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Human Resource Executive® would like to congratulate
this year's honorees



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COVER STORY

HR Tech in a Virtual World

BY HRE STAFF

HRE's annual HR Technology Conference & Exposition® went virtual this year, providing HR, business and tech leaders free access to keynote presentations, workshops and more. Here are the highlights. Page 10

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Earlier this month, NAHR bestowed its prestigious recognition to five HR luminaries: Stephen Fry of Eli Lilly, Tim Richmond of AbbVie, Carol Surface of Medtronic, Johnny Taylor of Society for Human Resource Management and Distinguished Fellow Dave Ulrich of RBL Group and the University of Michigan. HRE spoke with all five about their contributions to the industry and outlooks on the future of HR.

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The rise in remote work has prompted many employers to turn to virtual training, mentoring, coaching and more at record rates. However, experts caution HR and L&D leaders to make the shift strategically in order to ensure it's sustainable in the long-term.

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Political Perils

i4cp's Kevin Oakes explores the intersection of election year politics and the COVID-19 workplace.



COVID Collection

Stay up to date with expert insights on how all the latest pandemic news is impacting HR.



Top 100 Twitter Chats

Get full recaps on HRE's Twitter chat series with our Top 100 HR Tech Influencers.



Insights from a CHRO

Catch weekly profiles of top HR leaders, like Deluxe Corp.'s Jane Elliott.



Transforming D&I to Belonging

After this summer's ongoing protests around social justice, workplace diversity and inclusion has jumped to the top of HR agendas. The D&I leaders participating in our Big Reset working groups have discussed unprecedented levels of anxiety, frustration and even anger as they try to address the diversity challenges in their organizations in meaningful and timely ways.

After listening in on many conversations, it's clear that, in order to bring about real change, we, as HR leaders, need to move beyond hitting diversity quotas and other standard metrics and focus on creating a sense of belonging in our company cultures.

At one time or another in our careers, most of us have experienced a feeling of "not belonging." Being left out of meetings. Not having input into key decisions relating to your work. Not having control over your workday. Being afraid to voice an opinion for fear of public rejection. Such occurrences leave us feeling stressed, angry and mistrustful—feelings that result in low engagement, performance issues and, ultimately, turnover problems.

New research from Glint shows that people who feel they belong at work are 6 times more likely to be highly engaged. Betterup research further shows a 56% reduction in turnover when employees feel they belong; its data also shows that a feeling of not belonging can result in people giving up on trying to do a good job.

As part of her research on inclusion and diversity in the workplace, Dr. Lynn Shore, professor of management at Colorado State University, cites the two most important factors she believes are the foundation to creating a culture of belonging.

The first is creating a culture that values "uniqueness" over "sameness." For instance, if everyone in a company fits a similar demographic profile (e.g., young, white and/or male), is from a short list of certain colleges or has similar background experiences, then that company likely values "sameness" over "uniqueness."

The second factor is how a company moves from mere assimilation of diverse employees to actual inclusion. While many companies may have diverse workforces based on employee demographics, they may not foster true inclusion. For instance, while their workforces may have high percentages of women or minority employees, their management

teams may be comprised primarily of white males. Employees of certain ethnicities might be hired primarily for certain roles. Or, employees may be afraid to speak up or express opinions for fear of some type of retaliation.

Certainly, we need a diverse slate of candidates, pay equity and equal opportunity for promotion. And, definitely, we need to teach people about conscious and unconscious bias and respectful behaviors. But, at the end of the day, if the company doesn't create a culture of "high belonging," such programs won't bring about real change.

Based on the many conversations I've had over the last months, I've come to believe there are three steps to fostering a high-belonging culture:

- *Creating a nurturing, respectful company climate.* This involves making it safe for people to speak up, offering opportunities for personal and career growth to all and ensuring employees are actively involved in the company's growth. All-hands meetings, open discussions and feedback sessions are ways to create a sense of inclusion.
- *Coaching leaders.* It's hugely important for leaders at all levels to model respectful behaviors, to demonstrate that opinions and contributions are equally valued, to actively listen and to promote transparency.
- *Develop policies, practices and programs with muscle.* For example, does your company mandate a slate of diverse candidates for job openings or promotions? Does it publish pay metrics? Do you conduct meaningful D&I training (not just for checking boxes)? Are there forums for openly discussing opportunity or other disparities?

I recommend we all think more about belonging, and not just about diversity. How can you help your teams and managers learn to respect, value and enjoy peoples' differences at work? I also encourage you to give your own D&I leader more support. In today's highly charged climate, these folks are under enormous stress. And, finally, let's remember that belonging and inclusion at work starts with recognizing and appreciating the unique constellation of skills and capabilities we each bring to the job.

Josh Bersin is an analyst, author, educator and thought leader focusing on the global talent market and the challenges and trends impacting business workforces around the world. Send questions or comments to hreletters@lrp.com.

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Top Story

Culture Concerns in the New Workplace

In the early months after Submittable, a Missoula, Mont.-based software company that employs about 100 people, shut down its office over the coronavirus and told employees to work from home, people manager Asta So spent a lot of time figuring out how and when to bring workers back. But, as the pandemic dragged on, her focus has increasingly been on boosting the morale and gauging the work/life balance of homebound employees.

“One of the things I’m trying to figure out is how to keep our culture,” So says. One of her recent projects was “trying to get 15 random employees to get shaved ice in this park near our office—to go outside and, socially distanced, see people that they don’t normally get to see, to cultivate more spontaneous or impulsive interactions.”

In the beginning of the COVID-19 shutdown, So and her teams also organized virtual lunch get-togethers, though lately there’s been some “Zoom fatigue.” Now, some teams are establishing lunch hours where people make sure to go offline, or try to arrange one-on-one meetings in safe, outdoor locations—although, “with winter coming, it’s going to be more tricky.”

None of this was in the training manual for So—or for any other HR executive—when they signed up for people management. As the extended pandemic not only triggered lengthy shutdowns but inspired many firms to announce full-time

work-from-home options for many or all employees, people managers needed creative solutions to brand-new problems. Do workers have the right technology, ergonomic chairs or other logistical support? How do you foster a collaborative culture when workers aren’t in the same place? And what about workers who struggle emotionally with being home alone?

“The biggest problem is isolation: How do you force these collaborative pathways?” says Nancy Rothbard, professor of management at the University of Pennsylvania’s Wharton School. She says one of the biggest new

tasks for HR is to work closely with the middle managers to make sure they have the right tools and apps, and a smart strategy, to make teamwork happen remotely. “The virtual watercooler is needed,” Rothbard says, “but it may feel weird to managers, and so you will need to create models.”

Rothbard also notes that companies saving money from downsizing offices or expenses such as maintenance need to think about ways to reinvest some of these dollars on the new needs of employees working from home. Some firms are already doing that, including ServiceNow, the Santa Clara, Calif.-based software company, which early in the pandemic gave each homebound employee \$500 to spend on wellness needs, then expanded the payout to \$700 to address other issues such as technology for workers’ kids learning from home.

Karen Drosky, a vice president for human resources at ServiceNow, says monthly wellness surveys have been critical. “Those wellness surveys informed us what we needed to do to make employees happier,” she says. “They told us what they needed.” ServiceNow also employs gimmicks like a contest for the best “staycation,” because the tech firm, like many employers, worried that employees weren’t using their time off.

Submittable’s So says she also directs considerable attention to keeping the workforce both energized and connected, taking formerly in-house features like exercise classes or lunchtime-discussion groups onto platforms such as Zoom. “We’re trying to translate all the things we used to do in person to online,” she says.

Alex Alonso, the chief knowledge officer at the Society for Human Resource Management, says it’s important for HR leaders to be patient, realize the pandemic may not end quickly and be flexible. “I would ask most HR officers, people managers and other business leaders to think about what happens in the pandemic that you’re going to make permanent,” Alonso says, “and, rather than just thinking in terms of cost and operations, think about what kind of cognitive work to take from this so, when the next situation arises, you’re ready to deal with any number of challenges that arise.”

—Will Bunch



Why Employers Should Act Now on Mental Health

Workers’ risks of developing depression, anxiety and other mental health issues declined at the end of the summer, according to a recent Total Brain Mental Health Index. But those risks still are significantly higher than they were at the start of COVID-19, proving the pandemic is causing serious—and chronic—mental health issues.

“[Mental health] is significantly more negative overall,” Total Brain CEO Louis Gagnon said at a September webinar discussing the results, adding that female and younger employees have been hit harder by mental health issues. From July to August, the risk of anxiety among employees declined 7% while depression risk declined by 23%. Still, depression risk is 56% higher now than pre-pandemic, while anxiety risk is 45% higher than in February. The index, in partnership with the National Alliance of Healthcare Purchaser Coalitions, One Mind at Work, and the HR Policy Association and its American Health Policy Institute, is based on 500 anonymized assessments randomly selected among thousands of Total Brain assessments taken each week.

Chronic stress, anxiety and depression also are hurting workers’ cognitive performance, according to the index. Sustained attention, the driver of task completion, was down 31% in August when compared to pre-pandemic. And planning, the capacity to make decisions and drive strategy, was down 15% since February.

Though it’s positive that mental health risks saw some decrease, “the numbers themselves are shocking,” said Michael Thompson, president and CEO of the National Alliance. The numbers point to the fact that mental health issues are becoming more chronic and, potentially, a bigger issue that won’t go away any time soon.



Mental health issues will “far exceed the duration and impact of COVID itself,” said Garen Staglin, chairman of One Mind at Work. “There’s no vaccine for anxiety. There’s no vaccine for depression.” In addition to COVID-19 and its associated effects, a weak job market, racial tensions and political divides are adding to employees’ anxieties. “All of this is impacting our lives,” he said.

Additionally, there are many more anxieties at home as the lines of domestic life blur with those of work and school, said Colleen McHugh, executive vice president of the American Health Policy Institute and strategic advisor for HR Policy Association.

The issues should be a warning to employers and to HR managers, in particular, to do more to help employees. “Wellness is one of the most critically important issues for employers—it’s unprecedented times for HR trying to help their employees,” McHugh said. Employers also need to encourage workers to take time off, which most employees have not been doing this year.

Although many employers are making strides on mental health benefits and other programs aimed to help employees, significant work remains.

“The time is now to take action,” Staglin said. “Don’t wait until the wakeup call of a suicide in your workplace demands you to take action. I promise if you don’t take action, you will have that wakeup call.”

—Kathryn Mayer

Employees are Craving Career Development

During normal times, active mentorship can prove critical in helping employees achieve professional goals and career advancement. Beyond that, mentoring benefits can help keep turnover rates lower.

While that scenario is true during the best of circumstances, it's especially important during times of crisis, according to Renato Profico, CEO at Doodle, a Zurich-based enterprise scheduling technology provider. Yet, according to a new Doodle study, career development and mentorship opportunities have been sorely lacking during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The report, *Career Development in a Pandemic*, found that employee expectations for career development are strikingly different from what their employers offer during the pandemic. On one hand, 50% of employees say mentorship from their manager has become more important to them during the pandemic. However, employers are falling short of meeting those expectations, with 49% of employees saying they aren't

getting enough training, coaching and mentoring to advance their careers in these uncertain times.

"Constant recognition and growth can help self-doubting employees regain [employee] confidence," Profico says.

Doodle surveyed more than 1,000 full-time and part-time employees in the U.S. across a diverse set of industries. Key findings and trends include:

- Is COVID-19 derailing career plans? Forty-one percent said their career development has stalled

- during the pandemic, and 9% said the crisis has actually caused their careers to regress.

- Email is a crutch for career growth.

Despite the increased use of Zoom, Slack and Microsoft Teams in workplaces, email still reigns supreme (42%) as the primary method of communication among employees and their bosses. Phone (26%) is second, with employee communication tools and video conferencing tools less popular, at 21% and 10%, respectively.

- Employees value the boss' role in individual growth. When it comes to

employees' one-to-one meetings with managers, 32% like when their boss provides clear direction on their role and responsibilities, and 15% appreciate a manager's guidance and support of their career development goals. This means nearly half would like their manager to play a more active role in their growth.

- Capturing the boss' attention is tricky business. Only 18% of the respondents said their manager schedules weekly one-to-one meetings over video with them. Twice-weekly one-to-one meetings are even less common (14%).

- Limited calendar visibility keeps managers walled off and inaccessible. Almost half (47%) of the respondents

said they don't have access to their manager's calendar in case they need to schedule a quick "touch base" with them.

According to Profico, a major takeaway from the report is that employees trust the team they work with much more than the HR teams and senior leaders they occasionally see. For example, he cites that 34% of employees feel comfortable speaking

to their direct supervisor about their career development goals, and 28% are comfortable sharing their goals with colleagues. Yet, employee comfort level with discussing their career goals is much lower with HR (13%) and senior management (13%).

"Organizations should take note of these findings," Profico says. "If HR teams and senior management don't show their employees that career development is a top priority, during and after the pandemic, it's highly likely that their employees will lose their motivation to do great work and become disengaged from the organization." He adds that they also may be inclined to leave to work for another company that values and supports their career development plans.

"When people are at their lowest, positive reinforcement can do wonders to help them get out of that funk," Profico explains, adding that, for some employees, being recognized for doing a job well done or for taking on leadership qualities (regardless of their title) can do wonders for employee confidence and self-esteem.

"So, constant recognition and growth can help self-doubting employees regain their confidence, take more ownership and actualize their career goals, and it's crucial for HR as well as management to realize this," Profico says.

—Tom Starner



Working Parents Quitting in Drove

Working parents are among those most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, struggling to juggle childcare and work responsibilities. Now, new data finds just how much the situation is taking its toll on employees and their employers.

Nearly half of working parents have had to quit or reduce hours because of the pandemic, according to FlexJobs' survey of than 2,500 parents with children 18 and younger living at home. Forty percent have had to change their employment situation by either voluntarily reducing their hours (25%) or quitting entirely (15%). An additional 5% said their partner has had to either reduce their hours or quit their jobs.

The data is the latest to underscore the toll the pandemic is taking on working parents. Previous research from WorldatWork found that nearly a quarter of 234 organizations say they've had an employee quit during the COVID-19 pandemic due to their children's education needs.

FlexJobs' research also finds that, of those workers who quit, 38% do not plan to rejoin the workforce.

Although a handful of employers have rolled out benefits and programs to help their working parent population in recent months—KPMG, Bank of America, Huron Consulting Group and Twitter among them—FlexJobs' data illustrates the work that employers and HR leaders have yet to do. That's especially vital as the 2020-21 school year continues to pose challenges for parents who are helping to educate their children while working from home.

So, how can HR and other company leaders help prevent a further exodus of parents from the workforce? Offering support, providing backup-care benefits and being flexible are just some of the ways. In particular, working parents say having a flexible schedule (58%) would have the greatest impact on their ability to juggle career, distance learning and childcare responsibilities, according to FlexJobs.

"In order to help working parents not only stay in the workforce but also be productive employees during this challenging time, employers should absolutely consider offering flexible schedules," says Sara Sutton, founder and CEO of FlexJobs.

"When executed thoughtfully, giving employees more control over when they're able to work during the day can help create the critical space

Tech's Role in the Development of Talent

- **80%** of HR professionals believe workplace technology helps support their role as a strategic contributor to the business.
- **79%** of HR professionals say technology enables their workforce to be more efficient and productive.
- About seven in 10 (**69%**) HR professionals report that their budgets will increase this year, and technology tops the list (**50%**) of planned use for these additional funds.

Source: Paychex

they need to meet all their competing demands," she says. "The pandemic has really forced companies to see the struggles that working parents and other caregivers routinely face

and hopefully has shed light on just how impactful granting remote and flexible work accommodations can be."

—Kathryn Mayer

From vaccine mandates to contact-tracing policies, it's a whole new legal world for HR.

HR's Legal Nightmare

BY CAROL PATTON

Legal concerns are nothing new for HR leaders. Labor negotiations, discrimination filings, paid leave challenges—HR has long navigated the complex legal and compliance issues that all organizations face. However, HR professionals are now being faced with a bevy of new legal questions, ones for which the answers are not yet clear.

The coronavirus pandemic has upended the norms of the world of work, prompting legal precedents when it comes to issues like balancing safety and privacy. HR leaders are looking to their legal departments, and one another, to create answers that protect and advocate for employees while keeping business objectives in focus, work that is primed to pick up speed as more employers finalize reopening plans.

Here are just four of the legal issues that HR leaders should keep on their radars:

Contact tracing

Many HR professionals are involved in a process they never imagined: contact tracing, or the investigative process of building a social history for an employee who tests positive for COVID-19.

The novelty of the situation is prompting questions to pop up in every workplace, industry and state: How far back should you trace? What role do state and local health departments play? If an employee tests positive, how deep of a dive is needed?

In the process of informing employees about COVID-19 exposure, HR needs to avoid unintentionally violating confidentiality rules.

"It's quite clear that you can't disclose the identification of the [employee] who tested positive," says Susan Kline, partner at Faegre Drinker law firm. "Probably 90% of the time employees figure it out on their own but the answer needs to be, 'Cheryl is on approved leave, and we expect her back after a couple of weeks.' Repeat it as often as needed."

She says some HR professionals have been pressured to release the names of employees who test positive; however, Kline explains that information obtained through contact tracing must be treated like a confidential medical record and kept separate from personnel files.

Meanwhile, HR should not underestimate the importance of choosing the right person to perform this type of detective work. Successful tracers not only guard employee privacy, but also demonstrate a good bedside manner—maybe select



Susan Kline

someone with a medical background—and can solicit sensitive health information from workers without making them afraid that they or their co-workers will be fired or disciplined.

Likewise, focus inquiries on contacts that occurred during the workday, not when employees are off work or at lunch, unless it's on the premises. Otherwise, HR risks being branded as "Big Brother," which can stir up legal issues surrounding privacy.

By now, an organization's contact-tracing plan or policy should be

developed, well-documented and in place. Being unprepared may lead to panic, anxiety and costly legal mistakes, Kline says. Just as important, clearly communicate to employees what contact tracing is, why it's needed and what to expect to avoid potential surprises.

Also, HR can legally tell employees who test positive to self-quarantine offsite for 14 days. If they're not symptomatic, Kline says, they can also be asked to work remotely.

"If the person refuses, which is like any refusal to work, it can be grounds for dismissal," Kline says. But give them the benefit of the doubt. Ask why since there can be many legitimate reasons behind the decision. Typically, employee dishonesty during contact tracing may also be grounds for termination.

"They have to be honest and cooperative," says Kline. "You're not asking for medical information, you're only asking about close contacts while at work. That's fair game."

Immunity discrimination

As the country slowly returns to work, the pandemic may end up trapping recruiters in a legal snare called immunity discrimination.

This new type of bias involves recruiters who favor job candidates who have already contracted and survived COVID-19. Research suggests that coronavirus reinfection is doubtful. So, unlike applicants who haven't had the virus, survivors likely

won't need time off work to recover from any future infection and can safely travel, meet with clients or work with others to complete tasks or long-term projects.

"Recruiters may be inclined to lean toward one candidate who survived COVID-19," says David Barron, partner at the Cozen O'Connor law firm. "It's very dangerous to make decisions based on the past health history of candidates. It would not be appropriate for employers to know if someone has had COVID-19 in the past and use that information for purposes of making an employment decision."

The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission has already chosen sides, stating this practice is unlawful, he says.

Meanwhile, some job seekers may take full advantage of their health history by mentioning their COVID-19 experiences to recruiters during interviews, hoping it gives them an edge over their competitors.

Barron says recruiters need to handle such scenarios in the same way they deal with other out-of-bounds topics, such as religion: Politely steer the conversation in a different direction.

The safest approach is to avoid discussing COVID-19 during interviews, he says, except for addressing company policies like requiring all workers to wear masks or to social distance.

Barron explains that any question HR would normally ask employees



Employment Law

can be posed to job candidates. For example, it's legal to ask applicants if they are currently experiencing any COVID symptoms but taboo to ask broad questions, such as whether they have any underlying health conditions.

"We haven't seen a lot of this litigation yet, but it's starting to percolate," says Barron, adding that such cases will come "awfully close" to those involving the Genetic Information Nondiscrimination Act, which prohibits genetic discrimination by employers and health insurers.

In the months ahead, immunity discrimination may also rear its head in different ways. Barron points to managers who inadvertently use this information when deciding promotions, handing out stretch assignments or determining which employees to bring back to the office.

"It's going to be hard for managers to not think about this when they're making workplace decisions," says Barron. "It's a good time to train people to make sure they understand the rules of the road."

Safety training

Despite the dire statistics around the pandemic and expert advice, many Americans—and, thus, employees—don't understand or believe in the importance of social distancing or wearing a mask to protect themselves against this serious global health threat.

Some believe the virus is a hoax. Others flat out refuse to wear a mask. On weekends, employees may socialize at restaurants or backyard barbecues without social distancing. Then they return to their job, sometimes with a mask hanging around their neck, and potentially spread the virus to co-workers, clients or customers.

Training your entire workforce about the importance of observing COVID-19 practices and policies is just as important as complying with state and local occupational, safety and health regulations. Ask around. How many employees are well-informed? Could they explain your policies to state regulators after an outbreak occurs? Do they know who to contact at your company if they test positive for COVID-19? Their answers may surprise you. At the very least, training programs can act like a safety net by minimizing virus outbreaks, preventing OSHA violations and related fines, or avoiding wrongful death lawsuits.

"There's no reason not to educate the full [workforce] as to what your policies are and ask them to read and acknowledge them," says Dan Wolff, partner at Crowell & Moring law firm. "Employees don't get to dictate terms of the workplace but you need take this seriously."

Besides, he adds, training programs help build a better workplace culture.

Training doesn't need to be lengthy and can assume various formats. HR can lead a Zoom chat, create a 10-minute online video or email new

or revised policy information. Even supervisors can conduct five-minute meetings at the beginning of the workday, asking employees to read and sign off on printed materials.

Then, spend time training managers and supervisors on how to consistently enforce these rules.

"If you have a mask policy in the workplace but half are disregarding it, action should be taken in the form of discipline," Wolff says, adding that no policy is worth much unless enforced. "Discipline to the gravity of the situation."

Meanwhile, he says, personal injury lawsuits are stemming from occupational exposure to COVID-19. He also expects wrongful death lawsuits to climb.

"This isn't hard," Wolff says. "We all know COVID is out there. It doesn't take much to do a few things to diminish the risk in your workplace environment. Invest a little bit now [in training]. It's a much better business move than ignoring it and facing lawsuits or citations."

According to a summer Gallup poll, 35% of Americans would not get a



Dan Wolff

free, FDA-approved vaccine if it were available today.

This places companies in a predicament. How can they protect their employees if more than one-third are unwilling to take the vaccine?

Vaccines

The default rule in the American workplace—excluding employers in Montana and Puerto Rico—is to observe at-will employment, which generally means employees can be terminated for any reason if it's not illegal or prohibited by employment contracts or collective bargaining agreements, says Alissa Kranza, attorney at Lieser Skaff Alexander law firm.

"Employers need to stay informed of the particular laws in their state and look at their particular employee contract, agreement or handbook to determine what specific situations will allow for termination," she says. "Ultimately, those contracts will dictate whether or not termination is allowed for refusing a vaccine."

Since the virus travels across state lines, there's also been talk of Congress mandating a vaccine under the commerce clause, but Kranza believes this is unrealistic. She says employee rights would be at risk and it could trigger an avalanche of lawsuits.

Unfortunately, there isn't a uniform practice for what HR can do. Every industry is different. So are their employees and jobs. She suggests that HR evaluate the makeup of its workforce and review current policies or processes for handling exemption requests. For those needing a religious exemption,

it's not the religion itself that matters, she explains, but the sincerity of the employee's belief in those practices, even if they're not widespread.

Employees may also refuse a vaccination under OSHA or ADA laws if it threatens to do more harm than good. Some may take biologics or drugs that weaken the immune system, for example, which increases their risk of catching the virus, becoming seriously ill or even dying.

In such scenarios, Kranza says, protected workers will require accommodations, such as working remotely, or being reassigned to other jobs where they can use a plexiglass screen, social distance, wash their hands or wear a mask.

Meanwhile, HR is better off making vaccines optional versus mandating them, which tends to sour or terminate employee relationships, she says, adding that HR can launch a pro-vaccine campaign. However, if someone has a bad reaction to the vaccine, that could result in a worker's compensation claim.

Looking ahead, Kranza says, HR's path is "clear as mud."

"There are a lot of [people] who want to push this as though things are clear and employers can force everyone [to get vaccinated] and there won't be any backlash," she says. "We're a big country and will get different reactions."

company-related, workers were allowed to wear clothing with rainbow pins and flags in support of LGBTQ rights.

Consistency also applies to free speech. Diamond says her theory is that employees come to work to accomplish specific tasks. Since discussing politics can be a big distraction and interfere with their ability to perform their job, HR may establish rules on prohibiting expression of political views during the work day as long as they're consistently enforced.

Just be careful that enforcement of these policies doesn't cross sensitive boundaries. Free speech also applies to employees who believe they're being treated differently because of their religion or skin color, for instance. They have the right to complain about the terms and conditions of their employment during work hours; otherwise, employers may be violating discrimination laws.

Diamond says this highly charged political, economic and health climate presents opportunities for HR to host a broader conversation about respecting both diversity in the workplace and co-worker viewpoints, no matter where they fall on the political spectrum.

"This is a tense time with all sorts of workplace problems," Diamond says. "[HR] really needs to think hard about how it can have employees feel comfortable coming to work and getting their job done in an environment that's respectful to everybody."

Send questions or comments about this story to hreletters@lrp.com.



Tracey Diamond

Send questions or comments about this story to hreletters@lrp.com.

4 Ways We Can Fix a Broken Workforce Opportunity System



By Carrie Varoquiers
Vice President, Global Impact
and Employee Life and President,
Workday Foundation

This year has been filled with many challenges and uncertainties, whether it's the loss of Black lives, unemployment, the impacts of the coronavirus, or fires and other natural disasters. But with so much disruptive change, some good may emerge as we come together. These crises have prompted the world to deeply examine already existing inequities with a new lens and sense of urgency to help solve our toughest problems. By no means are these challenges going to be easy, but I'm confident in the common good of humanity. With a shared goal and collective determination, I'm optimistic for the positive impact to come.

As I reflect and observe what we're witnessing as a global community, I'm prompted to think about the role businesses can play as part of the solution, both within our organizations and for our communities at large. How do we, as business leaders, help rebuild a system that was already broken to begin with? How can we build it back better, open up more opportunities for all and ensure that we develop new ways of engaging with our workforce and community to develop opportunities for all?

1 Commit to building onramps to opportunity in talent acquisition. Talent is everywhere, but opportunity is not. We can help by looking for talent in diverse candidate pools and bridging the opportunity gap by seeking out non-traditional sources within the community. At Workday, we have developed an Opportunity Onramps® program in which we work with community partners to match highly motivated candidates with non-traditional backgrounds to internship opportunities they would not otherwise be able to access. Paid work experience through onramps programs like these provides economic mobility for people from underserved communities and connects organizations to some amazing new colleagues.

2 Ensure learning, reskilling and upskilling opportunities are widely available and accessible. It's imperative that organizations foster demographic diversity at all levels to provide an equitable opportunity for advancement and leadership across all groups. Offering remote,

on-demand training programs and skills clinics to empower employees to take control of their career mobility will be key for organizations and employees to thrive in today's increasingly virtual environment. Establishing mentorship programs can also be a very effective way to keep high-potential employees engaged and thriving.

3 Collaborate with those who share a goal and vision. We have found that a sure way to amplify and extend our efforts is by partnering with like-minded organizations. As a founding coalition member of #RecoverStronger, an initiative launched by JFF, we joined other companies to ensure we're accountable for how we're building back a more equitable economy. We also have a partnership with Opportunity@Work, which will leverage the Workday skills cloud to connect U.S. workers without four-year degrees to employers in need of their skills, allowing them to work, learn and earn to their full potential. And we also joined the Rework America Alliance, an innovative nationwide initiative to enable unemployed and low-wage workers to emerge from this crisis stronger.

4 Establish a tight alignment across the business (from HR to finance to IT) to ensure top-level priorities reflect and support equity-focused goals. We can all put in place not only a culture but also a formal infrastructure that cultivates the creation of opportunities within our own workforces and communities.

As we come together as business leaders, we have a responsibility to help do our part to improve the global social, economic and health crises. For organizations looking to diversify their workforces, creating programs like Opportunity Onramps and making hiring through these programs a part of overall talent acquisition strategy can lead to meaningful impact. Let's work together to build back a stronger economy and a more equitable system that works for all of us.



Cover Story

9 Key Lessons from HR Tech

The impacts of the pandemic on the world of HR were in the spotlight at the first-ever virtual conference.

BY KATHRYN MAYER

With COVID-19 prompting *HRE's* annual HR Technology Conference & Exposition® to go virtual for the first time ever, it's no surprise that the pandemic—and how it's changing all aspects of the workplace—was the most popular topic of conversation during the four-day event. Industry experts, employers and analysts all agreed the global crisis has rapidly changed the market, the HR profession and employee expectations—and there's no turning back.

"It's time to reshape everything we know. Wipe the slate clean," Jason Averbook, industry analyst and CEO and co-founder of Leapgen, said during one of the conference's several keynote sessions. "Sunset what no longer works and write a new strategy for what we call the now of work."

Aside from COVID-19, other popular topics at the conference—which drew a community of 20,000 people—included diversity and inclusion, learning and development, wellbeing and more.

Here are some of the biggest takeaways from the event.

1 COVID-19 IS CHANGING THE HR TECH MARKET. No surprise here: COVID-19 has impacted nearly every facet of the workplace—and HR technology is no exception. From enabling massive remote work and maintaining culture virtually to hiring and onboarding remotely and safely managing a return to the workplace, digital strategies—and the overall importance of technology—has exploded because of the pandemic.

"COVID-19 accelerated companies' digital communications strategies by an average of six years," Averbook said, "while 97% of enterprise decision-makers believe the pandemic sped up their company's digital transformation. It is the digital accelerator of the decade, and digital communication is the new lifeblood of business. If we're not digital, we're dying."

HR technology is quickly responding to COVID and other changes, said industry analyst Josh Bersin. In particular, 2021 will see companies—and, in turn, HR tech tools—pivoting to a focus on integrating work and life, he said.

What's more, HR leaders and HR technology vendors see the pandemic as fuel for digital transformations, innovation and other changes that have long been in the works. All 16 winners of *HRE's* Top HR Products awards, for instance, delivered products attuned to the needs magnified by COVID.

2 REMOTE WORK IS HERE TO STAY. COVID-19 prompted a massive shift to remote work, with the vast majority of employers moving their workers home when the pandemic began. Industry insiders say with the experiment going well, and we largely won't be going back to a full in-office experience even post-pandemic. "Remote work is a long-term investment, and it's going to be a talent magnet in the coming years," said Elizabeth Supinski, director of data science and research products at the Society for Human Resource Management. "Organizations that were hostile toward remote work—or at least skeptical—have really decided to take another look.

Around the world, I expect flexible work policies to become much more important to attracting and retaining talent."

Organizations will also embrace a hybrid workforce of remote and in-office employees, several speakers said.

So, what does a new remote—or hybrid—workforce mean for HR tech? Simply put, employers will be investing in tech to support remote work, said Stacey Harris, chief research officer at Sapient Insights Group. In her organization's research presented at the conference, Harris noted that remote work was the top area of tech investment when it comes to talent management.

Other experts pointed to a continuing increase in collaboration and distance-work technologies. "I think collaboration tools will continue to increase in their importance as we stay in a virtual or hybrid operating environment," Ken Solon, executive vice president, chief information officer and head of digital at Lincoln Financial Group, noted during HR Tech's final keynote. "They need to bring teams together in an innovative, decision-making perspective in a virtual environment."

3 ADDRESSING EMPLOYEE CONCERNS IS KEY. The pandemic has spurred a host of challenges for employees: mental health anguish, exacerbated caregiving and family responsibilities, and financial and economic concerns, among others.

"You can see and hear the burnout everywhere you go," said HR thought leader John Sumser during a keynote on the final day of the conference. "We've lost all sense of proper boundaries between life and work ... and

For full HR Tech Conference coverage, visit [HRExecutive.com](https://www.hrexecutive.com).

maybe that's something we're going to give up, but it's gone, and we need to figure out what to do with it. Where we are now is neither new, nor normal nor sustainable."

Experts at the conference agreed that technology solutions that focus on employee wellbeing will likely be a big area of growth in the market.

"The big theme," Bersin said, "is figuring out how to reduce stress, anxiety, financial concerns, uncertainty and concerns about productivity when people are working under very, very ambiguous conditions."

4 THE TALENT MARKETPLACE SPACE IS THRIVING.

Over the last several years, companies have been working to improve internal talent mobility. But now, especially driven by a pandemic that's shifting workplace priorities and making companies restructure at lightning-fast speed, the interest is exploding in both the concept of talent mobility and in tools to do it well.

"We've seen an acceleration of interest in the talent marketplace concept and organizations adapting to this as quickly as possible," Sona Manzo, managing director at consulting firm Deloitte, said during the event. "Technology-enabled platforms, which are typically powered by AI these days, are empowering our employees to really understand what those opportunities are and connecting the skills and interests they have to the right opportunities."

Early adopters of talent marketplaces were able to quickly adjust labor to meet rapidly changing needs due to COVID. Delta, for instance, despite an immediate external hiring freeze, relied on innovative tech from AI-driven talent management platform Avature to address the talent gaps and surpluses; pilots and flight attendants weren't busy but the reservations department was inundated. Myria Peek, Delta's manager of talent acquisition technology, process and analytics, said during a session that the company created a page within the Avature platform for hiring leaders to identify talent needs, and for employees to express interest in what Delta termed "special assignments," or transfers from their typical role to help close gaps.

Bersin said the talent management space is among the most competitive corners of the market. New tools are tapping analytics, and many are focused on training to drive fairness, diversity and inclusion. Still other solutions are designed to help employers gauge and listen to the voices of their workers, he said.

5 RESKILLING SHOULD BECOME A BIGGER FOCUS.

Before the pandemic, there was already some urgency around reskilling because many employees knew technology was changing and their jobs were going to change along with it, said Adrianna Gregory, senior editor at consulting firm Oxford Economics. But in response to COVID-19, "reskilling opportunities are going to be more important than ever. That's because a number of employers that had to lay off employees are now rehiring and are looking for workers with new, varied skills. Additionally, employers that aren't in a place to rehire are wise to upskill and retrain remaining employees to meet their current needs.

"Employers need to be making sure there's a chance for development for everyone in the workforce. [They] need to make sure [they're] taking care of their workforce," Gregory said. "[We need to] not lose sight of employee development and other broader goals."

In another session, Tanushree Guha, workforce analytics executive at Accenture, agreed that reskilling will become a bigger initiative for employers. "The world as we know it has changed almost overnight, and reskilling workforces to be relevant in the new world is absolutely essential across all industries."

6 THINK ETHICALLY ABOUT GOING BACK TO WORK.

With the pandemic still in full swing, do we need to rush

employees back to the office? Marcus Buckingham, author and business consultant, doesn't think so. "We don't need to rush our employees back to normal because we're trying to make them feel better," he said. "It won't."

Similarly, Sumser urged organizations and HR leaders to think "ethically" about return to work and said smart organizations need to prioritize safety, health and development. Organizations and HR leaders should continuously question assumptions and ask themselves what is best for their employees' health and safety when making decisions about when and if workers should come back to the office, how they can best keep employees safe and how much information they should give employees about the risks of coming back into the office during a pandemic.

Sumser recommended that all HR departments and their vendors create an operational ethics function so that decisions can be evaluated with a group of people to make sure everyone is in alignment about what they're doing and what they are trying to accomplish.

"I think ethics is [part of] a new way of deciding," Sumser said, noting that considering ethics also allows for decisions to be made that aren't permanent. "We want to keep things evolving because we're learning, and we still don't know a lot about what's going on."

The good news, though, is there is plenty of new health and safety technology in the marketplace to help employers try to make the return as safe as possible.

7 DON'T LOSE SIGHT OF DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION.

While grappling with the fallout of the pandemic has been the dominant priority for most HR leaders this year, they shouldn't let that disruption distract them from moving their diversity agenda forward, a number of speakers said. Keynoter Stacia Garr, co-founder of RedThread Research, noted, in discussing organizational purpose, that the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and many other Black citizens this year heightened corporate America's awareness of racial injustice. "And, as a result," she said, "we have seen organizations talking about social justice in ways they haven't before and, for many of them, doing things that are remarkably and demonstrably different than they have in the past."

In her keynote, Dr. Tolonda Tolbert, co-founder and head of strategy and culture at Eskalera, noted that far too many organizations still just talk about DEI without taking firm, decisive action. Technology can be a differentiator, she said; it can integrate recruitment, payroll, performance management and professional development systems, for instance, to generate some measurable numbers on DEI. She cautioned, however, that organizations need to also get more specific and granular with the questions they ask about their data in order to yield the most meaningful results.

8 EMBRACE EMPATHY AND CARE.

Perhaps more than ever, empathy and care should be top of mind for organizations.

The pandemic is highlighting the need for HR to center empathy in all of its decision-making, said ServiceNow Chief Talent Officer Pat Wadors. "Whole-person care"—which takes into account employees' mental, emotional, physical and financial health, as well as individual home lives and family situations—should be a driving factor in benefits, performance management, workforce planning and more. Managers need to be better equipped for such strategies, she noted, and C-suite executives may need an extra push from HR to get on board.

On the tech side, Bersin said, the market is seeing an influx of tools designed to help HR and managers be



Dr. Tolonda Tolbert



Marcus Buckingham

more empathetic. "Companies that understand the need for belonging, inclusion, diversity, a growth mindset and constant support and collaboration are the ones that are going to thrive through this pandemic," he said.

Limeade CEO Albrecht urged HR leaders to embrace technology that matches their intent—to choose the right tech tools that show their level of care. He also reminded them to continue to listen to what employees need. "No amount of technology can give you the true, ultimate culture," he said. "You have to listen to the voice of real human beings."

9 USE CRISIS AS AN OPPORTUNITY.

Silver linings to a tumultuous year? You bet. Optimism over how the pandemic, and social and racial unrest, will change things for the better was a common theme throughout the conference, with several industry insiders pointing to a number of positives and better business outcomes emerging from the pandemic. Increased diversity and inclusion, better employee engagement, a bigger focus on workers' health and mental health, more learning—and better tech to handle it all—will likely come out of the crisis.

HR has the chance to rethink its priorities, said John Boudreau, professor emeritus of management and organization and a senior research scientist with the Center for Effective Organizations at the University of Southern California. "It's an opportunity for HR to look around and make sure they capture the lessons that their organizations are learning right now so they don't snap back to something that's the same or maybe even worse as the pressure of the crisis subsides."

ServiceNow's Wadors agreed. "If we're wise, we will capture the silver linings in all of this and put it in our DNA," she said. "We should put the employee in the center of our experience and adapt as needed. If we continue to have that framework, everyone will be better served."

Send questions or comments about this story to hreletters@lrp.com.

Analyzing an Evolving HR Tech Market

Josh Bersin opened up HR Tech with a look at how the tech market is responding to HR shifts wrought by the pandemic.

BY JEN COLLETTA

The diagram, titled "A Framework For Ethics of Data and AI", is presented on a screen. It features a 2x2 matrix with axes labeled "Fairness" (vertical) and "Safety and Trust" (horizontal). The quadrants are: Top-Left (red) "Bias", Top-Right (blue) "People Impact", Bottom-Left (green) "Privacy", and Bottom-Right (orange) "Security". A small inset photo of Josh Bersin is in the top right corner of the screen. The screen also displays the HR Technology logo, the hashtag #HRTechConf, and the website www.HRTechConference.com.

Just one year ago, the world of work looked vastly different: The country was experiencing record-low unemployment, HR leaders were focused on retaining employees in a tight labor market and industry forecasters were plotting what the future of work would look like.

Then, the pandemic came—skyrocketing unemployment and prompting widespread economic uncertainty.

“But bigger than all of that is the transformation of companies, the transformation of jobs,” industry analyst Josh Bersin said during his keynote address at the first day of HR Tech. Bersin noted that, just in the last few months, 40% of workers have changed jobs or roles, and a full 90% of companies have now instated a work-at-home policy.

HR technology is quickly responding to these, and other, changes, Bersin said. In his opening day HR Tech keynote, Bersin untangled the increasingly complex HR tech market, highlighting emerging trends. In particular, 2021 will see companies—and, in turn, tools—pivoting to a focus on integrating work and life, he said.

“That’s not novel,” Bersin said, “but it’s harder to do than you would think.”

Here’s how Bersin thinks 2021 will shake out across the HR tech market:

Core HCM

Core HCM systems are stretched thin, with massive demand and investment in HR tech at an all-time high. “The question is, can core HR tech providers continue to provide the level of innovation and flexibility they need to address the pandemic? The answer is no,” Bersin said. Traditional core providers have no choice but to shift into ecosystem structures—partnering with other providers to allow their solutions to integrate and address the myriad needs HR is looking for in its tech platforms.

Talent Management

Talent management tools are changing because philosophies of management are changing, Bersin noted. Managers are increasingly expected to operate as “chief empathy officers”—demonstrating patience, understanding, active listening.

“Companies that understand the need for belonging, inclusion, diversity, a growth mindset and constant support and collaboration are the ones that are going to thrive through this pandemic,” he said.

As such, the talent management space is among the most competitive corners of the market. New tools are tapping analytics and many are focused on training to drive fairness, diversity and inclusion, while other solutions are designed to help employers gauge and listen to the voices of their workers.

Employee Engagement

When it comes to the all-important employee engagement, HR tools are shifting from intelligent dashboard models to continuous response-action platforms—generating tons of data and analyzing it in near-real-time. This approach also funnels analytics to the people who need the information and can act on it quickly, Bersin said.

“This is exactly the direction the customer experience market moved in,” he added.

Learning & Development

Learning is becoming more like TikTok and less like YouTube—small bits of as-needed, entertainment-driven information, Bersin said. Much of the learning tools to come will focus on helping employees build their collaboration and business capabilities, as well as behavioral skills, especially in demand by younger workers. There

is room for growth both in macro- and microlearning setups, and virtual reality is on the verge of exploding, he predicted.

With the average large company utilizing a dozen tools for learning, he envisions a shift toward “capability academies.” This model considers learning as a performance problem, so academies can be dedicated to issues like safety, marketing, sales—with learning programs for each.

In addition to these trends, Bersin said, HR tech will continue to respond to the wider and quickly evolving business landscape. In particular, as flexibility becomes embedded in the way we work, companies are quickly moving from industrial hierarchies to talent marketplaces, and technology will continue to emerge to support that direction.

And, as the pandemic continues to unfold through 2021, technology will play an increasingly important role in addressing the fallout for workers.

“The big theme,” he said, “is figuring out how to reduce stress, anxiety, financial concerns, uncertainty and concerns about productivity when people are working under very, very ambiguous conditions.”

How HR, HR Tech Fit Into an Organization's Purpose

Keynoter Stacia Garr shared the value of purpose in this tumultuous time.

BY ELIZABETH CLARKE

Don't be afraid to bring purpose to your (virtual) workplace. It won't hurt your work in human resources or your bottom line. In fact, aligning with purpose will likely boost your workplace happiness and profit margins.

That was one major takeaway from analyst Stacia Garr's keynote at HR Tech.

In "Finding Your North Star: The Importance of Purpose (and Technology) During Disruption," Garr defined organizational purpose as "a clear, concise statement that inspires people to deliver value to multiple stakeholders." It's also something that comes to life when it's connected back to ourselves, our individual purpose and how our work helps us achieve that purpose.

Garr, co-founder of RedThread Research, and her team began work on purpose before the pandemic and had already identified it as a growing area of interest to organizations.

And the idea of delivering value to multiple stakeholders, not only shareholders, might seem like a new concept, Garr said, but it isn't.

"Historically, a focus on purpose has made some people uncomfortable, especially those of us who were taught in business school that shareholders are king," she said. "The reason is that this model of thinking implies this tight tension between purpose and profit. It

really puts them at two different ends of the spectrum and says that they cannot be complementary."

But she calls that a misnomer.

As one investor drove the point, "if you're not making an impact on a broader set of stakeholders, your business is not successful. Your business is not making the maximum impact and therefore [not making] the maximum financial return that it can generate."

Who are those other stakeholders? Customers, employees, suppliers and communities, to start.

Garr's research shows that an organizational purpose that is carefully defined, passionately held and wrestled with daily can bring all types of business success. Driven by technology, the gig economy and work's relatively new role as an important and trusted institution in our lives, this idea is gaining broad acceptance, Garr said.

This year, both the pandemic and social unrest have brought the concept into even deeper relief, and in fact, 73% of people believe companies can increase profits and improve communities, according to a recent *Edelman Intelligence Report*.

"The murder of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and so many others has heightened the awareness of



Black people's experience in America, including corporate America," Garr said. "And, as a result, we have seen organizations talking about social justice in ways they haven't before and, for many of them, doing things that are remarkably and demonstrably different than they have in the past."

Garr believes the shift toward purpose-driven work is here to stay. So what then is HR's role and the role of HR technology?

Purpose, historically, hasn't been "within HR's purview," for the most part, but she contends that this is an opportunity for HR to step up. "We've heard that the 2008 crisis was the CFO's crisis," she said. "This is HR's crisis."

Because purpose is a "self-reinforcing system," HR has opportunities in four areas:

- Attracting and deciding who is best qualified to achieve the organization's purpose.
- Creating the conditions that enable a purpose-focused employee experience.
- Developing talent by helping people discover something deeper within themselves that connects them to the organization's purpose.
- Retaining talent by tracking the impact of talent practices that align to purpose.

And plenty of tech tools—from Eightfold AI to Benevity, Wespire and Guild—exist to help HR achieve success in all of the areas, Garr said.

Medical technology company Medtronic, in an example of enabling a purpose-focused employee experience, uses its purpose as a type of company constitution, even going so far as to print it on "important paper." And although a framed copy of its mission might hang on the office walls, "It

doesn't just stay on the walls," Garr said. "They took those documents and use them as decision-making guides."

But that doesn't refer only to company leaders' decisions. All employees are encouraged to call attention to the mission statement, which essentially says the company will "contribute to human welfare," to check whether an organizational decision aligns with what Medtronic is trying to do.

And USAA, in an example of developing talent to connect with the organization's purpose, has created a unique onboarding program that each of its 20,000 employees will experience before starting work with the military-focused company.

The new workers spend four days in a cultural orientation, during which they learn about the veterans and families they serve, but also share just a little bit of those customers' experiences. They eat MREs, put on the fully loaded backpacks that military service members carry, read letters from those in the field and more.

That focus on purpose shows up, in particular, in USAA's call centers, which are vibrant and focused, Garr said.

HR practitioners and HR tech providers, alike, can help promote purpose in different ways, but it ultimately means starting with an understanding of an organization's or department's purpose and working to integrate that into practices and technologies while also remaining authentic.

"Whoever you are, whatever you do, understand your own purpose," Garr said, "and the purpose of each member of your team and do your best to connect that to the work."

Another HR Tech is Coming This Spring

On the final day of HR Tech in October—which went virtual for the first time—event organizers announced a new online conference coming this spring.

Spring HR Technology Conference & Exposition is scheduled for March 16-19. Like this fall's conference, the event will be entirely virtual and free to attend. To register, visit [HRTechnologyConference.com](https://www.hrtechnologyconference.com).

The announcement came as HR Tech opened up its last day of programming. Usually held in the fall in Las Vegas, the conference shifted to an online setting in light of the pandemic, offering four free days of keynote

sessions, vendor demonstrations, discussions led by industry experts and networking spaces. Attendees from more than 125 countries participated, representing a range of industries and job titles, including HR leaders, tech innovators, vendors, C-suite executives and more.

The pandemic's impact on HR and HR tech was the primary topic of discussion and, given the uncertain future of the global health crisis and its quickly evolving impact on the world of work, the spring conference is sure to also be a hub for sharing best practices and leading-edge innovations.

—Jen Colletta

Boosting Workforce Resilience Through Crisis

Marcus Buckingham shared surprising new statistics about employee resilience at HR Tech.

BY NICK OTTO

From a global pandemic to social unrest, how are current events impacting the state of resilience and engagement in the workforce today?

They are all connected, *New York Times* bestselling author and business consultant Marcus Buckingham said in his keynote address on the third day of the virtual HR Technology & Conference Expo.

Buckingham shared for the first time results of two large, global surveys on the state of resilience and engagement in the workplace, which he conducted with his team at the ADP Research Institute.

“[Resilience and engagement] are related, but they are independent of one another,” he noted. “You can be highly resilient and not very engaged. You can be highly engaged and not very resilient.”

To measure resilience, Buckingham and his team came up with a set of core statements, involving views on work freedom, trust in leadership, personal focus and other issues.

“Resilience as a thing is created through, hopefully, a really positive ecosystem of your own understanding of what you can control in your life, what your team leader does for you ... and the role of the senior leader,” he said.

According to the data, 17% of the world’s workforce feels highly resilient.

Interestingly, Buckingham noted, there weren’t any major differences in resilience between gender (16% of men and 14% of women were rated resilient) or age (resilience levels varied from 16% for ages 20-39, 14% for ages 40-54, 12% ages 55-74 and 16% for age 75-plus).

COVID-19 and Resilience

Going into the research, Buckingham said, he thought resilience would vary with the way participants’ respective countries had responded to the pandemic. “So, I thought those countries that had had lower death rates and fewer cases, they would be more resilient. And countries with higher death rates would be less resilient. That didn’t turn out to be true at all.”

According to the study, he noted, citizens in Brazil, the United States and Sweden, where there have been high rates of infection and death due to COVID, reported levels of resilience similar to those countries with much lower numbers of COVID cases, like Australia and Singapore.

“However, what we did find is that the more intimate your experience of COVID was, the more resilient you are,” he said.

Respondents who had been infected, or been associated with a family member, close friend or colleague who had tested positive, were found to be 2.8 times more likely to be resilient. Participants who indicated yes to all of those questions were four times more likely to be highly resilient, he said.

“We humans do better psychologically when we deal with the reality full in the face,” Buckingham said. “We do not need leaders to sugarcoat things for us and pretend things are going to go back to normal.”

With that data in mind, he cautioned business and HR leaders not to rush workplace reopenings.

“We don’t need to rush our employees back to normal because we’re trying to make them feel better; it won’t,” he said.

What makes people feel better is reality, he added. “If we know the changes that are going to happen at work, we’re not only fine, we’re better. We’re stronger.”

PEOPLE SIDE OF DIGITAL

By Jason Averbook / Columnist



10 Ways to Reimagine HR for 2021

People have, quite simply, changed forever. The humanization of work must follow.

This year has poured gas on the digital revolution.

Dramatic world shifts, the prioritized prevalence of the digital workplace and distributed work, and a need to be physically distant with deeper connections than ever to work and each other dramatically accelerated digitization in our personal and professional lives.

It’s the parallel revolution that makes 2020 so significant: The human revolution overlaid these world shifts, making work suddenly, if not refreshingly, more human than ever. The global health pandemic rooted us in communal health, mental wellness, physical safety, psychological resilience and a local and global sense of both shared trauma and newfound community. The social justice pandemic shined new light on historic wounds, forced awareness and conversation, challenged value systems and inspired change. People have, quite simply, changed forever. The humanization of work must follow.

And we’re not even done yet: Employment, global economies, business models, health data, education systems and a pending U.S. political election all remain in wild flux while we valiantly attempt to forge the future. Rather than passively accepting a “to-be-determined new normal,” one that deals itself out to us by chance like a deck of cards as the world morphs and reshapes, what if we thoughtfully and proactively design a better normal

for business? What if we stacked the deck in favor of people?

Approached with optimism, the “now of work” presents incredible opportunities for organizations that establish a people-first mindset; instill a culture that encourages experimentation, innovation, inclusion and growth; and set out to design it with purpose. It’s not only possible, it’s up to us, HR, to set an agenda and lead the reset toward building a better normal.

10 HR Reimaginings for a Better Normal

1. A new model for HR operations, HR technology and employee experience supports whole employee care, bi-directional workplace communication and trust, and a frictionless workforce experience.
2. Old talent management habits make way for new talent stewardship strategies.
3. Talent wars are waged within our own organizations; the business prioritizes reskilling, the development of workforce resilience and intelligent mapping of capabilities and career drivers to the strategic needs of the business.
4. Organizations develop accurate, timely line of sight to the full, extended workforce. Experience, engagement, inclusion and mobility strategies apply to all, regardless of employment status.
5. Workforce experience is designed with a people-first and data-driven mindset.
6. Whole employee care and a truly frictionless workforce experience necessitate a unified digital people vision, the dissolution of HR silos, coordination

of people strategies and better people data than ever before.

7. Static strategies and multiyear roadmaps are replaced with agile, nimble strategies focused on what people and businesses need in the now of work and future-proof investments for an unknown period ahead.

8. Technology is configured, optimized or selected to address spikes and pitfalls and general changes in workforce behavior.

9. Renewed strategies are intentionally prioritized and sequenced to drive maximum business impact by leveraging tangible “measures of success.”

10. HR reimagines budgets and leverages sequencing to set the stage for sustained transformation in 2021.

Whatever crystal ball we relied on prior to 2020 was an illusion at best; we never needed it, we certainly don’t have one now and we’ve learned it was always up to us in the first place: to decide what we want to be, who we want to be as an organization, how we will operate and why it matters to our people and to broader society.

Jason Averbook is a leading analyst, thought leader and consultant in the area of HR, the future of work and the impact technology can have on that future. He is the co-founder and CEO of Leapgen, a global consultancy helping organizations shape their future workplace. Send questions or comments to hreletters@lrp.com.

Cultivating D&I with Technology

BY DR. TYRONE SMITH JR.



Creating a diverse and inclusive workplace is important for a number of reasons, not the least of which is profitability.

According to a recent McKinsey study, businesses with gender-diverse workspaces were 21% more likely to attain above-average profit, and those that were culturally and ethnically diverse were 33% more likely to outperform competitors.

Today's business landscape is dominated by new solutions to old problems, and it has never been more imperative to take advantage of them, as COVID-19 has made diversity, equity and inclusion issues in the workplace even more apparent. Even before the pandemic, D&I initiatives in the workplace often did not receive the prioritization they deserved, even in the most well-meaning of organizations. While the process of building and promoting these values might seem overwhelming, the good news is that not only will doing so benefit your employees and cash flow alike—it is also easier than ever to start the journey thanks to ever-evolving advances in technology.

How Does Technology Promote D&I?

In the past, issues that stymied building diverse workplaces—be they silent, inherent biases or something

more blatant—were often seen as individual failings or subjective issues. The workforce in general largely reacted accordingly, educating or punishing the individuals in question and not doing the necessary work to get to the root of the issue. Because the larger problem went unrecognized and untreated, however, even prompt action against prejudice was ineffective and did little to create a corporate culture that valued a diverse workforce.

Today, it is generally accepted that the problem of homogenized organizations is largely systemic in nature. This means that instead of exercising defensive action on an individual level, it is possible to assess the main ways in which diversity, equity and inclusion are hindered at a foundational level and utilize tools designed specifically to remove those factors from the equation. A rapidly expanding industry of diversity and inclusion technology has risen to meet this need. Research conducted by Mercer and RedThread Research classified these evolving solutions into four main categories: talent acquisition, development and advancement, engagement and retention, and analytics and insights.

Talent Acquisition

Unconscious bias can have a significant impact on hiring and, as a result, many organizations are investing in tools that randomize and “anonymize” resumes and applications. This allows recruiters and management to assess each candidate based purely on their

qualifications, independent from such factors as gender and ethnicity. Some solutions even improve candidate sourcing to ensure that qualified individuals from groups typically underrepresented are included.

Development and Advancement

Diverse and inclusive talent sourcing and hiring might be the first hurdle, but it is not the only one. Once talent has been acquired, the next step is ensuring not only that they receive the tools to succeed, but also that they are working for leaders who understand the challenges they might experience in a diverse work environment. According to *Forbes*, some of the most effective skill-building tools for management and the workforce alike are rooted in virtual reality technology. The goal of this kind of training tool is to provide real-world scenarios of difficulties often faced by underrepresented individuals in the workplace to build empathy and awareness.

Engagement and Retention

Virtual inclusion platforms are an increasingly popular option to support a diverse and inclusive workplace. This kind of technology works by granting employees the ability to share their experiences and allow their voices to be heard without fear of reprisal from management. In turn, it allows decision-makers to use that information to improve D&I policies immediately, rather than wait for an annual engagement survey or something similar.

Analytics and Insights

Finally, analytic software is an essential tool for building an organization that values and actively promotes diversity and inclusion. It can be used to analyze pay equity, group management and a variety of other factors that grant insight into the effectiveness of D&I policies in the workplace.

Companies should take a close look at their policies, processes, procedures and benefits to ensure they are all fair and equitable. Additionally, they need to examine the employee make-up and leadership team of their company and ensure they are reflective of the world around them. Lastly, companies need to hear from their employees about their lived experiences in the workplace to ensure it is inclusive. This is often the tricky part, as employees have to trust their organization in the first place in order to share their truth. To foster trust, companies must be transparent about why they want this information and how they will hold themselves accountable to what it reveals.

Diversity and inclusion are quickly becoming non-negotiable in the modern workplace, and ever-evolving technological advancements make it easier than ever before to begin building your team. Keep the four areas discussed above in mind as you plan the process of diversifying your organization.

Dr. Tyrone Smith Jr., a Top HR Tech Influencer, is the people operations and global workforce analytics leader at Ryan.

What's Keeping HR Up at Night?

COVID-19. Economic challenges. Social injustice. This year brought monumental shifts in HR's priorities—so, what's on your mind for the year ahead?

HRE's annual What's Keeping HR Up at Night? survey is your opportunity to share your perspective and learn what other HR leaders are concerned about in this unprecedented year. Respondents will get an early look at the results, before our full analysis publishes online and in our first issue of 2021.

To participate, visit surveymonkey.com/r/SQVRH2D.



How COVID-19 is Impacting HR Tech Spend

New research unveiled at HR Tech found that the pandemic is prompting business leaders to slash HR tech spending.

BY JEN COLLETTA

Among the many headline-makers at the HR Tech Conference was the public debut of the *Sierra-Cedar/Sapient Insights HR Systems Survey*. Now in its 23rd year, the research—unveiled by Sapient Insights Group Chief Research Officer Stacey Harris—featured a deep dive into HR tech trends, with responses from more than 1,900 individual organizations.

Notably, researchers found a 27% decrease in expected expenditures for HR technology spending this year. “That’s a wow,” Harris noted. About 30% of organizations had plans to increase spending in the coming year, compared to 42% in 2019. The number of companies planning to decrease their HR tech budgets for the next year jumped from

4% to 15%, compared to this time last year. Harris noted that researchers hadn’t seen that figure climb above 7% in a number of years. The budget slashes are expected to most commonly affect planned expansion of talent management tools, HRIS upgrades, and analytics and other emerging technology initiatives.

Unsurprisingly, 78% of respondents who anticipated decreases said they were prompted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

In addition to spending trends, the report also examined correlations among HR and business outcomes—finding that organizations that are thriving through the pandemic have several talent strategies in common.

The top five talent responses to the pandemic were: redistribution of critical members of the workforce,

postponing HR-related special projects, temporarily furloughing workers, reducing or eliminating contract workers and increasing HR tech spend on infrastructure.

There was a clear difference in how organizations with high business outcomes versus those with low ones addressed the management crisis of the pandemic, Harris noted.

Higher-outcome organizations were much more strategic and focused on moving forward: They increased salaries for those in essential roles, rapidly hired essential workers, increased tech infrastructure spend and redistributed workers. Lower-outcome organizations, meanwhile, reduced management and executive salaries, eliminated contract workers, laid off employees and furloughed workers.

“They were quickly making decisions that had long-term impacts on their organizations. And probably not always good ones,” Harris said.

Looking ahead, the study found that organizations are planning to tackle pandemic-related impacts through talent strategies like employee tracking, better communication methods, pay flexibility, new team-working structures, social distance policies and remote work—more than one-third of employers involved in the survey planned to expand remote-work capabilities once the pandemic is entirely behind us.

All of these will be reliant on tech, Harris added, noting that a continuous change-management approach for HR tech—applied to everything from systems strategy to tech selection to vendor relationship—is linked to better talent and business outcomes.

“No longer can we just talk about project-based change management. No longer can we think about it just when we implement something,” Harris said. “We have to think about this conversation all the way through the continuous lifecycle of our HR tech environment.”

EMERGING INTELLIGENCE

By John Sumser/Columnist



Diversity, Data and Software Development

“Two white dudes talking about diversity, inclusion, belonging and equity. What

could go wrong?” Jon Stross, Greenhouse Software’s co-founder, wondered aloud as we began our recent conversation. We scheduled the call at my request. I wanted to deepen my understanding of the Greenhouse approach to software development, how it is evolving and how Greenhouse is thinking about bias and equity in its design and development.

There’s a paradox in trying to solve complex human problems with software: The more you focus on the solution, the harder it is to continue to see the problem. In order to create software programs, we have to pin our ideas of the problem down and hold everything still. Meanwhile, the problem itself (and your understanding of it) continues to evolve. And not all human behavior and issues lend themselves well to logic, rules, models and algorithms.

Once we come up with an approach, we don’t really know whether and how it will work until people start using it. And then we may learn that the problem we thought we were addressing is not the real problem we have. So, we address the new issues by continually evolving the solutions. On one level, users always experience tools that are slowly being developed. The fact that the next version is better is the ultimate confirmation that

the current version is worse. Said another way, software design is an inherently iterative process. So is its closest cousin, intelligent tools design (artificial intelligence, machine learning, natural-language processing).

SaaS development methods, with their short-cycle iterations and releases, offer an opportunity to tighten the feedback loop between product and market. As the user base grows, useful feedback emerges quickly when new or improved features are added.

Stross referred to the 45 million people who apply for jobs each year through Greenhouse as the “QA testers.”

“They let us know when something is a little off. They help us improve their experience,” he said. “We are constantly studying the way our tools are used. It’s the most reliable way we have to discover our blind spots.”

Greenhouse, he said, is “in the business of helping people make better decisions,” using principles like “Fair decisions are good decisions” to guide the direction of its research. “And,” he added, “we really interrogate the data in search of insight. Once we find an indicator of an opportunity to improve, we dig in.”

Those conversations usually wander into the topic of bias, AI, NLP and intelligent tools. At the pinnacles of AI thinking, in the high-end research labs, the question of whether AI/ML/NLP can eliminate bias is an unanswered one. The more we learn about intelligent tools, the less likely it

is that we’ll use them to solve the bias question.

Stross said, “We are laser-focused on helping people make better decisions. We mine the data and reevaluate workflows in search of the things that make a real difference.” That was when he told me about the feature the company is building to help users hear and learn how to pronounce someone’s name. “LinkedIn beat us to market with the function but we think embedding it in the hiring workflow makes all of the difference for creating a sense of belonging.”

Name pronunciation is one of those simple, obvious things that everybody overlooks. Many powerful innovations are things like this—small, obvious things that create enormous value.

The idea is that people can record themselves pronouncing their own names or preferred names and have the recording surfaced to the hiring team before a scheduled interview. That way, any time a person’s name comes up, there is a simple way in the ATS to learn the correct pronunciation. The Greenhouse approach brings it one click closer.

As someone whose last name is often mispronounced, I know some of what this means. When people wrinkle their brow and struggle to say my name, I immediately feel different. There’s something uncomfortable about me for them and it’s my own name. I’m a big, booming, white guy that walks through the world fairly effortlessly. For many, a mispronounced name is a signal of subtle

and not so subtle discrimination to come. It’s a reinforcement of otherness. It’s a barrier to belonging.

By making sure that every user of the system that the candidate will come in contact with has one-click access to the pronunciation, Greenhouse reduces one more barrier to inclusion while improving the experience for everyone. As Stross said, “We are incrementally improving our tools so that our users make better decisions. Helping to ensure that candidates have equal footing begins with the smallest of things. Little barriers have big consequences.”

Bias in our decision-making processes interferes with good decision-making. Over-emphatic proclamations of the total eradication of bias put you and your company at risk. I prefer data-driven reduction of bias. That way, you get to keep an eye on the problem to make sure you are solving it.

In my keynote at the virtual HR Tech next month, I’ll be talking about HR’s emerging role as the shepherd of individual and organizational safety, health and development. The organization in which names are consistently pronounced correctly from the beginning is healthier and safer. That makes real development possible.

John Sumser is the principal analyst at HRExaminer. He researches the impact of data, analytics, AI and associated ethical issues on the workplace. Send questions or comments to hreletters@lrp.com.

It's an open enrollment season like no other.

BY KATHRYN MAYER



Benefits in Balance



Open enrollment is already a complicated, high-stress time for HR and benefits leaders. Employees, confused and frustrated by their choices, historically have spent little time choosing benefits. Most don't research their options even though they aren't literate on benefits, leaving employers struggling to make a significant impact.

But add to that a largely remote workforce and a global pandemic that's making not just health offerings, but an array of benefits, critical and those challenges are even greater—making this year's open enrollment more high-stakes and in the spotlight than ever.

"We are having to balance a lot more than usual in the benefits and HR world," says Misty Guinn, director of benefits and wellness at Benefitfocus. "We're used to walking a tightrope of mitigating increasing healthcare costs and still serving the total wellbeing

of our employees. But right now it's an earthquake of, 'We're not just balancing; we're trying to create that sense of trust.' It's employers that [employees are] expecting to take care of them and give them the right guidance on how to survive. We have that responsibility on our shoulders."

With that in mind, how can leaders better educate and encourage employees about benefits—particularly given the fact that workers traditionally don't care about them all that much? And how do they do that virtually?

New Approaches to Enrollment

Some HR and benefits leaders are getting creative with solutions and creating a plan for enrollment unlike any other.

"Because we are in this new virtual world, we can't rely on the banners that used to be outside our building or the fliers that were in the elevators or the drive-bys in the HR department—just

the questions and the watercooler conversations," Guinn says. "We have to create those in this new world."

About one in five (21%) organizations have made changes to their open enrollment procedures because of the pandemic, and nearly all the changes involve shifting from an in-person experience to a virtual



Misty Guinn

option, according to research from the International Foundation of Employee Benefit Plans. "We've heard from many organizations that in-person meetings and benefit fairs have been canceled or moved to a virtual space," says Julie Stich, the group's vice president of content. "Organizations are reducing

printed materials, like posters and signage, and instead [are] sending more emails or mailing information to participants' homes. Many are getting creative by making videos or developing more interactive websites to educate workers about their choices and the open enrollment process."

For her part, Guinn recorded more than a dozen podcasts about different benefits the company offers to employees to educate them on offerings. Those include core benefits like medical, dental and vision, as well as other perks such as pet insurance, financial wellness and company-sponsored benefits that employees don't need to enroll in, like caregiving resources through provider Cariloop. For the podcasts, she interviewed the vendors associated with each product to give employees an idea of how they work and how they can improve their lives.

"It's a banner time to remind people of all the great things they have to take advantage of," she says. "I think associates like hearing it that way. In the benefits world, we tend to use so much jargon."

Guinn keeps the podcasts short, between 10-15 minutes, because "I want to encourage people to [listen while they] take their dog on a walk or while they're folding laundry or cooking dinner; get up away from a screen."

Benefitfocus also is hosting virtual office hours this year, in a Zoom room, where employees can stop by to ask benefit and HR reps about offerings and open enrollment. And its digital benefits platform is available any time online.

Booz Allen Hamilton, which has roughly 27,000 employees nationwide, already has a heavy focus on virtual ways of engaging workers during enrollment, including webinars, conference calls and emails, but the company will continue to invest in those resources this year, as most of its employees are now working remotely, says Betty Thompson, the company's executive vice president and chief people officer.

One thing the consulting firm is doing different this year is getting more employees involved in open

Benefits

enrollment. They're ramping up training on benefits for all managers, for instance, "so that everyone is more knowledgeable," Thompson



Betty Thompson

says. "Instead of having the 10 people on the benefits team have to carry all the messaging, we are including a broader base." That's especially vital for managers,

she says, because the firm's data has found that employees are more likely to listen to their supervisors. More employers this year, including Booz Allen Hamilton, also are investing in home mailings that include information on different health plans, costs, available resources, incentives and more. "There's not as much junk mail in your mailbox these days," Thompson says. "All the junk mail is in your virtual mailbox. So we think [this approach] gets a little more tangible. You can touch it; you can look at pictures; you can come back and look ... I can't tell you how many emails I open that I forget to go back to."

Home mailings also are important this year to make sure the information gets in front of spouses and partners. "This open enrollment, more so than ever, will be where we see the family unit come up because of the large amounts of layoffs and unemployment. Maybe they weren't covering their

spouse or children, [and] they might make that change," explains Guinn.

"It's a family decision. It's not just the employee that needs to be knowledgeable or thinking about these things," adds Thompson.

'Employees are Listening'

Importantly, this year's open enrollment is all about messaging and making sure employees are keenly aware of benefits that can help them through one of the most stressful and tumultuous times in history. That's a far cry from recent years, when benefits were primarily seen as a key differentiator in a hot job market.

"It's no longer just a war on talent; it's really about being able to just survive," Guinn says.

To that end, employers are touting the benefits they feel are more vital to their workforce—even if they aren't benefits that employees need to enroll in during open enrollment (an employee assistance program or caregiving resources, for example).

Booz Allen Hamilton, in particular, is touting its mental health programs, which include an employee assistance program, parental mental health support and digital meditation. That's an especially important focus as mental health conditions rise at an alarming rate due to the pandemic. "It's on everyone's radar," Thompson says. "We are going to communicate and focus on mental health because they'll be paying attention. We don't want to add to the noise; we want to focus it on mental health."



Booz Allen Hamilton is among the employers making changes to its open enrollment strategy, including new benefits training for managers.

Benefitfocus' Guinn says she expects increased utilization in certain voluntary and supplemental benefits that may help protect employees' finances, which can be more fragile during a pandemic. Benefits such as pet insurance and identity theft insurance will be important focus points during the company's enrollment.

Employees tend to select the same benefits year after year. This year, though, with working and living situations different than before, that will likely change, says Leston Welsh, head of business segments at Prudential Group Insurance.

That means "employees will need better information and more time to analyze how a different set of benefits may be better suited for their new normal," he says. "A different hierarchy of benefits may be driven not only by a heightened awareness of what benefits are offered, but also by an understanding of how today's environment impacts what is offered and how these solutions address new and different needs."

Some good news: Prudential research finds that the pandemic is driving a significantly higher number of workers to report an increase in the value they place on the benefits offered by their employers, including a double-digit increase in how likely they are to remain at a job based on non-health benefits such as retirement savings, disability insurance, life insurance and other tools to help alleviate financial stress.

"The dangers of an 'It won't happen to me' mentality are now very clear, and employees are placing greater value on benefits because they are more aware of how these benefits can help them during a life event, including paying for high, out-of-pocket medical costs and hospital visits," Welsh says.

The fact that employees are listening is an opportunity HR and benefits leaders don't want to waste.

"We always say in benefits it's not a one-size-fits-all. But now that saying has [never] held more truth," Guinn says. "People are going to remember this time more than ever. And going into open enrollment, they are going to remember how we responded."

Send questions or comments about this story to hreletters@lrp.com.

Understanding the Benefits Problem

The vast majority of employees don't educate themselves on their benefit options, according to research from the International Foundation of Employee Benefit Plans.

The study found that 76% of employers say employees do not open and read communication materials or access resources during open enrollment. That underscores a familiar problem for HR leaders: Employees do not spend much time on their benefits enrollment or education.

Further adding to the problem? Just one-third of employees (34%) have a high level of understanding of health benefits. Over half (52%) have a medium level of understanding, and 15% have a somewhat or very low level of understanding, according to the IFEBP survey.

These figures are always problematic, but more so this year as the pandemic puts the importance of benefits in a new light.

Other research, however, shows some optimism for this year: Half of employees say they're willing to devote more time to the open enrollment process this year because of COVID-19, according to a recent Aflac survey.

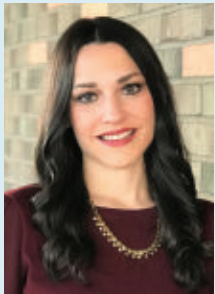
A new focus due to COVID-19 puts more pressure on HR and benefit leaders during this year's open enrollment. Because employees historically don't know enough about their benefits—and don't spend time finding out about them—it's important HR leaders ramp up education and communication to help employees get the information they need.

To encourage employees to read their open enrollment materials, employers say they're focusing on more COVID-19-related topics when communicating benefits this year, according to IFEBP research. Most employers (87%) say their main topic of focus is healthcare, including telemedicine benefits. Noting the importance of mental health resources during this time of uncertainty, 72% are communicating specifically about mental health benefits as well. Organizations also are emphasizing employee assistance programs and flexible work arrangements.



BEYOND BENEFITS

Kathryn Mayer / Columnist



The Employees Are Not All Right

It's a massive understatement to say our collective mental state isn't good. I've reported countless distressing statistics over the past

several weeks: 75% of employees are currently experiencing burnout at work. The risk for depression among U.S. workers has risen a whopping 102% as a result of the coronavirus pandemic—305% for workers aged 20-39. Financial stressors are sky high, with employees worried about losing their jobs (or their spouses losing their jobs), having less money or seeing their 401(k) balances drop.

And eight months into the pandemic, things aren't getting any easier. Worse yet, experts predict things will only deteriorate. Colder weather, the election, another school year in full swing—forcing working parents to juggle homeschooling and working, and, for families with kids attending school in person, fears of an outbreak—are all worrisome contributors.

Even the holiday season, usually a time of fun, celebration and gatherings with families and friends, will not be the same. It's a hard pill to swallow, adding to the better part of a year defined by massive unemployment, fears over health, not traveling, not taking vacation time and overall longing for normalcy in a time when nothing is normal at all.

With COVID-19 taking so much, it seems the disease is on track to cause its own mental health pandemic in the years to come.

Although the crisis is exacerbating psychological issues, it's important to acknowledge that our mental health crisis is not new. Conditions were already on the rise before the pandemic hit. And it was a problem that, frankly, we weren't doing all that good a job of addressing.

As a record number of employees look to their employers for help, the current reality is revealing a startling fact: Many employers did not have the benefits, programs or culture in place to adequately address mental health concerns even before coronavirus.

Those shortcomings ran the gamut: a lack of resources offered; lackluster communication about existing offerings; and a near-unanimous view that the subject was too taboo for the workplace. The pandemic has aggravated issues, to be sure, but significantly, it's also put into focus a host of flaws in our system.

One bright spot in the pandemic is the attention mental health is now getting. I can't talk to anyone in the industry without mental health coming up in the conversation—the importance, the renewed focus, new workplace programs. It's the topic most every expert or employer wants to discuss. It's important and it's progress, but it's also unfortunate that that so many employers are already far behind, rushing to catch up and make

meaningful change for so many employees who are suffering.

It's no secret that workplace culture is tied to mental health. It's not just about wellness benefits and programs—it's also about how employees are treated, what kind of work/life balance they have, what support they receive, what flexibility, what appreciation and recognition—the list goes on.

"All of us have been brought up in a culture that encourages that we should simply power through exhaustion and keep working [when we're] running on empty," Arianna Huffington told me during a phone interview in September. "That's why [mental health and self-care] are more important than ever, with these stresses and anxiety. They affect our productivity, our performance and our health."

Maybe the best thing about a crisis, though, are the flaws it exposes—and the opportunity it gives us to correct them.

Huffington's prediction?

"This is a time of trial, but also a time when we have an opportunity to reimagine the world of work and the world of human resources. There's a lot that was not working even before the pandemic. We were living life in a graceless way ... burnout acknowledged by the World Health Organization as a real occupation hazard. Now, we have an opportunity to rebuild the way we work."

Kathryn Mayer is HRE's benefits editor and chair of the Health & Benefits Leadership Conference. She has covered benefits for the better part of a decade. She holds bachelor's and master's degrees from the University of Denver. She can be reached at kmayer@lrp.com.

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Workforce transformation is not a process but a capability, which the World's Most Admired Companies share.

BY MAGGIE PATRICK AND MARK ROYAL

Why Some Organizations Keep Getting Transformation Right

Workforce transformation has always been, and always will be, a topic of critical importance for HR—if organizations are unable to evolve and adapt to changing environments, they have no hope of lasting success. But in a global pandemic, amid ever-growing disruption and social unrest, it feels more important than ever.

For many years, Korn Ferry has produced a list of companies that are Most Admired for HR for *HRE*. Each year, we focus on an area of best practice that distinguishes the best companies from the rest. This year, that



was workforce transformation—with good reason. Most Admired companies don't reach the pinnacle of their industries without achieving sustained

success, which inevitably requires a tried and tested ability to adapt to changing markets and customer needs.



So, what can we learn about transformation from the World's Most Admired Companies (WMACs)?

The first thing is that, for them, transformation is a capability, not a process—a capability built into their DNA that enables them to transform their organizations not just once but over and over again. Building transformational capability is not easy, but our research has identified some key areas that organizations need to focus on to achieve success.

Purpose and Values

Our survey of executives in companies on the *Fortune* WMAC list uncovered near-universal belief in the importance of organizational purpose, with 98% saying

that it moves leaders toward shared interest and 97% saying that their purpose is embraced by employees. We also saw a huge majority of respondents agreeing that purpose drives decisions in their organizations (93%) and that it is aligned with the company vision and goals (95%).

How does having a clear purpose enhance an organization's transformational capabilities? An earlier Korn Ferry study of intrinsic motivation found that people who have the resilience to pursue their passions despite setbacks and obstacles are often able to do so because they are working toward a broader purpose. The study also found that higher levels of innovation are achieved when purpose is activated. Furthermore, when leaders redefine their business in broad, purpose-centered terms, they can free people from old, restricting paradigms to offer better solutions.

Of course, not all purposes are created equal. Too often, we see employees left uninspired because their employers have failed to articulate their purpose in a meaningful way. Transformational organizations, on the other hand, use their purpose to create clarity for their stakeholders. Take these purpose statements from three of our World's Most Admired Companies: "Empowering others to achieve more" (Microsoft); "Transforming the health of the community, one person at a time" (Centene); and "Organize the world's information and make it universally accessible and useful" (Google).

Listening to Clients

All of those purpose statements are formulated with the customer at heart. Commitment to the customer is a critical component of any organization's transformational capability. WMAC executives, we discovered, are more likely than executives at peer companies (companies also participating in the rankings but scoring lower) to listen



Photo by Olga Thompson/Walt Disney World Resort via Getty Images

to clients to guide strategies, even if 180-degree shifts are involved (81% versus 75%). They are also more likely to be distinctly positive about the success of their organization in terms of client satisfaction (80% versus 75%).

Listening to clients can take your organization's transformation in unexpected but exceptionally rewarding directions. For example, Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella's vision for transformation was to ensure that Microsoft software and services were available wherever customers were—even if they weren't using Windows. As a result, his first big hire was to bring in ex-Qualcomm exec Peggy Johnson to help the organization partner with outside companies. This led to Microsoft's successful acquisition of LinkedIn and the company's expansion into 3G broadband, among other transformational efforts aimed at better understanding and reaching customers.

Anticipating and Reacting

In our survey, WMAC executives reported that senior leaders in their organizations are effective in anticipating trends and opportunities (95%) and turning ambiguous situations into opportunities (90%).

This corresponds with our organization transformation study, which found that transformational companies are always looking ahead and expanding the interpretation of their core purpose to explore the new opportunities, business models and product lines that will set them apart. Take Netflix, a company that began life as a DVD-by-mail distribution brand. Imagine what would have happened if the company hadn't abandoned its original model to focus instead on video streaming, revolutionizing the movie-viewing experience and becoming a leader in the industry. The rest, as they say, would not have been history.

Learning Agility

Ninety percent of WMAC execs agree that their organizations are able to learn quickly and rebound from crises. Likewise, 85% indicate that their senior leaders learn quickly from challenges and failures. While change has proven more challenging for many organizations since the start of the pandemic, a follow-up survey with WMACs months into the crisis found that learning agility is still ranked among the top priority items, especially at leadership levels.

Top 50 Most Admired Companies for HR

This list comes from Korn Ferry's analysis of *Fortune's* World's Most Admired Companies database, recalibrated with a focus on four HR-related attributes: management quality, product/service quality, innovation and people management.

2020 Rank	Company	Industry	2020 Rating	2019 Rating	Rank 2019	Rank Change
1	Walt Disney	Entertainment	8.488	8.378	3	+2
2	Apple	Computers	8.383	8.505	1	-1
3	Netflix	Entertainment	8.230	8.500	2	-1
4	Toyota Motor	Motor Vehicles	8.218	7.935	10	+6
5	Amazon.com	Internet Services and Retailing	8.203	-	-	-
6	UnitedHealth Group	Health Care: Insurance and Managed Care	8.195	8.163	6	0
7	Alphabet	Internet Services and Retailing	8.100	-	-	-
8	Nike	Apparel	8.030	7.713	20	+12
9	Microsoft	Computer Software	7.993	7.930	12	+3
10	Best Buy	Specialty Retailers	7.915	6.085	266	+256
11	Starbucks	Food Services	7.893	7.848	14	+3
12	BlackRock	Securities/Asset Management	7.818	8.110	7	-5
13	NextEra Energy	Electric and Gas Utilities	7.783	7.593	28	+15
14	Tyson Foods	Food Production	7.763	6.938	92	+78
15	BMW	Motor Vehicles	7.715	7.458	38	+23
16	U.S. Bancorp	Superregional Banks	7.713	7.755	17	+1
17	Raytheon	Aerospace and Defense	7.710	7.785	15	-2
18	Lockheed Martin	Aerospace and Defense	7.698	7.248	54	+36
19	Daimler	Motor Vehicles	7.653	7.005	83	+64
20	PepsiCo	Consumer Food Products	7.643	7.575	29	+9
21	Visa	Consumer Credit Card and Related Services	7.638	7.578	30	+9
22	Charles Schwab	Securities/Asset Management	7.633	7.728	18	-4
23	Berkshire Hathaway	Insurance: Property and Casualty	7.623	7.708	19	-4
24	salesforce.com	Computer Software	7.608	7.758	16	-8
25	Merck	Pharmaceuticals	7.588	7.520	33	+8
26	Nestlé	Consumer Food Products	7.555	7.525	32	+6
27	Johnson & Johnson	Pharmaceuticals	7.548	7.973	9	-18
28	PNC Financial Services Group	Superregional Banks	7.515	7.678	24	-4
29	Bosch	Motor Vehicle Parts	7.513	7.883	13	-16
29	Accenture	Information Technology Services	7.513	7.500	35	+6
29	Samsung Electronics	Electronics	7.513	7.325	50	+21
32	W.W. Grainger	Wholesalers: Diversified	7.510	7.648	25	-7
33	AT&T	Telecommunications	7.483	-	-	-
34	Adobe	Computer Software	7.445	7.933	11	-23
35	Kering	Apparel	7.433	7.220	59	+24
36	L'Oréal	Soaps and Cosmetics	7.423	7.410	45	+9
37	Procter & Gamble	Soaps and Cosmetics	7.418	7.445	41	+4
38	3M	Chemicals	7.385	7.635	26	-12
39	Wayfair	Internet Services and Retailing	7.368	-	-	-
40	PayPal Holdings	Consumer Credit Card and Related Services	7.365	7.518	34	-6
40	The Estée Lauder Companies	Soaps and Cosmetics	7.365	7.493	36	-4
42	VF	Apparel	7.358	7.140	69	+27
43	Arrow Electronics	Wholesalers: Electronics and Office Equipment	7.340	7.205	60	+17
44	Mastercard	Consumer Credit Card and Related Services	7.315	7.245	56	+12
45	Progressive	Insurance: Property and Casualty	7.280	6.963	89	+44
45	Stanley Black & Decker	Home Equipment, Furnishings	7.280	6.683	130	+85
47	JPMorgan Chase	Megabanks	7.275	7.233	57	+10
48	Nvidia	Semiconductors	7.268	8.040	8	-40
49	Adidas	Apparel	7.258	7.150	67	+18
50	Northrop Grumman	Aerospace and Defense	7.250	7.548	31	-19

Behind the Most Admired for HR List

Los Angeles-based management-consulting firm Korn Ferry launches the process when it teams with *Fortune* to determine the World's Most Admired Companies, U.S. companies ranked by revenue—and non-U.S. companies in *Fortune's* Global 500 database with revenues of \$10 billion or more. They then select the highest-revenue companies in each industry, surveying a total of 680 companies from 30 countries.

To create the 52 industry lists, Korn Ferry asks executives, directors and analysts to rate companies in their own industries on nine criteria, from investment value to social responsibility. To arrive at *HRE's* Most Admired for HR rankings, Korn Ferry recalibrates the *Fortune* attribute scores, isolating four criteria that relate to HR—management quality, product/service quality, innovation and people management.

Leadership

Of course, learning is as much about failure as success, and truly transformational organizations understand how important it is for leaders and employees to be free to experiment without fear. Astro Teller, who heads X, Google's invention laboratory, has even built failure into the discovery process, with teams actively seeking what does not work. He explains: "Teams kill their ideas as soon as the evidence is on the table because they're rewarded for it. They get applause from their peers."

At Korn Ferry, we use the concept of "self-disruptive leaders" to describe individuals, like Teller, who have high mental agility and who approach complex issues, new challenges and unfamiliar situations with broad curiosity and enthusiasm. Organizations that have such leaders at the helm will be far better-equipped to grow their transformational capabilities.

Building Transformational Capability

If your organization still has a way to go before it matches the WMACs for transformational capability, the good news is that there are clear, tangible measures to help you get there. Here are the key steps we recommend taking to build

transformational capability within your organization:

Look to leaders: Fill your leadership pipeline with future-ready, purpose-driven talent that knows how to learn and solve problems. Although there are many capabilities a company must cultivate to deliver on its purpose, effective and respected senior leaders deliver the greatest impact on financial success.

Create positive employee experiences: Compensation, work/life balance, culture and social responsibility commitments are all important contributors to successful transformation. People who feel valued will want to provide value.

Prioritize R&D: In our study on organizational transformation, the one consistent—and critical—strategy we identified across every industry was investment in research and development. Not only do transformational companies invest 115% more in R&D than the industrial average, but those that increase spending see the most growth.

Be transparent: If an employee is not well-suited to your company culture, both company and employee will suffer. Transparency ensures the people you attract are coming in with eyes wide open, ready to get to work.

Show integrity: Effective management and communication

practices, CSR values and a healthy culture will help minimize scandal and enable you to handle crises.

What Leaders Need to Do

Many leaders are facing the most demanding situations of their careers. To their credit, they appear to be rising to the challenge. According to a recent Korn Ferry survey, employees give their leaders high scores for "deeply believing in and being passionate about our purpose" and for "decision-making that has become faster since the COVID-19 crisis began." What can leaders do to build their transformational capability further?

Compromise: Continually develop your skills in integrating many diverse—and sometimes conflicting—needs. Leaders who are comfortable with trade-offs and ambiguity are most likely to succeed in leading a transforming organization.

Look outwards: While you may not know all the answers, you and your company operate in a complex, connected world. Be aware of events around you and be prepared to address many audiences with varied interests and needs.

Embrace culture: Work closely with your HR leaders to support a holistic evaluation of workforce capabilities and employee experiences. This way, you can ensure employees

bring their full energy to the changes ahead and become your greatest champions for transformation.

Get purposeful: Reflect on your individual purpose and find an organization whose purpose aligns. When your personal purpose aligns with your organization, your work will feel empowering and energizing.

Looking Ahead

The world's top organizations view transformation as continuous, not sequential. While renewing their commitment to their vision and goals, they continually look for ways to improve and build on quick wins, propelling them into the next cycle—until, ultimately, they find themselves in a perpetual state of transformation, where results and rewards fuel further investment in success.

Fortunately, the ability to continuously and successfully transform is one that all companies (not just the World's Most Admired) can build, as long as they have a clear purpose, stay focused on their customers and ensure they have the right leaders in place.

Maggie Patrick is a senior organizational researcher in the Korn Ferry Institute. Mark Royal is an associate client partner at Korn Ferry.

Disney Moves Into Top Spot As Most Admired for HR

In data collected before the pandemic, the entertainment giant jumped past Apple and Netflix while Best Buy moved up 256 spots to No. 10 on the annual list.

BY ELIZABETH CLARKE

The Walt Disney Co. has earned the crown for Most Admired for HR for 2020, unseating two-year No. 1 title holder Apple and jumping past second-ranked Netflix. Toyota and Amazon round out the top five on the definitive report card of corporate reputations.

Disney's ratings improved on all four attributes that make up the rankings, with its greatest gains on the two talent-related attributes: management quality and people management. The other attributes are product/service quality and innovation.

"Notably, as Disney ranked No. 1 in the entertainment industry on both of these attributes in 2019 as well as 2020, the gains reflect building on reputational strengths," says Mark Royal, senior director at Korn Ferry, which teams up with *Fortune* each year to determine the World's Most Admired Companies, on which the Most Admired for HR listings are based.

Several companies, including Amazon at No. 5 and Alphabet at No. 7, re-joined the list this year,

thanks to more available information in their industries. Others made significant jumps, resetting the rankings with their entrance into Top 20 and Top 50. The data was collected by *Fortune* in late 2019 and recalibrated for *Human Resource Executive's* annual Most Admired list based on the four HR attributes.

Best Buy made, by far, the biggest improvement on the list, launching 256 places to land at No. 10. Like Disney, its ratings improved across all four attributes, moving it into the top spot among specialty retailers on all four. Also like Disney, its biggest improvements for 2020 came in management quality and people management.

In 2019, the company also earned spots on *Forbes'* America's best companies for women (No. 7 of 300) and *Indeed's* 50 top-rated workplaces (No. 39), signs it is boosting its workplace reputation.

Other big moves in the Top 20 included Toyota, up six spots to No. 4;

Nike, up from No. 19 to No. 8; and Next Era Energy, a utility based in South Florida, which improved 14 spots to No. 13.

Another newcomer to the Top 20 and the second-biggest mover overall was food processor Tyson Foods. The Arkansas-based company came in at No. 14—up 78 spots from its 2019 ranking of No. 92.

Chief Human Resources Officer Johanna Söderström credits the company's decisions and actions around "putting people first" for the dramatic improvement in its ranking, which showed up consistently in all four areas measured in the executive summary score. Other important factors were corporate ownership of certain areas of management; implementing technology to help



Johanna Söderström

manage the workforce of 141,000 mainly hourly "team members," as the company calls them; and promoting a culture of collaboration between new, skilled HR employees and Tyson's HR veterans, she says.

Söderström herself is among the newest HR employees. Previously with Dow Chemical, she joined Tyson in June as executive vice president and CHRO, replacing Mary Oleksiuk, who retired after 35 years with the company.

Recent acquisitions, including Hillshire Brands in 2014 and Keystone in 2018, also helped fuel change, Söderström says. Hillshire, with a more retail-focused business, brought in an HR business partner model to complement the existing operational model at that time. Keystone, as well as Thai and European acquisitions in 2019, brought a more international perspective to the company.

Tyson also launched on Workday about a year ago. "It's a huge step forward," Söderström says, "but we still have a long way to go."

NAHR Names Five New Fellows for 2020

Five HR visionaries were recently given the industry's highest honor.

BY ELIZABETH CLARKE

Five new fellows have been named to the National Academy of Human Resources for 2020, earning recognition by the nation's most prestigious HR organization against the backdrop of one of the most tumultuous times on record.

These fellows—Stephen Fry of Eli Lilly, Tim Richmond of AbbVie, Carol Surface of Medtronic, Johnny Taylor of SHRM and Distinguished Fellow Dave Ulrich of RBL Group and the University of Michigan—have distinguished themselves throughout their careers but also have shown leadership in recent months as organizations faced constant change during the pandemic.

“Becoming a Fellow in the National Academy of Human Resources is the highest honor in the HR profession,” said Jill Smart, president of the academy. “The diverse NAHR class of 2020 fellows represents how different career paths can lead to a top HR leadership position where that leader can significantly impact the HR profession.”

“Each of these new fellows and our new distinguished fellow have left their individual mark on our profession, the organizations they have been a part of and the many

employees and colleagues they have interacted with. Being a fellow in the NAHR also means that they are personally committed to continuing to give back to our profession.”

The new fellows were installed Nov. 5 during the 29th annual meeting of the academy, which was founded in 1992 to recognize individuals and institutions of distinction in the field for their achievements while collaborating to advance the profession. New fellows are elected by a vote of the membership.

Here is the class of 2020, followed by their responses to five questions posed by *HRE*.

- Stephen Fry, senior vice president of human resources and diversity at Eli Lilly.
- Tim Richmond, executive vice president and chief human resources officer at AbbVie
- Carol Surface, chief human resources officer at Medtronic
- Johnny Taylor, president and CEO of the Society for Human Resource Management
- Distinguished Fellow Dave Ulrich, co-founder/partner at RBL Group, Rensis Likert Professor of Management, University of Michigan, Ross School of Business

Stephen Fry, senior vice president of human resources and diversity at Eli Lilly

What is your outlook on remote work? Do you think it will survive on a widespread basis after the pandemic?

Lilly has offered limited flexibility to employees for years, including working remotely on an occasional basis. We did have employees who lived in locations other than where we had physical offices, but they were few in number. Many of our manufacturing



Stephen Fry

employees worked in our facilities throughout the pandemic because their roles couldn't be done remotely. For others, the pandemic did force a new level of flexibility and, without question, we learned productivity didn't suffer and, in many cases, actually improved. I believe both for our company, and for many others, remote working will continue; we can't unlearn what we have learned during the pandemic. Our vision at Lilly is not that we mandate remote working but offer employees greater flexibility regarding work location, which will provide access to talent we couldn't reach before.

How has the pandemic reshaped technology's role in the HR function?

The role of technology in HR has been changing rapidly for some time. Employee and supervisor self-service have been on the rise, driven by technology, and that trend will continue. The pandemic has certainly forced the adoption of new technology at a pace I have not previously experienced, not just within the HR function, but for employees across our

company. We have found new ways to collaborate and share information within HR, with business partners and with employees globally. Things we couldn't have imagined doing virtually before the pandemic are now commonplace. Additionally, on July 1, we went live with Workday globally and broadened the use of service centers regionally. At the beginning of the pandemic, many questioned our ability to implement this major change program globally, but it was successful!

Tim Richmond, executive vice president and chief human resources officer at AbbVie

What is HR's responsibility when it comes to burnout and depression?

As we've come to terms with the magnitude of the COVID-19 pandemic, one of AbbVie's Principles, Transforming Lives, has taken on special meaning:

We inspire hope and transform lives every day. We make decisions based on our deep caring and compassion for people, delivering a lasting impact to our patients, their families, our employees and the community.

Consistent with this core principle, our top priority during this pandemic has been the health and safety of our employees and their families. AbbVie aims to provide support and resources so employees can be their best inside and outside of work. AbbVie Vitality, our approach to employee wellbeing, focuses on the “whole self,” empowering employees across the globe to achieve balanced lives, active bodies, fulfilled selves and healthy minds.

We traditionally offer strong mental health programs to our employees, such as providing employee assistance



Timothy Richmond

programs in many countries across the globe, free counseling sessions through our U.S. EAP and our annual Mental Health Awareness Month campaign.

However, this year, we are doing even more to address specific challenges and stresses created by the pandemic, including offering additional financial assistance through our new COVID-19 Childcare Relief Fund and AbbVie Employee Assistance Fund, and conducting newly created parent support focus groups, guided conversations and educational webinars led by our onsite licensed clinical social worker.

What should HR leaders be doing to advance the conversation around diversity and inclusion?

Equality, diversity and inclusion (ED&I) are embedded in everything we do, from recruiting to developing, advancing to performing. It is clearly stated in AbbVie's Principles and is a core part of our culture. For us, having a diverse team and inclusive culture is imperative. Developing and bringing innovative, life-saving medicines to patients requires diversity of thought—which is why our recruiting, hiring and development practices focus strongly on diverse talent.

As HR leaders, we set the tone and play a key role throughout the organization. We can impact unbiased hiring and promoting, pay equity, and learning and development opportunities, to name a few. In 2019, we elevated our commitment to ED&I by implementing a new global strategy across the organization—including a five-year roadmap that defines key global focus areas, objectives, associated initiatives and implementation plans by function and geography.

I also believe listening is a huge component in advancing the conversation. As the head of HR, I conduct small-group, cross-functional listening sessions to gain feedback directly from employees on how we can amplify our culture at AbbVie, which includes ED&I efforts. The insights employees share during these

conversations play an important role in informing our path forward.

All that said, ED&I is not specific to HR; it can't be. To successfully create an equitable organization, there needs to be a focus and commitment throughout the entire organization, including among our people leaders. We aim to build this at AbbVie through new awareness and education offerings, in addition to our many employee resource groups (ERGs) and initiatives such as our Executive Diversity Mentoring Program, partnerships with historically black colleges and universities, our global Women's Leadership Journey and Supplier Diversity Program, to name a few.

Carol Surface, chief human resources officer at Medtronic

The role of HR has changed dramatically in 2020. What are the most important skill sets HR leaders of tomorrow will need to fulfill those roles?

This year has presented us with a series of significant challenges and no playbook. The ability to identify and respond to external trends that we may not have experienced before—carefully assessing and evaluating the implications of different actions across multiple stakeholders like employees, customers, shareholders and the broader community—will be imperative. Courage, transparency, optimism and empathy remain timeless leadership skills. Higher levels of digital and marketing acumen will also be important to deliver on the consumer-grade experience that employees increasingly expect at work, especially related to core HR processes. Overall, this year has taught us the importance of



Carol Surface

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Read more insights from the NAHR Fellows at HRExecutive.com.

It's Time for HR to Head to the Factory Floor

To make it in human resources, in which we are known for our agility in handling unusual and delicate interpersonal situations, one needs to quickly learn how to be an adept tactical problem solver. Nobody in the office can clean up a mess, work themselves out of a jam or be quite so clever as HR can. And if you were to ask many HR professionals what their strengths are, “problem-solving” would likely be near the top of their lists. Our strength in one-off issue resolution, however, often doesn’t translate into being able to address larger systemic organizational challenges.

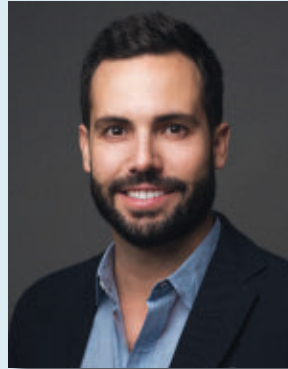
One of my absolute favorite quotes comes from Albert Einstein, who once said: “If I had an hour to solve a problem, I’d spend 55 minutes thinking about the problem and five minutes thinking about solutions.” Yet, in my experience, HR can tend to get complacent in relying on the trusted solutions we are familiar with, even as the problems we are solving continue to evolve, fester and grow. We restrain ourselves by relying on old methods while understanding less and less about the root causes of today’s fast-moving people challenges.

Of course, it’s understandable why we go back to the same solutions, whether they be a process, vendor, consultant, technology, etc. Our brains are supercomputers themselves, constantly seeking patterns where we identify a recognizable threat (in this case, an organizational challenge) and then instantly recalling what to do based on prior experience. The problem with this is that our brains (and, as a result, our HR and management teams) are more broadly relying on past experience and patterns to address things that may have never happened before at the same sense of scale, complexity or severity as at the current moment—such as keeping employees safe from contracting COVID-19, engaging staff in a compelling employee experience while working remotely or addressing persistent gender and racial bias and discrimination that we’ve long pretended was largely not much of an issue anymore.

Oftentimes, when we think of innovation or creativity inside of organizations, it involves groovy studio spaces where our best and brightest talent (and management consultants) come together to experiment and opine about the future. As a tech founder, however, my own experience of innovation has been far less sexy or glamorous. It requires jumping into the trenches to understand what the hell is going on, at a granular level. Usually, we’re surprised—and even wrong (pro tip: mimic scientists who flatly declare that their hypothesis has been disproven)!

This often means experimenting without any past case study or guarantee that our solutions will work, and it requires endless resiliency to play the proverbial game of “Marco Polo,” in which we’re getting ever closer to achieving the goal, but at the same time, we always feel like the target is moving further away from us, in spite of all our progress.

This is largely why HR doesn’t zero-base our centers of expertise on headcount, vendor bases, processes, tech platforms or other solutions. In case you’re not familiar, zero-basing is often used by CFOs and financial teams to create financial plans and budgets, wherein nothing is carried over from prior years and each item must be justified, each and every time. There is a good reason we don’t do this—it’s



exhausting! Not to mention, our colleagues in IT, legal, procurement and finance often create processes that present massive, painful disincentives for us to make changes; high switching costs that bind us to whatever previously got through their gauntlet. But we’re going to have to break through this red tape if we are to ever truly innovate. And it all starts with getting a better sense of what’s actually going on with our people.

One interesting, simple formula I once heard was “start with What + Why, then figure out the How.” The role of senior executives and management is to define the “What” (objectives, goals) and “Why” (context, mission) and then—ideally—delegate or empower the “How” to teams that are closer to the actual work and who, as a result, know more about the problem at hand. When I was being trained as a Lean Six Sigma Black Belt early in my career while working at

Lockheed Martin, I learned the term “gemba,” which in Japanese roughly translates to “the actual place.”

The idea was to get executives to leave their conference rooms and cushy offices in high-rises and literally go down to the factory floor because that was where the best information about the problems resided—with the people facing those problems each day. The most innovative ideas could emerge on the floor, once teased out with effective facilitation and encouragement.

When’s the last time you were on HR’s proverbial factory floor? The higher up you are in your organization, or the longer you’ve been there, the more out of touch you might be with today’s employee experience and unmet needs.

Gather more current and contextual information, then hunker down and force yourselves to come up with many potential solutions. Challenge yourself to be curious, creative—even courageous! Google is your friend here, as are your colleagues in other industries, geographies and company sizes or growth phases. Include a rich diversity of perspectives beyond your fellow HR colleagues too. Don’t stop until you’ve truly considered a multitude of solutions—and not just an RFP to compare lookalike tech platforms, but truly imaginative thinking, such as not using technology at all. One book I highly recommend to help push your thinking is *A Beautiful Constraint*, which is perfect for us HR folks.

So now, as we begin to enter fall and many of us are preparing budget requests (by the way, you should likely be asking for a LOT more budget next year, given everything that we’re dealing with and counted on for) and creating annual plans and goals, commit to bring fresh thinking to your seat at the table. Challenge your teams to slow down and make sure that everyone has a shared and nuanced understanding of the problems we’re trying to solve. Demand broad thinking and inquiry into many solutions, and create the air cover for your teams to be able to try new things that may not necessarily be sure bets. After all, if we are not willing to fail or to embrace uncertainty, then we’ll surely never learn or innovate.

Ben Brooks is the founder and CEO of the career development platform PILOT. Share your reactions to this column on LinkedIn or @benbrooksn.

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collaboration across multiple disciplines like medical affairs, communications, IT, operations, legal and government affairs, to write the playbook together.

How has the pandemic reshaped technology’s role in the HR function?

The pandemic has exponentially increased the number of employees working remotely. In many cases, the workday has expanded and live interaction within traditional work hours no longer meets the needs and expectations of most employees. If the HR function isn’t already leveraging robotic process automation, AI, virtual chatbots and other ways to deliver core HR programs and processes 24/7, the impact of COVID-19 is accelerating the need for the function to make those investments. The pandemic is also

reshaping how HR uses technology to support critical employee health and wellbeing priorities like safety-related phone applications to support contact tracing and social distancing. The HR function has even closer partnerships with IT and communications teams to leverage technology in new ways that keep employees connected, engaged and productive.

Johnny Taylor, president and CEO of the Society for Human Resource Management

What is your outlook on remote work? Do you think it will survive on a widespread basis after the pandemic?

Yes, SHRM’s research with the top 2,000 employers shows that over



Johnny Taylor

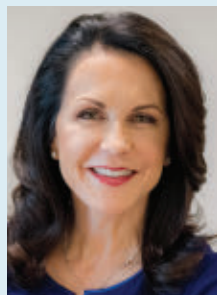
one in three organizations are reviewing open positions to determine if they can be completed remotely. Many employers have found telework during COVID to be successful for their organizations. Despite this, three in four people managers have seen a decline in the productivity gains experienced at the outset of the pandemic, citing employees’ need for the psychosocial elements of work. SHRM’s national biweekly poll of

one in three organizations are more willing to consider employing fully remote workers going forward, compared to prior to COVID-19, and 27% of

American workers shows 60% admit to experiencing a decrease in productivity after experiencing diminished motivation after the first two months of working from home. Savvy employers have found safe means for engaging in return-to-worksite with a focus on building better people manager mechanisms and resources for employee wellness. The best employers have pivoted by leveraging the talent to accomplish innovation and diversification. In sum, there will be more remote work opportunity post-COVID, but I believe the majority of employers will return to a worksite as their primary office.

What should HR leaders be doing to advance the conversation around diversity and inclusion?

HR leaders can drive greater focus on inclusion over diversity.



Social Innovation in Astonishing Times

From the start of the pandemic, people have had to adopt entirely new ways of working while navigating blurred lines between their work and home lives.

I marvel at the way workers have met this challenge. Almost overnight, people's living rooms, kitchens and garages have been mobilized to keep the global economy in motion. Without this effort, the economic damage of the pandemic would have been unimaginable.

Counting the Cost

However, the home-working revolution has not come without cost. Eight months into the crisis, it's clear that working from home has presented an extraordinary set of pressures, particularly for people with families. My heart goes out to parents who have had to juggle work with childcare, home-schooling and eldercare responsibilities. For some single-parent families, or those where both parents work, the demands of balancing home and work life have proved impossible to meet. Many people have had to make tough choices, including taking a leave or resigning from their jobs to focus on these increased responsibilities with few available support systems.

Moreover, the early impact appears to be disproportionate by gender. In what many are calling a "shecession," women are losing jobs at a much higher rate than men. From February to May, 11.5 million women lost their jobs compared to 9 million men. By the close of April, a decade's worth of employment gains for women had been wiped out. The pandemic has revealed women—and particularly women of color—are more vulnerable to such crises, which is believed to be primarily due to long-term wage inequality and gender-role perceptions.

Furthermore, it's not only nuclear families that are suffering. Regardless of their family situation, many home workers are finding the experience trying. People are experiencing stress and anxiety, and this is affecting their mental health. According to one study, only 28% of workers now report a positive mental state, compared to 62% before the crisis.

HR is Leading the Way

Fortunately, innovative solutions are beginning to emerge quickly. I've been inspired by chief human

resource officers I've spoken to who care deeply about their colleagues and are working tirelessly to support them. For example, large tech firms, which have provided weeks of additional paid leave to workers who need time off to care for their families, also leverage tutoring and childcare resources for their employees. Support groups are connecting workers with everyday needs, such as care for family members with special needs. Some are leveraging employee volunteers who can tutor students in math and conduct virtual kids' gym classes and homework clubs. One CHRO has added a teacher to the HR team as an advisor to serve as a resource for home-schooling counsel for working parents. Others are working with leaders on empathy training. Some have put a "care ambassador" in place in manufacturing facilities to help people feel safe when their role requires physical presence at work.

A new report from the Josh Bersin Academy highlights other inspiring examples of CHROs supporting their people in innovative ways. Some companies help enable online learning for workers' families by opening training courses, libraries and content. Others have invited chefs and fitness instructors to teach cooking and exercise classes to staff, providing valuable social contact for at-home workers.

Companies are refocusing operations around their workers to a degree I've never seen before. Some companies use advanced analytics to determine which stores to reopen by examining where employees live in relation to each restaurant, allowing them to get there by walking or cycling (thereby avoiding public transport).

Getting Started with Social Innovation

I recently caught up with Josh Bersin to talk through his report and discuss HR teams' responsibilities today. For Bersin, there are three main things that HR leaders are doing to ensure their people can work from home while navigating their family lives and trying to support wellness and good mental health:

1. Designating a person or team to focus on wellness in general and family wellbeing. Before COVID-19, wellness programs were often linked to companies' compensation and benefits departments and mostly administered by insurers. Many organizations are now dedicating whole teams to these areas, empowering them to collect data to understand workers' new needs and accelerating solutions direct to C-suite decision-makers.

2. Winning the budget. During some of the worst economic conditions in our lifetimes, securing funds isn't easy, but it's a challenge CHROs are taking on. The reason is simple: Those who fail to invest in social innovations such as childcare, remote schooling, parental leave, etc., risk damaging trust with their employees and losing the people they need to serve customers and patients.

3. Providing psychological support. With workers feeling isolated, many HR teams are going the extra mile to keep their people connected. That means keeping in touch with workers and providing them the psychological boost that can only come from meaningful interactions. Team video conference calls, social networks, open town halls, video dance parties and even "bring your family or pet" to team calls are playing an essential role in relieving stress and welcoming the whole human to be part of the team.

As companies adjust to our very different world, business leaders, CHROs and board members I have talked to are confirming that wellness programs have shot up in importance. From being a "nice to have," they're now essential to keeping workers mentally healthy and ensuring they can attend to demands in their work and home lives.

New solutions to new problems are constantly emerging, and they're making a real difference. This is good for workers, and it's also good for businesses; Bersin told me that new research he worked on recently shows the availability of family support programs within companies directly correlates with strong financial performance.

Before the pandemic, one of the significant trends facing the HR community was the move to more responsible business. This priority has been accelerated to protect the people who make businesses work. There are tough times ahead for sure, and there are also ample opportunities to rise. I am confident that HR professionals' ingenuity and compassion will help get us through these astonishing times and thrive.

Eva Sage-Gavin is a former CHRO with more than three decades of experience in Fortune 500 corporations. She currently serves as the senior managing director for Accenture's global talent and organization consulting practice and as a technology board director. Send questions or comments to hreletters@lrp.com.

Traditionally, we have focused so heavily on the compliance part of diversity and tried to grow the applicant pool. SHRM's own research indicates a tendency by employers to spend \$3 on hiring for diverse candidates as opposed to only \$1 on inclusive retention for diverse candidates. Balancing this metric is what makes true inclusion a possibility in our lifetimes. We launched the TogetherForward@Work initiative precisely to help the profession take the lead in making workplaces more diverse, inclusive and equitable.

Distinguished Fellow Dave Ulrich, co-founder/partner at RBL Group, Rensis Likert Professor of Management, University of Michigan, Ross School of Business

What is HR's responsibility when it comes to burnout and depression?

Again, mental health is not a new topic. The pandemic heightens attention on employee wellbeing because of the increased personal demands facing employees (social distancing, reinventing work, demands for productivity). HR professionals, working with business leaders, are on the front line of caregiving. They are often the emotional first responders to help employees find resources to cope with the increased demands. We have talked about five resources to help employees cope with



Dave Ulrich

the pandemic malaise that is affecting nearly everyone: 1. Physical: Take care of one's body and space; 2. Emotional: Tame apprehensions and find emotional support; 3. Social: Create psychological safety and a positive community; 3. Intellectual: Learn and grow and establish a growth mindset; and 5. Spiritual: Discover personal meaning and align it to organization values.

The role of HR has changed dramatically in 2020. What are the most important skill sets HR leaders of tomorrow will need to fulfill those roles?

In our seven rounds of *HR Competence Studies*, we have found that about 30%-40% of HR competencies that deliver value evolve every four or five years. The multiple crises of global pandemic, social and racial strife, and economic disruption

will continue to require emerging HR competencies. We hypothesize and will test five emerging competencies: provide information asymmetry (ability to acquire, analyze and act on information to make better decisions); separate signal from noise (in today's business context of overwhelming information, HR recognizes and focuses on what matters most; offer guidance (on the "right" talent, leadership, organization and HR); provide anticipatory solutions (respond quickly to opportunities and challenges to create anticipatory scenarios that can be quickly implemented); and ensure social citizenship (help the organization navigate citizenship issues around planet, people, political changes, philanthropy and purpose/profit creation). These emerging HR competencies matter if and when they impact personal effectiveness, customer and investor value, and business results.

L&D's Virtual Transformation

The pandemic has forced employers to embrace virtual learning and development. Here's what they need to know to craft a successful program.

BY JEN COLLETTA

The coronavirus pandemic has produced a wave of downward trends in HR: hiring, employee engagement, mental wellness. One area, however, that is seeing a major upswing is learning and development.

A LinkedIn report this spring found that employees increased the amount of time they spent on corporate learning by 130% between February and April. More than two-thirds of L&D professionals polled said reskilling current talent to address skills gaps has taken on record importance, and it's an area that has C-suite support: L&D leaders reported a 159% increase in CEOs championing L&D at their organizations.

The need is obvious: With organizations around the world shifting business models, strategies and priorities nearly by the day to keep up with the changes wrought by the pandemic, both leaders and employees need to be armed with the right skills to manage the effects of those changes. Similarly, the onset of widespread remote work and the impacts of the health crisis on employees' financial and mental wellness have generated a stronger appetite for learning to combat these challenges.

"There's a demand and a desire for [learning], and now people are looking for the ways to do it best in this time," says Tucker Miller, vice president of client development and consulting at training company ELI. "We weren't sure if people would stop doing



Tucker Miller

training altogether [at the start of the pandemic], and that's not at all what we're seeing. Organizations are adapting."

Adapting in a largely remote world means that more employers are turning to virtual L&D—e-learning,



coaching, training, mentoring and more—at record rates. It's a move, experts say, that will dramatically redefine L&D; however, it's one that employers need to strategically approach in order to reap the benefits in the long-term.

A 'Paradigm' Shift

Ben Brooks, founder and CEO of software-based employee-coaching product PILOT, uses the analogy of a beehive to describe coaching and career development: The employees are the bees and the hive is their organization—coaches are tasked with helping bees to figure out their place in the company.

The pandemic, however, turned that analogy on its head: The hive is now distributed, and employees have to manage their own corners of the world, while learning how each fits into the overarching structure of the organization. It's an unprecedented

process that has made coaching and mentoring—now in a virtual setting—more essential than ever, Brooks says.

"Coaching can help people realize, 'Wow, as much as I've been nervous to keep my job, I am performing, and I do need time off.' That's where the role of coaching is different in this new work-from-home paradigm," says Brooks. "When we were in the beehive, it was, 'How do you succeed in the beehive?' Now, it's 'How do you succeed out on your own?'"

As such, coaching is becoming seen as less of a remedy for a problem and more of a "virtuous process and experience that brings out the best in all of us," Brooks says.

That paradigm shift is helping the field of coaching to better fulfill its potential for advancing career development, he says. The practice too often used to focus simply on the job—helping employees succeed in a current work assignment or project—

whereas now it's being looked to more as a way to enable workers to integrate more satisfaction into their job.

Before the pandemic, employers had been excited about the opportunity to get coaching to more employees through virtual channels, Brooks says, but many were risk-averse and taking it slow. In the past few months, however, PILOT has seen record usage and adoption. Brooks says his own private



Alexandra Connell

coaching practice has also seen a sharp trend upward. Online coaching solution Pluma has also seen "significant growth in interest" during the pandemic, notes co-founder Alexandra Connell. Uptake was slow



at the beginning of the crisis, as people “froze in place trying to figure out which way was up,” she says, but immediately took off as HR leaders scrambled to meet the needs of newly remote workers.

For instance, global beauty retailer Sephora leaned on its partnership with Pluma to ensure leaders have the tools they need to navigate the unprecedented environment.

Pluma’s customized executive coaching program allows participants to select behavioral-change areas most pertinent to their work. Sephora’s leaders gravitated toward sessions around thinking strategically and fostering innovation—reflective of the landscape of COVID-19, which has prompted store closings, phased re-openings and a heightened focus on e-commerce.

“Sephora took immediate action launching Pluma coaching engagements, doing an excellent job shifting and accelerating their development approach to make sure they could offer really bespoke support to leaders on the front lines of this effort,” Connell says. “They recognized that getting something in the hands of leaders immediately, that would feel really customized and authentic to whatever their specific needs were, was most important.”

In both strategic thinking and innovation, coaching participants showed marked improvements, compared to manager-, 360-degree and self-ratings. Engagement is also measured: On average, clarity about their own role within the organization rose 17 percentage points after coaching.

Connell says coaching’s value has never been more clear than in the wake of the pandemic, as businesses strive to maintain both morale and business growth despite massive disruptions.

“Coaching is a clear answer to these needs,” she says. “It’s bespoke to the individual so the ability to help them manage anxieties as well as business objectives is immense. Having a credible, authentic coach for support has been invaluable to the employees we work with; we hear that from them every day.”

Is Microlearning the Wave of the Future?

Actor Jon Lovitz may not seem like the voice of HR, but he is exactly that for one new **virtual training** solution.

Lovitz is among several celebrities narrating animated microlearning content from NINJIO, which launched an HR vertical in August. The cybersecurity awareness training company expanded to include an HR arm at the prompting of several clients, says NINJIO CEO Zach Schuler.

“They said, ‘Can you NINJIOtize our HR training?’ I heard it so many times, about how horrible so many clients’ HR training was, so we looked at the market and said, ‘Heck yes, we can do it.’ And we want to do it in the exact same methodology we do cybersecurity awareness.”

That strategy is focused on story-based microlearning: short, 3- to 4-minute animated episodes. Content is created by writers whose credits include shows like *CSI: NY* and *Hawaii: Five-O* and publications including *HuffPost* and *Forbes* and given the Hollywood-style production treatment.

The length of the episodes is designed to appeal to users’ shrinking attention spans. Schuler noted the Microsoft study that found the human brain today can be swayed from concentration in just six seconds; for millennials, that attention span is closer to two seconds.

“If you lose them, their mind is going to float,” Schuler says. “Traditional training is based on lecture, but for the vast majority of people, the way that they learn and retain information is if it’s delivered in a short bit and on a frequent cadence, as opposed to having to sit through a 45-minute-long death by PowerPoint.”

It’s not just about the time, however. NINJIO seeks to capture viewers with a storyline-driven format that offers emotional engagement from the very first scene.

“When you use a story-based format where you’re learning through inference and through the story and you have an emotional connection, you have a much better chance of getting people to pay attention,”

Schuler says. “We’re looking for that one teachable moment, that one nugget people can walk away with and go, ‘Oh, I didn’t realize that me saying that, while I thought it was a compliment, could have been taken offensively.’ ”

Content—geared toward all levels of employees—will focus on “trending topics”: issues like workplace bullying, unconscious bias, sexual harassment and even new pandemic-related issues such as etiquette around social distancing and contact tracing, says Marta Voda, who is leading NINJIO HR.

“We’re putting together content that is meant to bring people together in a way that addresses the stress and pandemic realities of our world today,” she says. “It will focus on employee wellness and organizational wellness and all the things that are coming up that employees need to have civil discourse about.”

The designers aim to be centrist—while some politically related issues will be tackled, it’s from a neutral vantage point that highlights workplace complications, rather than the veracity of one opinion over another.

“HR is facing a lot of these issues for the first time,” Schuler says. “We want to create content that helps people have productive conversations about navigating these very sensitive and new waters that are literally popping up every day.”

Today’s challenging conditions are ripe for virtual microlearning, Voda notes. Users can watch the episodes from home in just a few minutes, and are even encouraged to pass them along to friends and family; each registered user receives a code that can automatically send new episodes to up to seven other people when they publish.

Given the rapidly changing nature of HR, she adds, many in the workforce, as well as business leaders, are looking to HR to be “inspirational leaders,” which non-traditional, agile L&D can help them strive for.

“This is a time where we have more change than most of us have ever had to deal with,” she says. “I see NINJIO as a complement to reinforcing company culture and common core values in order to help organizations embrace change.”

Making the Jump

Other areas of career development, including training, have also moved online. When the pandemic hit, ELI noticed many clients initially were hesitant to shift scheduled learning and development sessions to a virtual setting, opting instead to cancel and await the return to the workplace.

But the company has offered virtual training for eight years, which has made it uniquely positioned to educate clients about the value of virtual training, Miller says. For instance, in comparing evaluations for face-to-face and virtual sessions over the years, the only differentiating factor has been the level of surprise participants in the virtual sessions registered about the success of the training.

Over the past few months, Miller says, there’s “been this wave of

[virtual training] adaptation as we’ve gone along.”

The shift to remote pushed employers that were dragging their feet on digital L&D transformation to action, says Simon Greany, founder and chief product officer at e-learning



Simon Greany

platform Elucidat. At first, many employers had a knee-jerk reaction and sought to replicate real-world training for virtual settings—one-way presentations, lectures and PowerPoints—an approach that Greany says neglects the opportunity of virtual.

Throughout the summer, a shift occurred. Among online learning methods, virtual, instructor-led training (VILT) dropped from a high of 67% in the spring to 36% a few months later, according to Brandon Hall.

While VILT programs remain popular, organizations are also increasingly looking to other modalities, says Greany, like e-learning—with less of an emphasis on interacting directly with an instructor.

A study this summer from Elucidat found that 97% of leaders across training, L&D and HR departments planned to produce more e-learning materials within six months, with the majority of respondents (82%) aiming to do so by the fall.

“[Future virtual training] will be highly modular—easily personalized

Talent Management

to groups or individuals to use time effectively,” Greany says. It will be more blended, with digital merging into real-life experiences. It will also be more mobile and available on more channels, he adds.

“Asynchronous learning, polling, personalized learning journeys, just in time, simulation are just a few examples,” he says, “of how digital can open up a richer and more personalized experience.”

At ELI, the organization relies heavily on Socratic dialogue to support interactive communication, along with chat functions and voting.

“These allow everyone to participate simultaneously in a highly

interactive way that’s always giving them something to do,” Miller says.

Breakout rooms are another feature that can help mirror an in-person feel for a virtual learning session—though Miller cautions that not everything about face-to-face learning translates well to a virtual setting. For instance, employers should pay close attention to timing.

ELI’s typical in-person program provides four to six hours of content, which is adapted to about two hours for a virtual setting.

“People can’t be expected to sit still for that long and just look at their screen,” she says. “There’s research that shows how the brain has to try to process these images and these pixels and that the sweet spot is really 1.5 to 2.5 hours at a time.”

A ‘Big, Big’ Investment

Now that virtual L&D is finding its footing, it doesn’t appear in-person formats will ever return at the same rate. Elucidat’s recent survey found that only 12% of organizations plan to fully revert to previous levels of face-to-face training.

Miller concurs with that prediction.

“Virtual, as a part of the L&D solution, is going to be with us forevermore,” she says. “I don’t know if we’ll ever get some of our clients now to transition to back to face-to-face because this is becoming an imprint of their training experience; this is just what training looks like now.”

Brooks predicts a “big, big investment” in virtual career development in the coming months. While unemployment rates are soaring, employers are still hungry for talent with particular skill sets and will be working hard as the pandemic subsides to retain those with the desired skills.

“Unlike the Great Recession and other times where L&D budgets have been slashed, I haven’t been seeing that here,” Brooks says. “I’m seeing companies that know that the world is a different place to be now—diversity, equity and inclusion are top of mind—and they know that employees need more to keep them engaged in a remote work environment.”

That transition will be supported, Pluma’s Connell notes, by the fact that employees—many of whom have been working virtually for most of the year—are accustomed to digital solutions outside of work, making virtual learning a natural next step.

“The main hurdle to overcome,” she adds, “is to prove to organizations and employees that the experience is just as good, if not better, than something in person.”

Send questions or comments about this story to hreletters@lrp.com.

TALENT MANAGEMENT

By Peter Cappelli / Columnist



The Dating Police Have Arrived

Remember when there was more in the news than the pandemic and the presidential election? When #MeToo shined attention on the need for HR to

deal more aggressively with sexual harassment?

One of the issues that concerned me then was the fact that nearly all employers allow dating in the workplace, which means they allow efforts to begin romantic and intimate relationships in their workplace. My bet then was that employers, like it or not—and probably not—were going to end up as dating police.

And so it begins, according to several U.K. papers, which recently reported on new rules at Blackrock, the extremely large and influential investment company.

Let’s acknowledge that financial companies, with their fiduciary obligations, have a special need to be concerned about improper behavior. The concern here seems to have more to do with possible conflicts of interest than with sexual harassment, but it nevertheless leads to regulating dating.

The company already had a rule requiring that employees had to “register” any relationship they had with a fellow employee. Most companies have a simpler policy, just prohibiting dating across certain roles. The new Blackrock rule requires that employees report relationships with fellow employees *and also* with employees of vendors who do work with Blackrock, employees of clients of Blackrock and, it seems, employees of any organization with which the company has a business relationship.

I’m sure there are subtleties and nuances in the policies that the papers did not report, so let’s just talk about what these reported rules would mean. Rather than prohibiting certain kinds of relationships, the employer in this case would require that the employees report every relationship that had *the potential* for a conflict. Then the company would determine whether it is a conflict and what to do about it.

This certainly sounds creepy, but before we get to that conclusion, what counts as a “relationship”? The policy says it is any relationship “susceptible to perceived impropriety.” That includes family members. Close friend? Probably not. Someone you are dating? Define “dating,” but probably yes. Friend with “benefits”? Probably. Imagine people with complicated personal lives, dating more than one person or separated but still married and beginning a new relationship. Should you tell your romantic partner that you have registered your relationship with your employer? Probably yes, but at what point? Should you wait until after you’ve met their parents? Is this like a “promise ring”? (“Honey, I just wanted you to know that I registered our relationship today.”) Blackrock’s policies mean that the company requires

that it knows more about your love life than your mother does.

A big company like Blackrock has thousands of business relationships, certainly thousands of clients, and there could literally be millions of employees in those businesses with which it is connected. It would not be surprising if a majority of employees had some relationship with some employee connected to one of those organizations. Every time the company changes business relationships—gets new clients, changes vendors—existing relationships become new, reportable conflicts.

To flag situations where conflicts were possible, you would have to know not only whether your employees had a relationship with someone working for an organization in your business ecosystem but also what role your employee’s relationship partner played in it. Presumably, that requires constant updating from your employees. I suppose employees would also want the company to know when the relationship is over, so they would be reporting “delisting” relationships.

It is hard to imagine all the staff required to keep track of all these possible relationships and then vet them.

If I am an employee in a company with a policy like this, what is my incentive to comply? Most likely, if the company decides the relationship is a conflict, I would be reassigned to some role where no conflict is possible, which is disruptive at best. Maybe the company will ask the vendor or client that employs your relationship partner to reassign *them*. Wouldn’t that be fun for your relationship? Knowing the possible resistance to reporting, will the company check your Facebook account to see if you’ve left something off your reporting? How should it deal with “helpful” fellow employees who just want to make sure the company knows who you are dating?

Why not instead rely on a much simpler rule that employees should just avoid any personal relationships that create conflicts of interest with the company, no matter where they might occur? They could still be fired if they had them and did not deal with it. The only answer is because we don’t trust them to do so. Instead, we are going to make them report all their relationships, keeping them updated, which we will then monitor. Someone willing to act truly inappropriately with respect to their employer is not going to report their relationship in any case, so it is not obvious what the advantage is here.

Does any part of this sound like a good idea?

Peter Cappelli is the George W. Taylor Professor of Management and director of the Center for Human Resources at The Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia. Send questions or comments to hreletters@lrp.com.

Cloud provider *Fastly* recently named **Doniel Sutton** as its chief people officer. She is tasked with overseeing all aspects of the HR function, including talent acquisition, diversity and inclusion, and the new workspace.



She brings more than two decades of HR leadership experience, including at Fortune 100 and 500 companies. Most recently, she was CHRO

at PayPal, where she held several leadership roles since 2011. She has also held HR positions at Prudential Financial, Bank of America and Honeywell Aerospace.

Sutton earned a bachelor of science in finance and a master of business administration in human resources from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Katie Urtnowski has been appointed as vice president of people and culture at construction and development services firm *CNY Group*. She previously was director of organizational development at the organization. In her new role, she is responsible for fostering its people-oriented culture through learning and development and other initiatives.



Urtnowski has held a number of management positions, including director of administration at the Urban Justice Center.

She earned a bachelor's degree in business administration from Adelphi University.

Monica Sauls has been named as chief people officer at *Bojangles*. In the newly created position, Sauls will focus on company culture, employee development and talent attraction for the restaurant franchisor.

Sauls has more than 20 years of experience in HR leadership, most recently in Duke Energy's Fossil Hydro and Nuclear divisions. She has also held HR positions at Boeing, Walgreens, Edward Jones and Ingersoll Rand.



She earned a bachelor's degree in psychology from Southern Illinois University-Edwardsville and a master's degree in human resources and industrial relations from the University of Minnesota.

Terri McKelvaine is the new CHRO at *Citizens National Bank*.

She has more than two decades of HR experience, including as owner and manager of Simply Smart Workforce Learning Solutions.



Previously, she held HR leadership roles at Anderson Regional Health Systems and Avery Dennison Corp.

McKelvaine earned a bachelor's degree in business administration from Mississippi State University.

Lilicia Bailey has been appointed as *Emory Healthcare's* new CHRO.

She previously was chief people officer at Wake Forest Baptist Health and also held HR leadership positions at Belk Inc. and Manheim Auctions.



Bailey earned a bachelor's degree from Spelman College, a master's in HR management from Keller Graduate School of Management and an executive master's degree in business administration from Pepperdine University.

Universal Music Group has hired **Eric Hutcherson** as its new



executive vice president and chief people and inclusion officer.

Hutcherson comes to UMG from the National Basketball

Association, where he served as executive vice president and CHRO. He also has led HR at the North American division of Marsh, as well as at Mercer.

He earned a bachelor's degree in political science from New York University a master's degree in sports management and administration from the University of Massachusetts-Amherst.

Tanya Clark Robinson has joined *Segra* as the chief people officer of the fiber bandwidth infrastructure company.

She spent more than 13 years with Aetna, most recently as vice president of human resources. She also held leadership positions at Raytheon Technologies.



Clark Robinson earned a bachelor's degree in communication from American University and a law degree from the University of Connecticut.

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Insights from a CHRO

How this HR Exec is Bringing 'Safety First' to Life

BY JEN COLLETTA

Susan Baxter never intended to end up in HR. She studied biology before earning a degree in business administration and working in retail management, where she discovered her passion for working with people. A number of mentors pushed her to pursue that passion through HR early in her career, which has included HR leadership roles on Wall Street, at QVC, Zulily and Amazon, and at several staffing firms. Four years ago, Baxter joined Integrity Staffing Solutions—a national staffing organizations with locations in 20 states and client placements across North America—where she now serves as senior vice president of HR and safety.

Safety has been central to her work at Integrity, especially recently. With 500 internal staff and 20,000 associates at client organizations to support, Baxter has spent the last eight months working to prioritize and protect the health and wellbeing of employees—from instituting new protocols to promoting safety education and benefits like telemedicine.

With the course of the pandemic—and its impact on HR—uncertain, Baxter says she tries to approach questions about when the crisis will end with a dose of realism.

"It's not ending, it's just changing how we move forward," she says. "This will be our new normal."

How has the pandemic changed your day-to-day as an HR leader?

My day-to-day has become all-encompassing around COVID-19 and business continuity as a whole. The first thing we did was ensure the safety of our staff and associates—making sure everyone in our corporate office was set up to be remote and providing them the proper tools. That was key because we have so many offices and we had to ensure they were all set up appropriately. We went into all the facilities to ensure that, if we had an orientation, there were no more than 10 people in an area and everything was spaced at least 6 feet away. We ordered a ton of supplies—hand sanitizer, gloves, wipes, masks—for all of our associates and staff. We also had to make sure flexibility was key. We had schools closed and that's created a lot of different challenges for staff and associates, so we needed to be more flexible.

What are some of the trends you've seen in light of the pandemic?

Telemedicine is critical. We had just renegotiated with our benefits broker so we were able to quickly add telemedicine for all of our associates and staff to use for free. We've also done a lot of education on wearing masks, washing hands and social distancing. We're also getting temperature kiosks in some places. We're doing more virtual recruiting, and we have plexiglass at all of our facilities in locations where there is candidate contact. We no longer touch IDs and, if a candidate needs to use a pen, they now keep it. We're even doing contactless drug tests.

You have mentioned that you are a firm believer in "managing by walking around." How have you sought to do that creatively despite the distance?

We have an IM system and I'll often send somebody a message and just ask if they have time for a quick Zoom, so I do pop-ins that way. I don't mind working remote but one thing I do miss about being in the office is when people could just walk in to talk about something they wouldn't necessarily pick up the phone to



call about, so that's why I think those Zoom check-ins are critical because we don't always just talk about work. I also do skip-level meetings not only with my staff but also with our operations team.

Your title includes the word safety. What was the original intent of that title, and how has it changed?

To me, HR always has included safety because it's always been about the employee. What's changed now is there's a lot more focus on OSHA requirements, keeping up with what the CDC and WHO are saying and making sure clients are up to date and following safety procedures. Safety is more in the forefront but it's always been a partner to HR.

Can you identify a few accomplishments you've worked on at Integrity that will have the most lasting impact?

Introducing telemedicine before it was really recognized widely was a huge win for us and a differentiator within the industry. Outside of the pandemic, we introduced Next Step U, which is a partnership with a company called Penn Foster, where we enable associates to take classes for free to help upskill them, keep them on the job longer or just increase their knowledge.

What differentiates Integrity from other staffing organizations?

We advocate for our associates and staff more than anyone else. I had a staff member at corporate who ended up with COVID. We quickly made sure she and her family had the proper supplies—cleaning supplies, masks, hand sanitizer—and anything else she needed from the store and dropped it off at her house. Even when I worked at a Fortune 10 company, they wouldn't have done that. We do those types of things because of how we care about our people. The people part always comes first.

How did you get your start in HR?

I didn't go to school for HR; I initially went for biology and, when I graduated college, I ended up in retail. I was managing multiple people and was very close with who was, at that time, the personnel manager and she became a good mentor of mine. From there, I went into the staffing industry and then later into AIG on Wall Street. I implemented a temp system for them and had some really great mentors there who challenged me to do more and pushed me into the HR side, which I loved. I loved to see the impact I could have on people's lives and being able to give someone a job and opportunities; that's just beyond fulfilling both personally and professionally. I really give a lot of credit to the great mentors I had along the way, including my current boss.

Outside of work, what are you passionate about?

My four dogs. I have two Boxers and two Doberman puppies; they just turned 1, and are 97 and 78 pounds. My dogs are absolutely my passion, and I'm also passionate—especially during the pandemic—about wine and craft beers.

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72%

Percentage of HR leaders who said their organizations will place more emphasis on continuous feedback as a result of the pandemic.

Source: Aon



One-half

Amount of employees who said the pandemic has been a "wake-up call" that will prompt them to spend more time selecting employer-sponsored benefits.

Source: Aflac

Two-thirds

Proportion of surveyed employers that expect usage of employer-sponsored mental health and wellness benefits to increase in the coming months.

Source: Unum



5%

Percentage of U.S. companies that said widespread vaccine availability would guide decisions about returning to the workplace; more than one-third of those polled said they did not know when their employees would be returning to physical workplaces.

Source: The Conference Board

1 in 5

Proportion of federal employees who are working from home and who expect the arrangement to last at least another year.

Source: Government Executive



43%

Percentage of organizations that plan salary freezes for management and executives in 2021 to cope with the fallout from the pandemic; 42% will freeze salaries for non-management personnel.

Source: Gallagher



83%

Percentage of employers that said they will put more flexible work policies in place after the pandemic.

Source: Mercer

14

Number of percentage points separating low-wage and high-wage workers who have returned to the same employer since being furloughed or laid off at the start of the pandemic; 25% of low-wage workers have returned, compared to 39% of high-wage workers.

Source: The Federal Reserve

47%

Percentage of employers that have not made any new hires since COVID-19 was declared a national emergency.

Source: Randstad RiseSmart

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