentucky. According to the corporate website, her basic annual salary is precisely \$165,759 (£125,300).

She explains that the firm's initial decision, taken back in 2013, was to make pay transparent internally to better align the company with its values and "to enable the rest of the team to see what other people made". Finding that its employees' response to that was "very positive", Buffer decided to go one step further and disclose their salaries publicly.

The policy of openness has since developed to incorporate a salary

calculator and career frameworks, which aim to help employees see how their earnings could grow if they were to achieve promotions.

One obvious benefit of introducing transparency has been that the number of people applying for jobs at Buffer has "skyrocketed", Terry says. "Candidates were very encouraged to see that level of transparency at the business. It helped them to know what to expect, regarding pay, before applying."

Transparency can also improve levels of trust among teams, remove the need to negotiate pay rises and help to eliminate gaps between certain groups. According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, nearly 80% of the gender pay gap, across a sample of 16 member states, can be attributed to wage inequity inside organisations. It describes pay transparency as a "simple way to identify and address gender wage gaps" when they occur in the workplace.

Terry notes that Buffer's policy of openness has helped the company to address this matter effectively. "Whether you're male or female, if you're in the same role in the same position, you're going to make the exact same amount," she stresses.

In the UK, the BBC is one of the highest-profile employers to have introduced pay transparency rules. Following an internal policy review in 2019, the salaries of the broadcaster's highest earners (defined as those paid £150,000-plus) are published in £5,000 bands. All adverts for its lower-paid UK-based vacancies include references to the bands the roles will fit into, ranging from A (£20,536 to £30,804) up to F (£61,608 to £112,948).

Alan Price, CEO of HR software provider BrightHR, observes that "a clear and open pay structure is more likely to both improve staff retention and attract new talent. It can increase productivity and motivation if employees know that they will be rewarded on merit and there are clear objectives to work towards to achieve pay rises."

Despite the benefits, there is still reluctance among most employers to mention salaries in their recruitment adverts. Daisy Wolfenden, MD of Leeds-based digital marketing agency Wolfenden, prefers to keep pay private, despite agreeing with many of the counter-arguments.

"As a small agency, we hire people with specialist knowledge who often have varying levels of experience and skill," she says. "This can make it difficult for us to advertise roles at specific set salaries, as no two members of the team will be performing the exact same role."

It's an approach that technology training firm Revolet Group also takes. The company's president, Nabila Salem, explains: "Employers might choose to not publicise how much they pay for many reasons. Withholding salary information makes it harder for employees to get poached by rivals. In competitive markets such as tech, that is something most employers want to avoid at all costs. At the same time, it protects those employees who wouldn't be comfortable if this information were to be made public."

THE CASE FOR BEING CLEAR ABOUT THE REWARDS THAT RECRUITS COULD EARN

76%

of US workers say that the knowledge that another company is offering a better package is an enticement to leave their existing employer

80% expect a pay rise in 2022

78% are planning to seek a new job

24 Seven, 2022

Other employers believe that being upfront about the earnings potential of a given role could limit the number of applicants. Their argument is that strong potential candidates might rule themselves out either because they consider

“If you want to be getting the best people for the job, you need to be transparent from the very start

themselves too inexperienced for the pay grade or because they think they could earn more elsewhere.

Bendtsen describes such concerns as "a bit of a fallacy. If you put up a range of salaries, then you can cover the minimum and maximum you're willing to pay. If you are willing to pay more than the maximum for the right person, I would argue that you should have advertised that in the first place."

The tightness of the recruitment market is also influencing some employers' decisions to keep pay secret, according to Bendtsen. With the demand for skills outstripping the supply in many sectors, rewards for new recruits are being inflated significantly. Many businesses will therefore be reluctant to advertise the figure they're prepared to pay to fill a given vacancy if existing employees in similar roles are being paid considerably less.

But she stresses that being honest and open with employees remains the best course of action, adding: "If you've got to hide the salary, then perhaps you know it isn't good."

Why onboarding is key to talent acquisition

Onboarding is often overlooked as a vital element of talent retention, but new technology could help streamline the process and make it more efficient

A good cultural fit, the right skills and experience, and a sound grasp of the job role have always been essential to successful recruitment strategies. In the new era of remote and hybrid working, with a challenging talent market, an effective onboarding process has also become pivotal to ensuring a successful hire, as Chris Jones, head of customer success at onboarding and engagement platform Enboarder, explains.

"Poor onboarding is a major cause of employee turnover, which has huge cost implications for companies," he says. "If they can engage people after they've accepted an offer, but before they start, they will settle into their new role more quickly and will be less likely to leave."

It's surprising to learn, therefore, that over a third of employers (36%) do not have a structured onboarding process, according to a survey by CareerBuilder. With hybrid and remote working now the norm, and competition for talent fiercer than ever, companies need to work harder to engage with new hires. Many are turning to digital platforms that can customise and personalise all aspects of the onboarding journey, creating an exceptional employee experience that boosts productivity, engagement and retention.

Make it personal
Enboarder's platform, for example, delivers engaging personalised content directly to a new hire's mobile phone from the moment they sign their offer letter. It can find out about their interests and preferred learning style, providing managers and the support team with valuable information on how they would like to work with the team before they've even joined. A built-in coaching system for managers allows them to better prepare to welcome a new starter and make them feel more engaged.

Communications can also be personalised to avoid overwhelming new starters. In a global survey by Enboarder over half of employees (54%) reported feeling more overwhelmed in the last two years due to the number of notifications they receive from work-related software. For large companies with thousands of employees, the sheer volume of information that gets sent out can make engagement a challenge.

Jones says: "The technology can prevent that information overload by breaking it down and delivering the most relevant content to individuals based on the preferences they've already expressed to their team, or their location, rather than bombarding them with information on everything."

Maintaining the human touch
A personalised approach to onboarding and engagement makes employees feel invested in, valued, and cared about by their employer. It also strengthens their connection to the company and their team, which is particularly important for those working remotely. The Enboarder study found that 84% of employees found it easier to do their best work when they felt close to the team they're working with. However, while technology clearly has a huge role to play in enhancing the onboarding process and the overall employee experience, it can never replace human interaction.

"True engagement between an employee, team members and managers has to be on a face-to-face basis, whether that's in person, or via Zoom," says Jones. "The technology sits in the background, seamlessly handling all the personalisation, and automating much of the labour-intensive admin. This gives managers more time to invest in their team, and maintain that enhanced employee experience, whether it's when someone joins the business, takes parental leave or is promoted to a managerial role."

Shared social learning
Digital onboarding also supports the concept of social learning. In any organisation there are people with different learning styles and different skills gaps. Instead of this falling to the manager to deal with, digital onboarding platforms can match people to others with similar learning styles and skills, enabling them to learn from one another, reinforcing a culture of social learning.

Jones says: "In recent years, the challenges of attracting the right candidate has made the recruitment experience the focus of the talent strategy. The process of onboarding, and engaging people with joining hasn't been on the radar. Talent is extremely hard to find and costly to lose, but with an effective onboarding process companies will achieve higher levels of engagement and retention."

REASONS FOR SKIPPING HR TASKS

Percentage of 2,000 full-time employees surveyed in the US, UK and Australia

The reminder to complete the task got buried amid other notifications → 47%

The reminder to complete the task came at the wrong time → 41%

My manager never mentioned the task, so I figured it wasn't important → 32%

THINGS THAT WOULD MOTIVATE EMPLOYEES TO COMPLETE AN HR TASK

A timely reminder to perform a task → 47%

A discussion to perform the task → 46%

Breaking the task down into bite-sized, digestible steps → 39%

Enboarder, 2021

For more information, visit enboarder.com



THE WELLBEING AGENDA

With burnout levels high among employees and the great resignation still causing problems for employers, could the right wellbeing strategy make work better for everyone? And, more crucially, do employers and employees have the same ideas when it comes to wellbeing?

- Living within my means
- Maintaining a healthy diet
- Achieving an acceptable work/life balance
- Getting enough exercise
- Managing my stress
- Saving enough for retirement
- Developing relationships
- Building an emergency fund
- Getting routine medical checks/managing a health condition
- Devoting more time to me and my interests
- Reducing my debts
- Saving for a large purchase
- Developing new skills and/or advancing my career
- Finding better accommodation/buying a home
- Funding my education

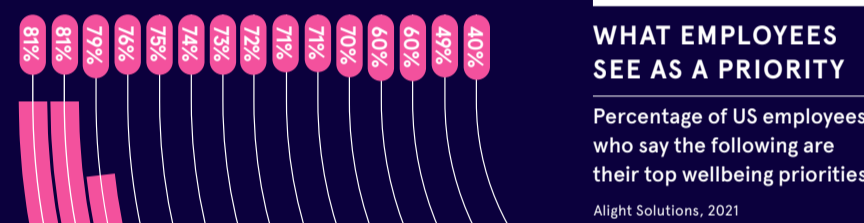
EMPLOYEES

79% of UK workers have reported experiencing burnout

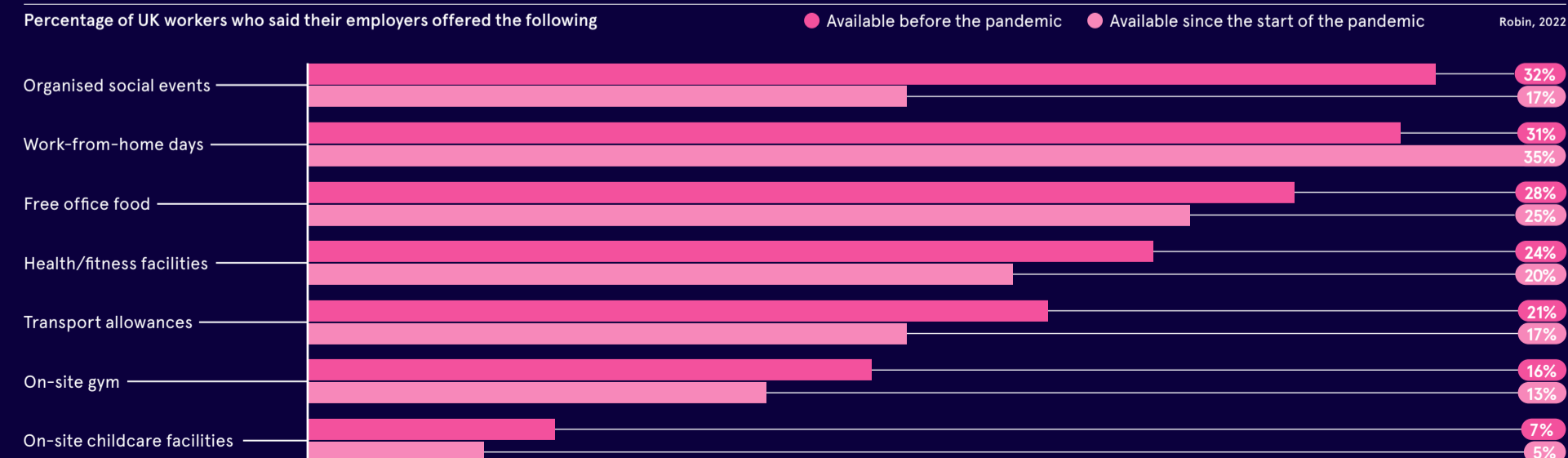
35% have indicated very serious or extreme burnout symptoms

27% of these workers are requesting accommodations from their managers

Ceridian, 2022

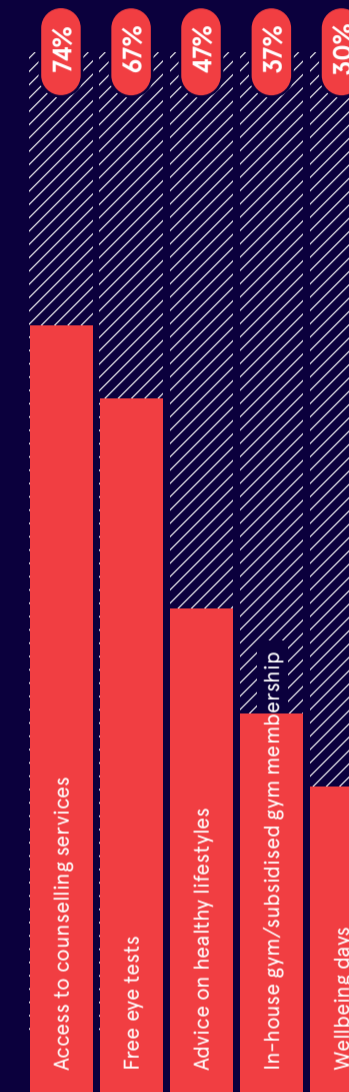


HAVE WELLBEING PERKS SURVIVED THE COVID CRISIS?



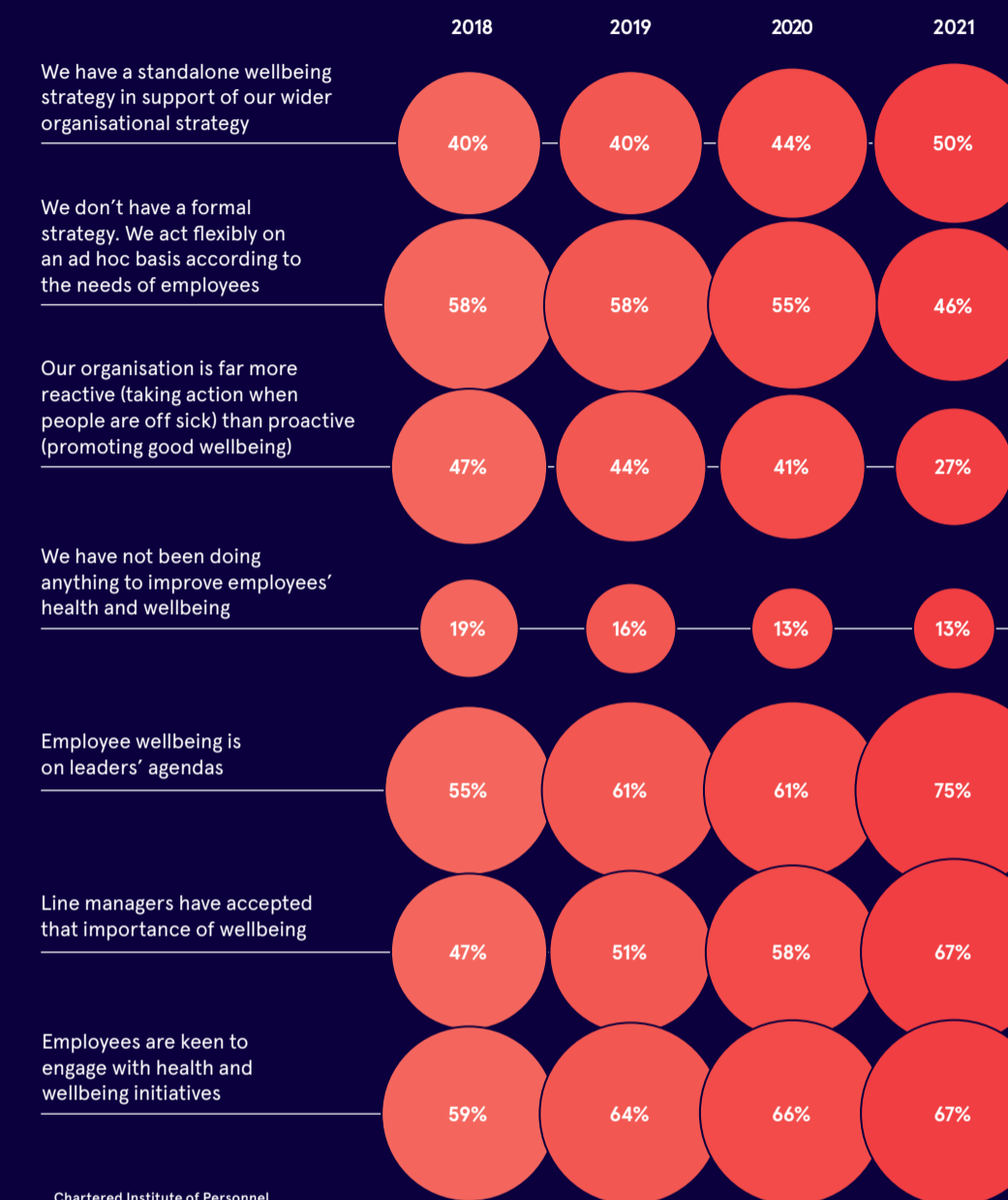
THE MOST WIDELY AVAILABLE WELLBEING BENEFITS IN THE UK

Percentage of HR chiefs who say their firms offer the following



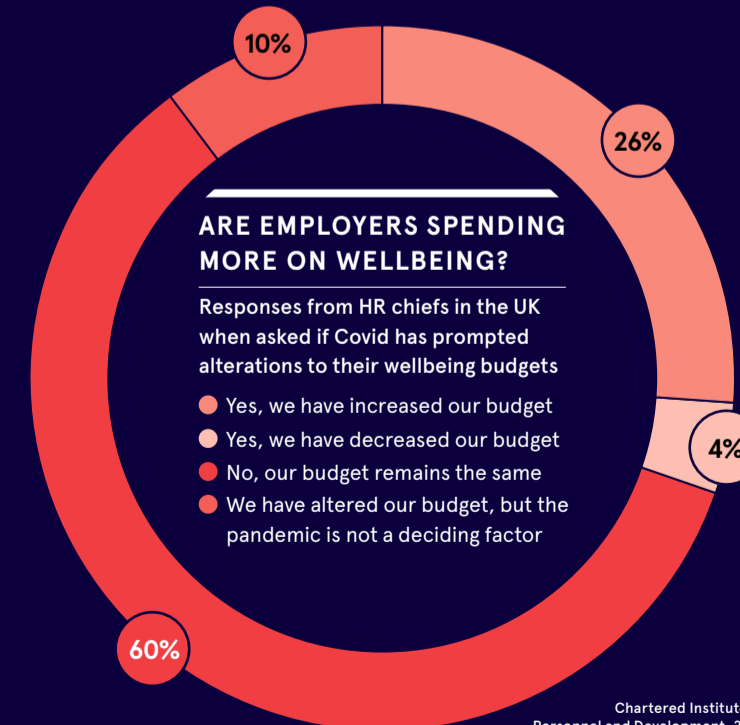
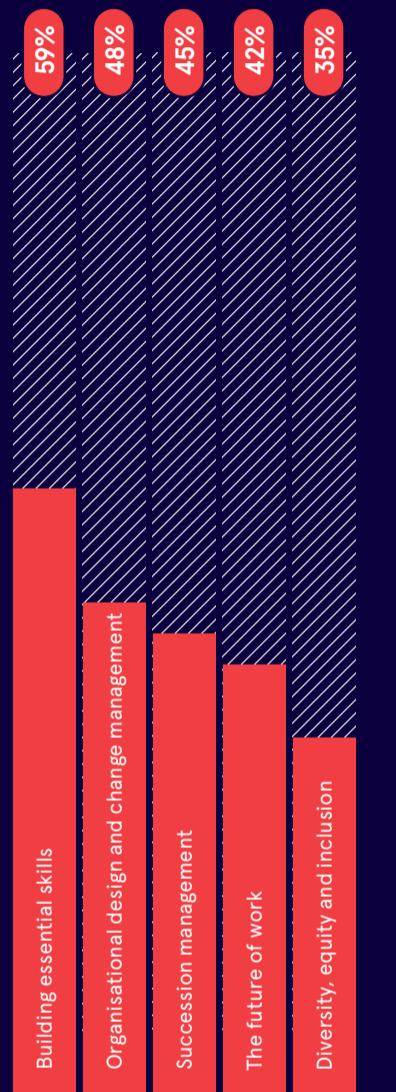
WELLBEING IS MOVING UP THE AGENDA

Percentage of senior HR professionals in the UK who say the following is the case in their organisations



HR'S TOP PRIORITIES

Percentage of global HR leaders who say the following are their chief concerns for 2022. Wellbeing does not make the top five

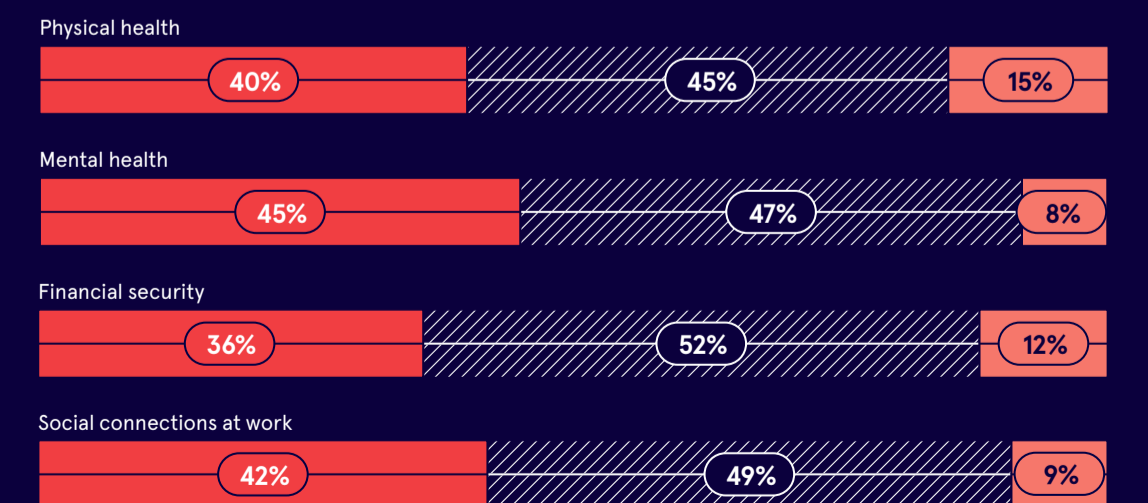


HOW THE COVID CRISIS HAS AFFECTED EMPLOYEE WELLBEING

Percentage of senior HR professionals who say the pandemic has made the following better or worse

● Worse ● No change ● Better

Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, 2021



ENGAGEMENT

‘Pain points’ plotted: how to map out the employee experience

Companies have long monitored customer interactions. They’re now using similar technology to track the employee experience – and build better relationships in the process

Lucy Handley

The secret to achieving high levels of employee engagement is to understand what your people really want and also why they might be dissatisfied. To achieve both, employers are going far beyond the annual all-staff survey to gauge the quality of the employee experience they offer. Ikea is mapping out employees’ “journeys”, just as it does so with its customers, reports Neena Potenza, global strategic initiatives manager

for people and culture at Ikea’s parent company, Ingka Group. “Experience is the sum of all the things that a co-worker experiences throughout their connection to us as a company – the job itself, culture and leadership, HR services, and the digital or physical workplace,” Potenza explains. “We use journey mapping to understand the perspective of the co-worker.” Ikea is testing several platforms to determine which best suit its needs.

The furniture giant is using measures such as the net promoter score (NPS). Originally designed to gauge the proportion of customers who’d recommend a product or service, NPS has been adapted to assess employees’ views on their work. The firm often seeks their thoughts about the processes they experience throughout their employment. Ikea wants to better understand what is most effective in mapping employees’ journeys. For example, in assessing people’s learning and development at work, it looks for detail on their skills assessment processes and whether they were able to apply what they learnt.

“This all helps us to pinpoint where we can make improvements to help people learn, feel included and thrive,” Potenza says.

A switch to new tech has helped mattress manufacturer Emma to track its employees’ journeys more efficiently and so identify ‘pain points’ (recurring problems affecting many of them).

The business, based in Frankfurt, has grown rapidly in recent years. It employs more than 850 people in locations ranging from Shanghai and Mexico City. It started using the Culture Amp employee experience platform in 2019 to gather feedback from them. It had previously taken Hannah Börner, a senior lead in its organisational development team, about three weeks at a time to analyse the information provided by each of the regular staff surveys it used to conduct.

The questionnaires that Emma now circulates twice a year have been rendered easier to complete, meaning that more people bother to respond than they did before, while the resulting data is now accessible on a single page. Team leaders – who may be the focus of the feedback – are then offered tips

on how to create a “productive and solution-oriented atmosphere”, rather than receiving verbatim critiques. One area pinpointed for improvement was the 360-degree review and development process, where employees at all levels give their colleagues performance feedback. Emma now gathers this over about a month each year, as well as continually providing developmental feedback on an informal basis.

One of the firm’s priorities is to create career opportunities for people in the business who have learnt a lot and are ready to be stretched.

“We are looking at development opportunities through project rotation. We’re asking how we can use people’s strengths in the best way for the company while also enabling them to develop,” Börner says. An employee might be moved from their usual job to a special project or spend time in an overseas office, for instance. Or perhaps two leaders could swap roles, she adds.

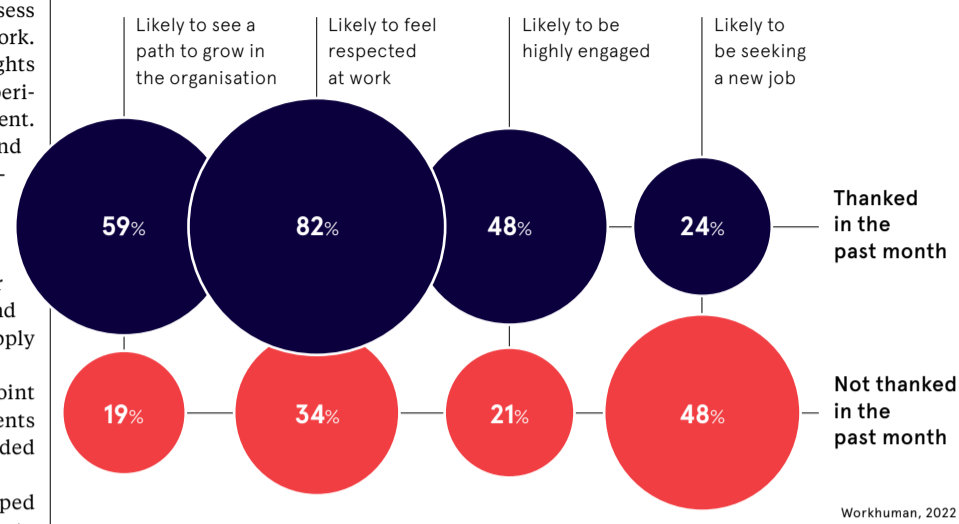
In addition to its big biannual surveys, Emma uses regular, more iterative ways to map employees’ journeys and identify pain points. “If we feel that there may be an issue, we do a quick check-up with a group of people, we go into talks and we try to identify the root cause of a problem,” Börner explains.

This blend of data and human input is also key to the work of Reza Moussavian, a seasoned HR and transformation expert who joined fashion retailer Zalando last year as vice-president of people products.

The company hired 7,000 people in 2021, so the induction process is a natural focus of its efforts to understand the employee experience. There is a direct relationship between the quality of the onboarding process and employee retention

THANKLESS TASKS

Percentage of employees worldwide who say they have or haven’t been thanked by their bosses in the past month and their corresponding engagement levels



Workhuman, 2022

“Experience is the sum of all the things that a co-worker experiences throughout their connection to us as a company

rates, according to Moussavian. The answers that recruits give in their first 90 days when asked if they’d recommend Zalando as an employer and whether they see themselves staying at the firm for at least two years are “highly correlated” to attrition levels, he says.

Moussavian adds that adopting “blended onboarding” should help to improve retention. This approach might include arranging lunches for recruits with their colleagues and smaller touches such as celebrating a new starter’s arrival by buying them their favourite cake.

Like Börner, Moussavian views development as another critical process. In his former role as senior vice-president of HR at Deutsche Telekom, he and his department redesigned the evaluation process. Managers and employees would together discuss an individual’s performance, which would culminate in the creation of a development plan. This would then be read by an artificial intelligence system, which would suggest next steps – for instance, recommending training courses and relevant projects that the employee could work on.

This use of technology means that employees don’t even have to ask their managers about career progression or learning opportunities.

“There is a win-win, because the line manager saves time... and the employee has immediate recommendations on career planning,” Moussavian says.

Ikea is “just at the beginning” of the employee mapping process, but has already identified areas for improvement, according to Potenza. “Whereas we’d thought that onboarding was our main problem area, we found bigger ones. These included managers not having enough time for co-workers, training that wasn’t specific enough and a lack of appropriate IT,” she says. “Now that we know, we can make improvements in these areas.”

Potenza adds that Ikea is “hypercurious” about what’s working and what isn’t. Other firms would be similarly inquisitive, as mapping pain points and intervening where necessary makes for happier – and more loyal – employees. ●



Bloom Productions via Getty Images



The three processes set to revolutionise the HR role

HR leaders face some stiff challenges post pandemic. Prajnesh Karthic, demand generation manager, Qntrl, explains how they can respond with better recruitment, onboarding and offboarding

HR directors face increasing challenges in maintaining their brand and reputation in the global job market. But new technologies and processes are helping innovative companies get the competitive edge they need, and dramatic savings too.

Some challenges are long-term but accelerated by the pandemic. These include the move to remote and hybrid working; the need for more efficient, data-led processes; and the rapidly changing expectations of employees and job candidates. Others, such as record numbers of people switching jobs – known as the great resignation – are purely a result of the pandemic.

People are resigning in such great numbers because they have been able to reflect on what they want from their careers; and remote working enables them to access a wider job market. This means companies are recruiting in an expanded but more competitive market where top firms are all chasing the same talent pool.

In this new world, your recruitment, onboarding and off-boarding processes need to stand out. If they are substandard, word gets out quickly, which will damage your brand. Talented candidates will get a feel for how well

they will be welcomed and treated, and choose employers accordingly.

But it’s easy for these processes to slip up in the fragmented world of remote working. HR leaders need much more control over their recruitment, onboarding and off-boarding processes, so they can avoid these banana skins and drive quality, smoothness and efficiency.

Meeting off-boarding challenges

In a remote working model, teams managing different parts of the off-boarding process have become fragmented across various locations, or even time zones. Leavers may have to handle some of the processes themselves at home. This means the “last day” process can stretch into a “last week or fortnight” and it can be difficult for HR professionals to coordinate.

However, employees will not tolerate this. They have the same expectations in the remote and hybrid working era that they had before the pandemic.

Organisations need to respond with more efficient digital off-boarding processes that involve all the necessary parts of the organisation, but which the HR manager owns. This allows them to connect all these people, and track and manage processes seamlessly.

Solving disjointed onboarding

Similarly, the onboarding process for new recruits has also often become fragmented and awkward. In a remote world, introducing joiners to teammates and managers, sharing work responsibilities, and setting up IT and other administrative tasks can be challenging.

Again, it can take more than a week to achieve this, which delays the employee’s ability to get on with the job.

Meeting recruitment expectations

Fragmentation can also disrupt the recruitment process. To make it more efficient and joined up, HR needs a single thread – a digital process that connects everyone in their remote offices.

“Solutions have reduced manual work by 60% on average – enough to free up an extra day each week for team members

Commercial feature

Recruiting from a much wider geographical background does make it easier to find employees from diverse backgrounds and regions. But people from various backgrounds have different expectations and feelings about the recruitment process.

For example, I previously worked for a Swedish company but I was the first non-EU resident they ever recruited. This naturally made me a little unsure what to expect and required me to adapt to the Swedish hiring culture. My experience of the recruitment process was completely different from that of a local employee.

How processes drive diversity

The Swedish company had discussed the need for diversity but it had taken them many years to hire their first non-EU resident. Hiring a diverse workforce does not just happen through words and values. You need to include it in your recruitment processes too.

Good workflow software will also produce analytics so HR leaders can see if their diversity policy is working or, if it is not, where the problems could lie. For example, it can track whether qualified applicants from minority groups are making it through the process. If you see from the workflow they are not, it will also show where problems exist so you can look into it.

Part of the problem is that there is often a gap between what HR leaders aspire to and what you can do because the IT requirements are outside your role. If you had a workflow that was easier to set up and design yourself, you could reduce reliance on IT teams and have more control and flexibility to solve issues like these through your system’s design.

Other benefits of workflows

Workflows can also help you control the onboarding process end-to-end by giving each person involved checklists and timelines. Analytics from the system show where any bottlenecks or mistakes happen, so you can correct them. It also shows which staff are overburdened or

63%

of job seekers will likely reject a job offer because of a bad candidate experience shared by a prior applicant

G2, 2020

71%

of organisations have no formal offboarding process, and 70% of organisations are only interested in dealing with resignations

HRonboard, 2015

under-used so you can balance work distribution in your team.

Much of today’s recruitment, onboarding and off-boarding processes – such as updating applications, booking meetings and notifying team members – are manual and repetitive. But workflows can automate many of these processes by, for example, triggering an email or a Slack message after a particular event.

At Qntrl, we have implemented such automated workflows at over 4,000 large and small organisations across the globe. These solutions have reduced such manual work by 60% on average. That is a huge immediate value and enough to free up an extra day each week for team members.

Some HR software takes weeks to program in a complex implementation project. But Qntrl is straightforward and intuitive to use and configure on your desktop or mobile application. This reduces IT intervention dramatically. With Qntrl, HR managers can use a simple interface to execute processes quickly on one platform.

Conventional business process software is prohibitively expensive, making it impossible to include all your teams on the same platform and orchestrate processes. Another huge benefit of Qntrl is that it costs \$7 a month per employee – around 10% of the cost of competing software. By pricing it this way and making it non-technical, we aim to democratise this sector. This helps HR leaders revolutionise their daily practices and drive a world-class brand in the global job market.

Learn more about Qntrl: qntrl.com



WORKING CONDITIONS

Grab a seat: can we learn to live with hot-desking?

It was an inflammatory practice in many offices before the pandemic. As hybrid workers return to HQ in greater numbers, the daily scramble for limited space is arousing even more ire

Sam Forsdick

The widespread switch to hybrid working since the relaxation of Covid restrictions has prompted the return of one of the most contentious office policies: hot-desking.

There was a time when asking workers to compete for seats each morning and clear their workspace every evening would have aroused fierce opposition. In 2019, recruitment website CV Library listed it as one of the most common office rules that employees “secretly hate”, while an older survey by Unison and *Community Care* magazine found that 90% of social workers who’d been asked to hot-desk thought that the practice added to their stress and sapped morale.

But, as more and more employees split their working time between home and headquarters, businesses are becoming even less willing to provide a permanent assigned desk for every employee, given that the cost of commercial property in most big cities remains high.

Workers may well understand the reasons, but this hasn’t stopped them from voicing their annoyance. Civil service unions have complained about a lack of office space in Whitehall following cuts to the government estate, for instance.

What makes it such a bone of contention? Sonya Dineva, a lecturer in occupational and organisational psychology at the University of East London, says it’s all to do with our sense of belonging. “We humans have an inherent deep-rooted need for belonging –

“Workers want the reassurance of knowing that they’ll have a desk allocated to them when they attend the office

and this needs to be present in our places of work,” Dineva says. “Having to clear your desk at the end of each day means that you cannot identify with these spaces and your need for belonging is not satisfied.”

Creating a “subconscious identification with your work environment” is important for generating this feeling of belonging, she adds. This can involve anything from putting a pot plant on your desk to sticking photos up on the wall – measures that hot-desking renders impractical at best. Wherever colleagues are having to compete with each other for the

most desirable locations each morning, there are also ramifications for productivity. A 2019 study conducted by app producer HotDeskPlus concluded that hot-deskers were spending an average of 18 minutes each day hunting for a workspace. This was in addition to the time that people might spend downloading a software or collecting any extra equipment they would require to complete their daily tasks.

“Such activities reduce our productivity and also have an effect on our cognitive performance,” Dineva says. “People want to know that their set-up is going to be the same each day, because it takes time to adjust their working environment to their own requirements.”

ShareSpace, the creator of a digital real-estate leasing platform, has been experiencing issues with hot-desking.

The firm’s co-founder and chief technology officer, Marcin Dyszyński, says: “We’re seeing that it doesn’t create the culture and sense of permanency that many people would like. Similarly, there can be a lack of privacy, which might be a problem for some businesses.”

Desk-booking applications offer a potential solution to some of the problems. Providers such as Appspace and Juggl Desks report that the use of their platforms has been on the rise since the start of the year. Both anticipate that take-up will continue increasing as more people become regular office visitors.

“Workers want the reassurance of knowing that they will have a desk allocated to them when they attend the office,” observes Juggl Desks’ head of business development, Jeremy Steward. “Many organisations have reduced space in response to hybrid working, so workers cannot always turn up to the office on a whim and find a free desk. The ability to reserve a desk of their choosing, perhaps with certain facilities nearby, can help to give them peace of mind.”

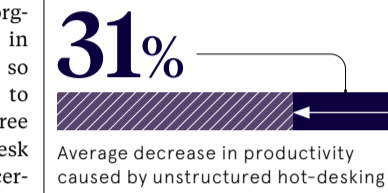
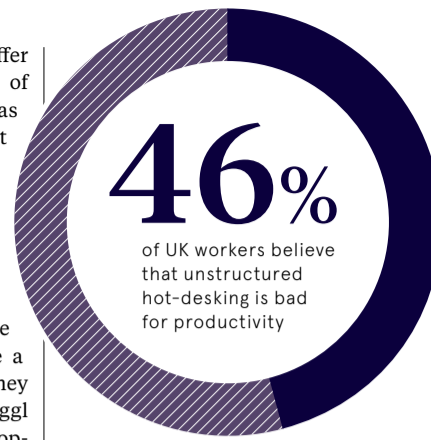
Dineva believes that such tech can bring a level of predictability to workplace arrangements that can be a boon for users, but adds that booking systems should not be viewed as a panacea.

“It can be very beneficial to use a booking system, especially if it enables people to reserve a workplace that’s somehow tailored to their needs,” she says. “But this can still lead to competition for the best spaces. No system will be perfect.”

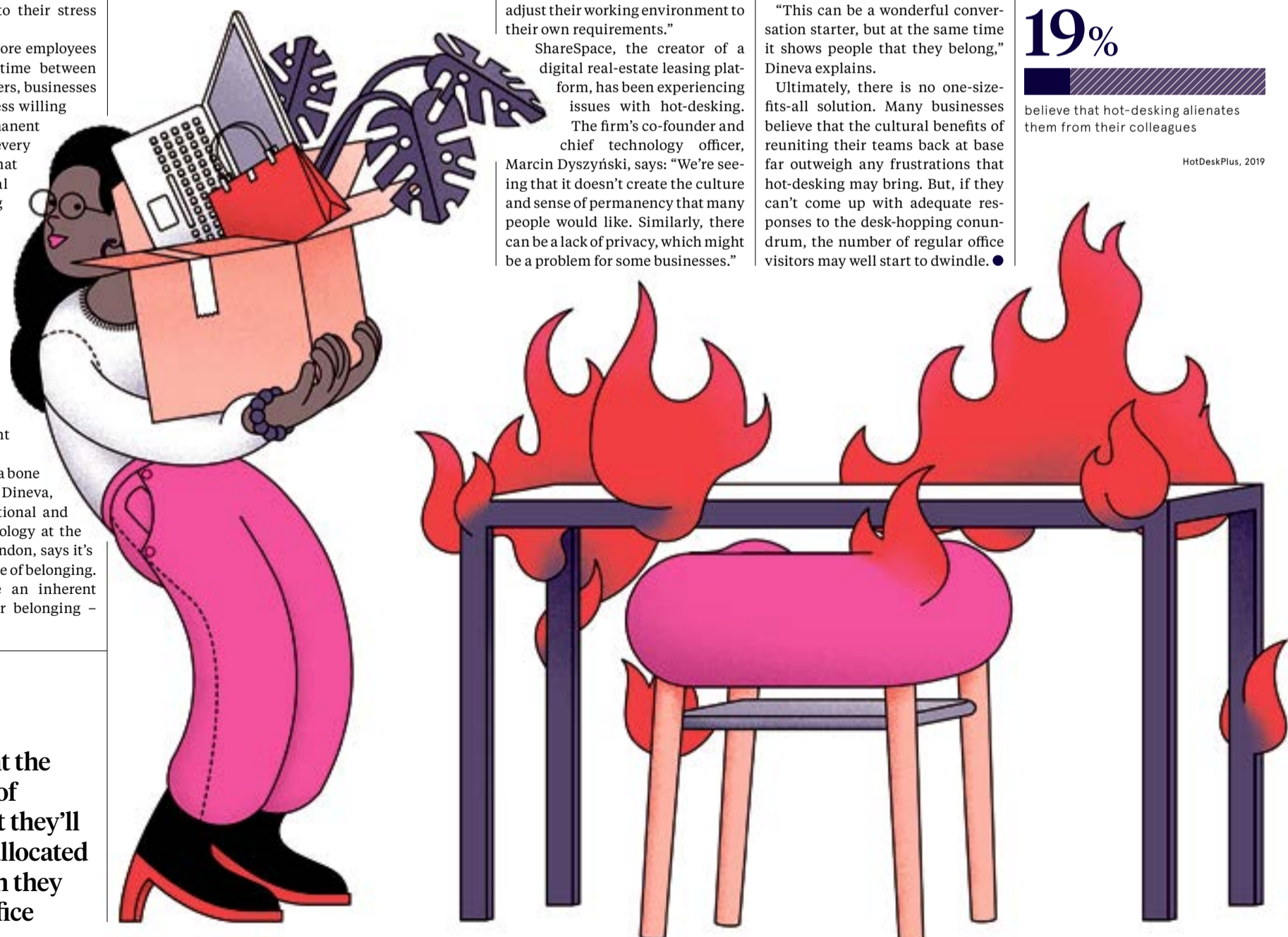
Another measure could be to allow employees to bring in personal items to display in common areas.

“This can be a wonderful conversation starter, but at the same time it shows people that they belong,” Dineva explains.

Ultimately, there is no one-size-fits-all solution. Many businesses believe that the cultural benefits of reuniting their teams back at base far outweigh any frustrations that hot-desking may bring. But, if they can’t come up with adequate responses to the desk-hopping conundrum, the number of regular office visitors may well start to dwindle. ●



HotDeskPlus, 2019



Tackling talent scarcity through ESG commitments

To succeed in a difficult talent market, companies need to rethink their commitments to the environment, society and their own people in order to resonate more strongly with prospective and current employees

The battle for talent is being waged by organisations of all sizes across the UK and beyond. Businesses need to stand out; to connect with their workforces and not only retain the talent they have, but to ensure prospective employees want to join their organisations.

Those companies that commit to their ESG strategies and communicate that to employees will be the ones that succeed.

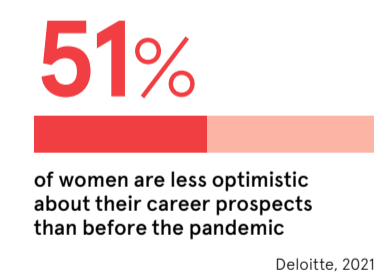
Research by ManpowerGroup, parent company of Talent Solutions, found that two-thirds of employees want to help improve society through their work. Half would change jobs to work for an employer that benefits their wellbeing. Most importantly, people want to find an employer that is aligned to their values.

The stronger the commitments an employer makes to improve the environment, society and its governance, otherwise known as ESG, the more likely it is to attract the best talent, according to the McKinsey Quarterly. ManpowerGroup has increased its commitment to ESG as well, a positioning that will support its own employees, as well as its clients, candidates and associates.

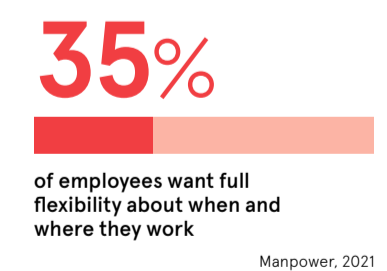
Jonas Prising, ManpowerGroup’s chairman and CEO, says, “Our purpose is clear: we believe meaningful, sustainable employment has the power to change the world.” As part of this objective, ManpowerGroup has worked with over 8,000 young people in 26 European countries to provide mentoring and upskilling. Similarly, it has committed to seeing women make up at least 50% of leadership roles by 2025.

Organisations like Talent Solutions helping clients to support women throughout their careers might just be the change that is needed to ensure female talent isn’t lost. Women are 51% less optimistic about their career prospects than before the pandemic, says Deloitte. And ManpowerGroup found that 57% of women plan to leave their current job within two years. That, combined with the data around hybrid working – namely that ManpowerGroup has found that 35% of employees want full flexibility about when and where they work – points to a crucial business risk in the battle for talent. Women aren’t satisfied with their current roles, working arrangements and company fit. Losing experienced female talent will not only be a blow to diversity and equality but will further exacerbate the ongoing scarcity of talent already worrying business leaders.

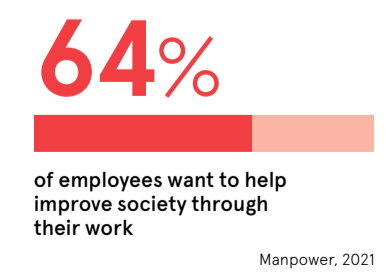
A holistic talent strategy, though, goes beyond gender equality. Racial diversity is not only a proven benefit to businesses, but will help ease the talent crunch, too. Part of the ManpowerGroup that supports clients with end-to-end workforce strategies, Talent Solutions, focuses



Deloitte, 2021



Manpower, 2021



Manpower, 2021



“Our purpose is clear: we believe meaningful, sustainable employment has the power to change the world

chairman & CEO of ManpowerGroup in the recent ‘Working to Change the World’ report.

Building a stronger employer proposition relies on taking a more comprehensive approach to ESG. ManpowerGroup is the only company in its industry that has set ambitious goals to tackle climate change, including reducing carbon emissions across the board. The company has already cut global emissions by 37% over its 2018 baseline and is well on its way to reaching net zero.

But it’s not just about the supply chain or emissions, HR strategy makes an impact on the environment too. Sustainable working practices can align with employee desires for hybrid or flexible working patterns. Similarly, reskilling or retraining staff can also build stronger talent pools in low-carbon and sustainable job roles.

Gartner noted that 58% of all employees will need new skills to get their jobs done in future. While companies have thus far relied on benefits and salary bumps to attract and retain talent, skills development may become the new frontier in talent management.

Skills development can also allow for a broader range of educational backgrounds, neurodiverse individuals and non-traditional talent pools to emerge, all contributing to a company’s ability to compete in a talent-scarce landscape.

And in a world in which 60% of companies are linking their ESG goals to their corporate purpose, HR can’t afford to lose ground. Prising says, “Our ‘Working to Change the World’ plan is about collectively caring for people and planet with new awareness and urgency. Advancing towards net zero by measuring and reducing our climate impact (and offsetting only when we must) while accelerating social justice

to address inequities will drive job creation and demand for new skills and will progress opportunities for all.”

For employers to make a positive impact for their communities and the environment into the future, they must be run ethically and have a strong sense of their governance strategies and accountabilities. Seventy percent of employees say having leaders they can trust and follow is important for them. Not only does this require companies to set out honest governance strategies, but employees also want to see organisations taking a stand for positive change. They want to see their employers advocating for racial equity or voting rights or action on climate change. Doing so will only help businesses build stronger connections with their purpose-driven workforces.

ManpowerGroup has led by example with regards to governance. Not only was it named the ‘World’s Most Ethical Company’ by Ethisphere for the 11th year, but it has a global human rights policy in place that reinforces its ethical recruitment and HR practices.

Being an attractive company takes more than a strong bottom line. Employees want an employer that sees beyond the numbers. Talent Solutions has led the HR industry on the issues that matter. But it takes a broader commitment from companies across the UK to create a positive social impact and deliver sustainable employment with the power to change the world.

Find out more about how Talent Solutions can support your organisation, at talentsolutions.manpowergroup.co.uk



BENEFITS

Breaking good: the sabbatical finds itself – as an effective retention tool

Firms that offer employees the opportunity to take an extended leave of absence as a loyalty reward could be giving themselves a crucial competitive edge in an overheating market for talent

Sam Forsdick

After years of hopping on a plane to Copenhagen every week as an executive director at Danish company Leo Pharma, Mike Hinchy decided to hit pause on his career and take a sabbatical.

"You don't often get a chance to take more than a two-week holiday, so this seemed like a great opportunity to reflect and focus on my own wellbeing and family," he says. "It sounds obvious, but the pandemic has prompted me to reconsider my priorities and where I invest my time and emotional energy."

Hinchy is far from alone. The Covid crisis has prompted many of us to reprioritise our commitments, with employees increasingly ranking work/life balance over career progression.

A third of UK workers interviewed for Totaljobs' *Hiring Trends Index* valued work/life balance highly when seeking a new employer. They ranked it second only to the desire for a higher salary.

Julie Gaskell is head of partnerships for events company Wild in Art. She has also opted to take an extended break from work. According to Gaskell, the pandemic has been an isolating experience, especially for single people. With travel restrictions lifting, she feels that it's the right time for a six-month trip taking in America and Europe.

"I've had a good career, but a lot of the drive has disappeared over the past few years," Gaskell says. "It felt like the right time to try something different and shake my life up a bit. Luckily, I have an employer that sees the benefits I can bring back to the business by exploring more of the world while on sabbatical."

In an overheating jobs market, many firms are redoubling their efforts to improve retention. With employees increasingly demanding greater flexibility at work, sabbaticals are growing in popularity.

"Following the working situation during the pandemic, people are thinking quite differently about their careers and the importance of work/life balance," reports Claire McCartney, senior resourcing and inclusion policy adviser at the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development. "It therefore makes sense that employers are introducing sabbaticals as a way of supporting people in this."

In February, online bank Monzo announced that it would be offering all employees a three-month paid sabbatical after four years' service.

According to its people experience director, Tara Ryan, the aim is to allow staff to take time out to travel, spend time with families and focus on themselves, without having to leave the company or sacrifice pay.

"We are always looking to introduce best-in-class policies for our employees," she says. "Our aim is not only to reinvent banking for customers, but also to vastly improve the experience for employees working within the industry."

Global identity-verification company Veriff has recently introduced its own sabbatical policy. The firm will be offering staff in its European and US offices six weeks of fully paid time off for every three years of service completed.

"We believe that, in order to live fulfilling and impactful lives, our employees could benefit from taking longer breaks every once in a



while," explains Piret Saag, head of learning and employee experience at the Tallinn-based firm. "The past couple of years have been full of challenges for our global team, both professionally and personally. This is why we hope that the sabbaticals will encourage people to switch off fully, recharge and come back well rested and with new perspectives."

"The pandemic has prompted me to reconsider my priorities and where I invest my time and emotional energy

The change in policy comes off the back of a successful year for the privately owned startup, which achieved unicorn status in January, meaning that it is valued at more than \$1bn (£760bn). The additional time off is seen as a token of appreciation for those who have been with the firm during this period of strong growth and an enticing benefit as the business engages in a new round of recruitment.

"With our sabbatical programme, we want to give our employees an opportunity to step back from their roles at Veriff, focus on their personal enrichment and consider new angles for professional development," Saag says. "We hope that this will serve as a great benefit for people looking to join Veriff, as well as for staff seeking new opportunities within the company."

There are many reasons that people could have for choosing to go on a sabbatical, several of which may stem from the Covid crisis. For some, experiences of stress and burnout may influence their decision to take a break, while those with relations living abroad might have been unable to spend significant time with them while Covid travel restrictions were in place.

The mundane experience of working remotely during the lockdowns played a part in Hinchy's decision. "Being on calls all day at a desk and not moving has definitely had a negative impact on me. I feel I've really aged over the past couple of years," he says. "In my mind, there has to be a better way to balance out my life and work, rather than being stuck at a desk for 10 hours a day on a variety of meetings and calls."

Companies that ignore employees' requests for greater flexibility risk an exodus of talent. After what Hinchy describes as six happy years at Leo Pharma, he's had to leave the company to take his break, as it doesn't offer the perk.

"I have had a 22-year career in the pharmaceutical industry, so not knowing what that next job will be or where the next pay cheque will be coming from is a new experience for me," he says.

Leo Pharma UK and Ireland says that the company reviews its employee benefits package every year, "with the aim to benchmark above the industry standard". The business is "lean and agile, making it a challenge to offer a standard sabbatical offering while maintaining business continuity".

The company adds that it is open to considering all requests for flexibility from employees on a case-by-case basis and frequently adapts working arrangements "to meet individual needs".

Hinchy would like to see more employers follow the lead of businesses such as Monzo and Veriff in offering loyal employees additional time off.

"If you are looking for people to invest a significant portion of their career in a single company, the opportunity to have a sabbatical and time to reflect every few years could be a clever thing for the employer to offer," he says. "If it doesn't offer it, people may just take one anyway, which would mean it ends up losing talent from the business."

While introducing a sabbatical policy might sound a straightforward measure, there are important considerations for HR teams.

"It is really important to have a clear policy in place and to think

"I feel I've really aged over the past couple of years... There has to be a better way to balance out my life and work"

through all of the potential implications," McCartney says.

The first of these will be the eligibility criterion: will it depend on length of service or seniority? With people taking extra time off, the level of disruption for the business will also need to be explored, but perhaps the most important consideration is whether sabbaticals are to be paid or unpaid.

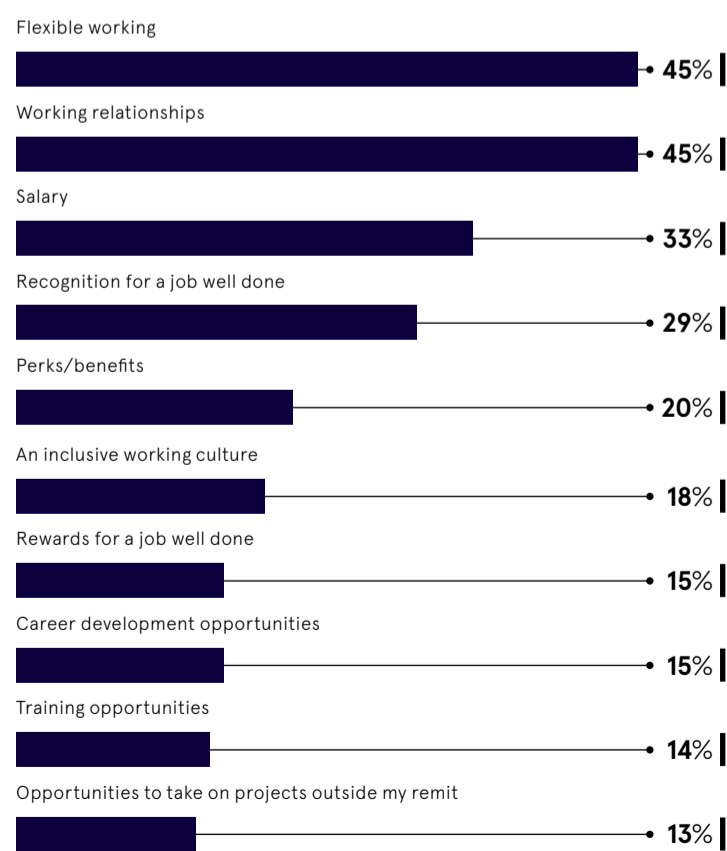
This choice could have consequences for people's contracts, warns McCartney. "If it's unpaid, the organisation would need to clarify that the employee will be able to return in the same position, as stopping and restarting a contract would have an impact on their continuity of service."

With more employees seeking a better work/life balance, offering sabbaticals could boost retention. Like many workers, Hinchy has come to believe that work should fit around his personal commitments, rather than the other way around.

"When I finish my sabbatical and find a job, I'll have a better sense of my priorities and how I want to be spending my time," he says. "And it probably won't involve being in the airport for hours every weekend." ●

WHAT PEOPLE WANT FROM THEIR WORK IN 2022

Percentage of UK workers who say the following are the best parts of their job and the company they work for



Totaljobs, 2021

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SKILLS

Are boomers the solution to the great resignation?

Employers need to recruit and retain more older workers to overcome a skills shortage that's threatening to hamper the recovery

Martin Barrow

Baby boomers, your country's employers needs you.

With a record 1.2 million vacancies, enterprises throughout the UK are facing unprecedented labour shortages. As the economy recovers from the Covid shutdowns, businesses are struggling to rebuild their workforces in response to the resurgence in consumer demand.

Pubs and restaurants can't hire the staff they require to put food and drink on customers' tables. Housebuilders can't recruit bricklayers and carpenters to provide the new homes needed by so many families.

The trend is similar in the public sector. The NHS and social care each have more than 100,000 unfilled vacancies, while the education sector needs to recruit thousands of teachers at every level.

The problem? An army of employees has left the labour market. The Institute for Employment Studies estimates there are still 600,000 fewer people in work than before the

“This sense of hostility in the labour market is a key factor keeping older people away from work

pandemic, and more than a million fewer than if employment had continued to grow at pre-Covid rates.

More than half of this change is down to older workers calling it quits. Since the pandemic struck the country, 560,000 over-50s have become economically inactive.

As in several other industrialised countries, the UK's great resignation is grey, even as the official age of retirement is rising. With fewer migrant workers and more young people in education, it's clear why the employment market is in crisis.

Solving the shortage demands a multifaceted strategic approach that will take several years to work. Older people need to be at the heart of this process. They often have the skills and experience that are in short supply across so many industries. They also have the age profile and insights that are likely to match those of both senior decision-makers in companies and higher-spending customers.

Enticing them back into employment while retaining those who may be approaching retirement will be a huge challenge for business. The reality is that many over-50s see the world of work as a hostile environment and would rather suffer a decline in living standards than try to fit in where they do not feel welcome. An extreme example hit the headlines recently when it was revealed that IBM referred to older workers as “dinobabies” and talked about removing them to make way for younger people.

Doctors, nurses, carpenters, electricians, drivers, caterers: many are

quitting work and taking their skills with them. This brain drain is bad for business and for the economy as a whole.

Why is it happening? By 2030, half of all adults in the UK will be over 50. Even so, the workplace is still tilted towards younger people in areas such as training, promotion opportunities and flexibility in time off for caring responsibilities.

At the start of the pandemic, older employees were more likely than younger colleagues to be placed on furlough, according to the Institute

for Fiscal Studies. Many employers don't consider age when looking to improve diversity and inclusion in recruitment, while the type of language used in job adverts can deter older workers from applying.

Many workplaces are reluctant to make reasonable adjustments for older workers as they might for other groups. For example, new technology is available that reduces the physical impact of some work, such as lifting heavier weights or bending and stretching to complete tasks. While allowance is generally

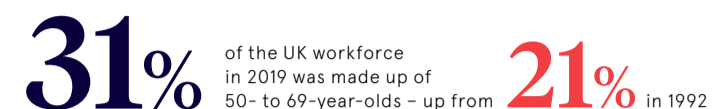
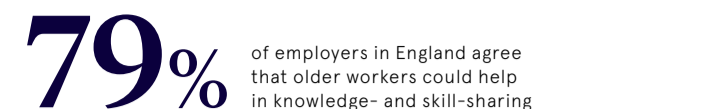
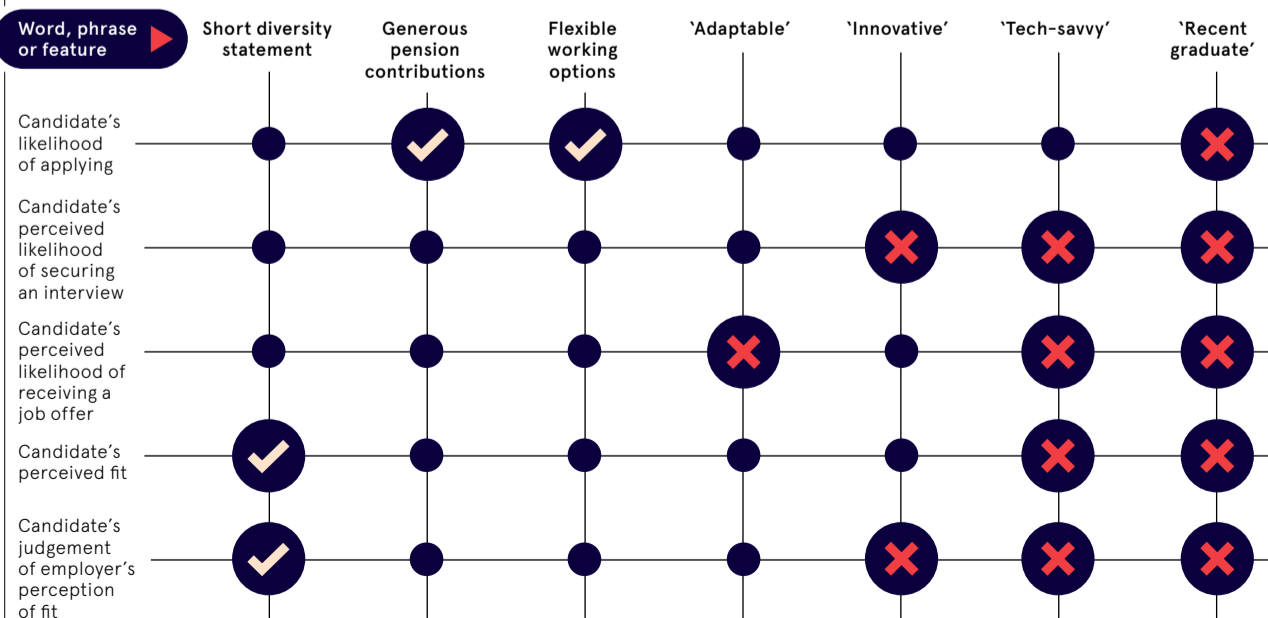
made for childcare responsibilities, line managers are less accommodating when it comes to caring for an older partner or parent. Even social events at work tend to be organised around the interests of younger people.

Older workers fear and experience discriminatory attitudes and prejudicial behaviour in the labour market, says Dr Emily Andrews, deputy director of evidence at the Centre for Ageing Better think-tank. She notes that 36% of those aged 50 to 69 feel disadvantaged by their age

FACTORING AGE INTO INCLUSIVE HIRING

Centre for Ageing Better, 2021

The positive and negative effects on older candidates of key words, phrases and features included in job adverts



Centre for Ageing Better, Institute for Fiscal Studies, 2021

when applying for jobs, while 17% report direct experience of age discrimination in the hiring process.

“This sense of hostility in the labour market is a key factor in keeping older workers away from work,” Andrews says. “Encouraging employers to actively pursue this age group and to tackle age bias in their recruitment practices would help to address this long-standing issue. Such action is now more urgently needed to tempt this cohort back to work.”

There are several steps that employers can take to recruit and retain older workers. When it comes to hiring, don't just rely on online platforms and digital application forms. There is nothing wrong with a standard, traditional job application form.

Don't ask job applicants to state their date of birth and avoid asking questions such as: “Where do you see yourself in five years' time?” It also helps to include older people on your recruiting panel to minimise the likelihood of unconscious bias. And challenge any preconceptions, such as the widely held assumption that older people take more sick days (they don't).

Employers must look at their data on the age range and structure of their workforces to understand how exposed different teams and business areas are to the retirement of colleagues. This will help organisations to mitigate the potential loss of experience.

Offer meaningful training to older workers to update their skills. Sometimes employers balk at the cost of training for employees who might retire soon, but this can be a false economy, demotivating those who are excluded. Adopt mentoring schemes to encourage older workers to share their wisdom with younger colleagues; this also aids the team-building process.

Since the pandemic, businesses have become more flexible in terms of working hours and workplace attendance, a trend that's generally been positive for older workers. Maintaining these kinds of flexible working arrangements will be critical when it comes to recruiting and retaining older people. Some companies are moving towards flexible

“

Up to a million over-50s who genuinely want to work are jobless

retirement, where employees take their pensions but continue to work for the company. The employees have fulfilling lives with enhanced financial support, while their employer continues to benefit from their experience and commitment. Mid-career conversations with senior managers can help employees to take steps to prepare for working in later life while also feeling valued by their employer.

Understanding the challenges and opportunities of an ageing population is essential if we want to create productive, innovative and inclusive multigenerational teams as we all lead longer working lives. As the population ages, it makes sound business sense to have a workforce that broadly reflects the customer base.

Andy Briggs, CEO of FTSE-100 insurer Phoenix Group, is the government's business champion for older workers. He wants more firms to focus on attracting over-50s who can offer a wealth of experiences, skills and perspectives.

“Up to a million over-50s who genuinely want to work are jobless,” Briggs says. “While some people have actively chosen not to work as they get older, many have been forced into this position. This is an important issue that we all need to tackle. It's one that's being exacerbated by labour-market shortages and productivity challenges.”

Phoenix Group believes that a diverse workforce in terms of age can benefit a company. About half of consumer spending in the UK is being done by over-50s – and it's important for the firm to be representative of its customer base.

“Older workers”, Briggs says, “are a key part of the solution.” ●



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RELATIONSHIPS

Paramours' parameters: establishing the rules of workplace attraction

The recent resignation of Jeff Zucker as president of CNN Worldwide highlights the problems that secret office romances can cause. How should HR handle such delicate matters?



Sam Forsdick

If you've ever found yourself gazing longingly at a colleague on your screen during a video call, you are not alone. Half of the workers who responded to a recent survey by the US Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) admitted to having a crush on a co-worker. Three-quarters of those polled said they would feel comfortable if other people in their company were engaging in office romances. But employees should be aware that such relationships could, under certain circumstances, cost them their jobs.

One high-profile example of this emerged in February when CNN Worldwide's president, Jeff Zucker, was obliged to step down from his role at the broadcaster after it was revealed that he had failed to divulge his relationship with its chief marketing officer, Allison Gollust, in accordance with company policy. (She too left the business days later, under investigation for other alleged policy violations.)

After his resignation, Zucker said: "I acknowledge that the relationship evolved in recent years. I was required to disclose it when it began, but I didn't. I was wrong."

Covert relationships at work can cause problems for employers – particularly when, as in Zucker's case, they involve someone in a position of great authority.

"Workplace romances are common, but they can be viewed as unethical in some circumstances," says Emma Parry, professor of HR management at Cranfield School of Management. "They can be particularly problematic at work when power dynamics are in play – for example, if one party is more senior than the other and the junior partner feels pressured into starting or sustaining a romance."

Zucker is not the first business leader to fall foul of their own company's policies on fraternisation. Steve Easterbrook was dismissed from his role as president and CEO of McDonald's in 2019 after the firm discovered that he'd had what it

described as a "recent consensual relationship" with an employee.

Leaders need to hold themselves to a higher level of account in such situations, argues Sally Bendtson, founder of independent consultancy Limelight HR.

"The issues are different at a senior level. Because of the power that executives hold, there is a greater chance that any relationship will be misconstrued," she says. "The business also has to protect itself against potential cases of sexual discrimination or harassment and be aware that the person concerned may be misusing their position."

Organisations need a policy on relationships at work to set boundaries for their people

The cases of Easterbrook and Zucker highlight the importance of including relationship clauses in employment contracts, according to Jo Mackie, head of the employment law practice at Slater and Gordon. "Organisations need a policy on relationships at work to set boundaries for their people," she says. "This will enable businesses to control any potential fallout."

Such policies may stipulate that employees must treat everyone equally, with dignity and respect. They may also state that, if you do enter an intimate relationship that may lead to conflicts of interest – for example, between a trainer and their trainee or between a CEO and their marketing chief – you need to inform the HR department.

This is where the relationship between Zucker and Gollust would have been most problematic for CNN, Mackie notes.

"Workplace relationships can be absolutely fine – and businesses cannot prevent employees from entering relationships with colleagues – but people need to be careful when there's a potential conflict of interest," she says.

If the HR team is informed of the relationship at an early stage, as per the policy, it can work with both people involved to deal with any potential problems. A solution can often be found, from restructuring a team to ensuring that neither party will be involved in decisions about the other's pay or career progression.

This tends to be less straightforward when a senior executive is involved, which is why some organisations include contractual clauses that ban managers from entering relationships with subordinates. But Parry believes that such measures should be adopted with caution.

"If these policies are extremely restrictive, they might also be seen as a breach of the trust-based relationship between employer and employee," she explains. "The more critical consideration is to

develop a culture that is built on trust, support and psychological safety. This will help to ensure that employees feel comfortable discussing issues and communicating any problems."

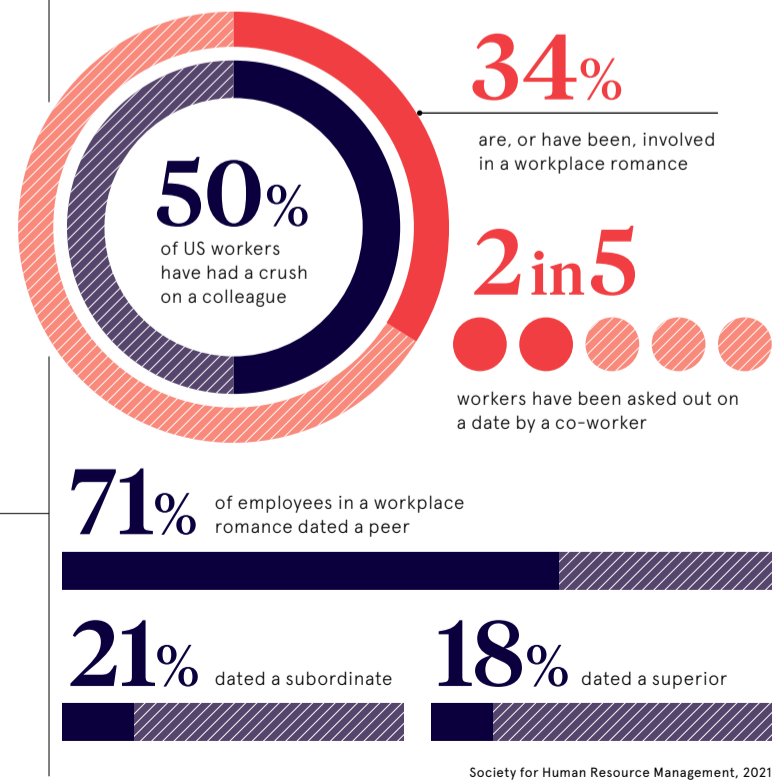
Such a culture can prove especially important whenever a relationship between employees breaks up acrimoniously, notes Mackie, who adds: "How do you deal with that at work when two people now loathe each other? HR teams can manage all those things, but only if they're aware of them. That is why disclosure is so important."

Some may consider this to be an unnecessary intrusion into people's private lives. Indeed, according to the SHRM survey, 77% of respondents who'd engaged in an office romance said that they did not disclose it to HR at the time. Unsurprisingly, people are particularly reluctant to inform their employer about a relationship that constitutes an extramarital affair.

In 2020, Bill Gates stepped down from the board of Microsoft. It later emerged that he was being investigated by the company in relation to an allegation by an employee that he'd had an affair with her some 20 years previously. Gates denied that this was the reason for his decision, stressing that he simply wanted to focus on philanthropy.

Mackie says: "If people are having covert relationships, it can be difficult to handle because it's people's private lives. But line managers may need to know about the situation, as it can have all sorts of implications for the business. The parties involved need to be made aware of the liabilities that may arise for them if they're caught out."

While it's hard to stand in the way of love, it is important for companies and their employees to be aware of the potential ramifications of a workplace relationship. Inserting a carefully worded relationship clause in the company handbook should reduce the likelihood that problems will occur further down the line – and it could even avert a PR nightmare. ●



The changing face of talent acquisition

In a tough, candidate-led jobs market, the traditional approach to talent acquisition is over. Companies must switch to alternative methods, with a strong focus on their employer brand



The jobs market has been upended by the drastic events of the past 24 months. The rate at which the prospect of a huge spike in unemployment became, instead, a global talent shortage was nothing short of remarkable. It's never been harder to attract the best talent to a business.

Retention is just as much of a challenge. The so-called 'great resignation' has truly taken hold, with a Microsoft study forecasting attrition of over 40%. Jaded by their lockdown experiences, eager for a change in lifestyle or better work/life balance, or perhaps simply tempted by the large number of employers seeking talent, workers are leaving employers in their droves.

The shift to a candidate-led market is affecting organisations across all industries, geographies and hiring categories, from apprentices and graduates through to senior executives. The reality is that traditional, well-trodden routes to talent attraction are simply no longer bearing fruit, and if companies keep knocking the same doors they'll be unable to compete and operate effectively.

"There's been a real move towards a much more digital career path, irrespective of industry, and as a result there are skills deficits everywhere," says Jo-Ann Feely, global managing director of innovation at global total workforce solutions firm AMS. "There's a mismatch between existing skills and the skills that are now needed, and it's leading to a severe shortage of highly qualified candidates."

An elevated diversity, equity and inclusion agenda has exacerbated the issue. "Catalysts such as the Black Lives Matter movement helped transform workplace diversity from a 'nice-to-have' to a critical business issue," says Steve Leach, regional managing director UK&I at AMS. "Add that to the general scarcity of available talent and changes in business strategy and it equals a perfect storm for workforce

planning, made worse because the traditional talent acquisition methods do not work anymore."

Amid the significant deficit in talent availability versus demand, companies are increasingly realising they need to rethink how they acquire and develop talent. Unable to hire people with the skills they require, they instead are seeking to hire people with the potential to learn the skills through non-traditional channels, such as upskilling programmes. The more progressive organisations are becoming talent makers, not talent takers, leading the way in creating their own talent pool.

Better still, they are combining this strategy with efforts to reskill their current workforce and encourage career switching. AMS is supporting employers through this journey to create workforces that are not just resilient in today's business environment but also fluid, diverse and differentiated. The company calls this 'workforce dexterity', via a recruit, train and deploy or up/reskilling model. Through workforce dexterity, AMS encourages organisations to think about the skills needed, not headcount – encouraging the movement of talent throughout the organisation.

"We hire candidates and immediately give them 12 to 15 weeks training in, for instance, software engineering, data science or change management," says Feely. "We then place them into a client organisation and support them for a period of up to 18 months, before they convert to being permanent employees. So we recruit them, train them, deploy them and they become the workforce of the future. Meanwhile our clients are also asking us to train their existing workers."

"There's a huge spike in demand for graduates, but the challenge is companies then don't have enough managers to train them. Using a company like AMS for the training and mentoring gives organisations a chance to develop their management credentials. And

retraining their existing staff means they get a combination of experienced people who already know the culture and industry and are learning a new skill, and brand new talent. Businesses need to think very differently. It's not just about current and future

There's been a real move towards a much more digital career path, irrespective of industry, and as a result there are skills deficits everywhere

Workforce dexterity means looking at every possible channel and being aware that the skills you want don't necessarily exist, so you have to go out and create them

headcount, but current and future skills needs."

While organisations will find far bigger talent pools by hiring for potential, not skills, they still face the challenge of attracting people to work for them in a world where candidates are more discerning than ever, actively shunning employers which don't align with their personal values. What candidates look for in an employer has transformed, and companies that previously found it easy to attract talent through their market-leading positions or strong salaries are falling short.

Increasingly, people want to work for inclusive organisations that contribute positively to society, behave ethically and are considerate of their impact on the environment. And while it's still common to see videos of CEOs talking about commitment to sustainability, candidates all too easily see through messages that lack authenticity. It's no longer enough simply to define some brand values – organisations must live and breathe the values and embed them in the business.

Alongside its efforts to support organisations in acquiring and developing talent for the modern workforce, AMS also assists companies in transforming their employer brands – an area of its business which has doubled in the last year. This includes amplifying aspects of an employer brand which perhaps were not as vital before. While businesses have long sought to give back to communities

through corporate responsibility programmes, the challenge is ensuring such efforts are conducted in strategic ways which reinforce core values and enhance brand equity.

"We are working with some very traditional industries to transform or amplify employer brands in a major way," says Leach. "The values that brands promote must be an authentic representation of the organisation and marketed in a very transparent way, recognising it might not suit all communities. Understand who you want to attract and then reach them with the right messages."

"Talent acquisition is now a board agenda item and CEOs are rightly concerned about where their workforce is going to come from. Workforce dexterity means looking at every possible channel and being aware that the skills you want don't necessarily exist, so you have to be prepared to go out and create them. They are not going to land on your doorstep. Be proactive with your employer brand, hire for potential, and then offer opportunities for people to constantly learn and evolve."

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