SEPTEMBER 2021 • $8.95

Human Resource Executive®

Innovation for a New Era

The winners of this year's Top HR Products competition highlight the direction HR technology is headed.

PAGE 6

They prepare others for the future. Help them plan for their own.

With over 100 years of financial expertise, TIAA can help you provide your employees with monthly retirement income for life. **TIAA.org/IncomeForLife**

TIAA

HR IN THE FLOW OF WORK

Josh Bersin/Columnist

6 Areas to Focus on for Better Employee Experience

To say employee experience is complex is a dramatic understatement. And the speed with which it's emerged as a priority for HR and business leaders has sown uncertainty. Get a group of HR leaders together and I guarantee you wouldn't get agreement on the very definition of EX, let alone what to do to actually drive higher employee engagement, foster more productivity and performance, and ultimately enable improved outcomes.

No one single action by HR will magically result in an excellent employee experience. EX is multi-layered and requires buy-in and participation from across the organization. But you can't give up or take shortcuts. The stakes are too high, and your employees trust you to make change happen.

In the Josh Bersin Academy's recently published report, *The Definitive Guide: Employee Experience*, we set out to learn what actually matters most when it comes to creating an excellent employee experience. The results will likely surprise some. Although many view EX as primarily a technology challenge, the six key EX principles identified through the research are related to creating a culture of trust and transparency, equitable rewards, ongoing people-related investments and the development of HR capabilities. These principles transform EX from a passive, top-down technology initiative primarily focused on simplifying work processes to one that brings about sustained cultural change that puts people first.

1. Focus on trust, transparency, inclusion and care. Companies that do EX exceptionally well put their mission and purpose first. Trust is vital. When people don't trust your company, you have to offer a lot of money and perks for them to even consider joining you—and, even if they do, you may not be able to hold on to them.

2. A supportive culture plays a big role. By far, the biggest predictor of EX excellence is a work environment in which people are encouraged to help others.

3. Innovation and sustainable growth depend on equitable rewards and building communities at work. EX is sometimes used as a code word for pay and perks. However, in order to have a significant impact, rewards and recognition must be fair and equitable.

4. Consistent, mission-first people investments in any business climate improve business performance. When money is tight, it's easy to clamp down on investments and a focus on culture. We found companies prioritizing investments in people, regardless of the business climate, are much more profitable, have more satisfied customers and more engaged employees, and are perceived as great places to work.

5. EX excellence directly leads to business outcomes. Engagement is an important outcome of a great employee experience, but not the only one. There's no doubt more engaged people are happier, more productive and provide better service to customers. But companies focusing on the right EX strategies and practices have better outcomes across the business, as well as for their people and innovation.

6. HR capabilities and the right technologies are vital. EX is about trust, transparency, caring and empathy. It's about leadership and culture, growth, communities and equity. How do you enable these big strategic concepts and scale them for your workforce? The answer is developing the right HR capabilities and implementing the right technologies.

A Word about the Role of Technology

Clearly, technology plays a role in creating a great EX, making daily moments more simple and removing friction from the workday. Even small companies need tools to help employees get work done, and that infrastructure grows the more complex the company is.

Our study looked into various tools related to EX and found that technologies and services alone don't drive a great experience, but they absolutely matter to supporting the right culture, trust and inclusive environment. Additionally, companies go through an EX journey in different maturity levels (our study includes a four-stage model). As a company matures, different technologies need to be added.

We also found that the EX practices that have the biggest impact on business and people are those related to getting insights, learning and growing, particularly advanced people analytics and correlated actions, followed by advanced knowledge systems and adaptive learning tools. Only when we understand barriers to productivity and inclusion through analytics, take action based on these insights, and provide the knowledge and capabilities needed for optimal performance can employees do their best.

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.

TALENT MANAGEMENT

Peter Cappelli/Columnist

Post-COVID Remote Work May Not Be So Rosy

Discussions about work-from-home policies simply will not stop—and for good reasons.

First, the deadlines for employers to make decisions about remote policies keep getting pushed back. Remember when there was some consensus that we would be back in the office by Labor Day—and we meant Labor Day 2020? The more infectious Delta variant of COVID-19 has skyrocketed new cases back up among non-vaccinated communities. We aren't sure now how long the immunity from vaccinations lasts. Some urban communities, including mine, have reinstated mask mandates again for indoor settings. In this context, bringing people back to the office does not yet seem like a good idea, so there is no pressure to set permanent work-from-home policies in the short term.

Second, everyone is waiting to see what everyone else is going to do. Within communities, there is some consensus: The New York banks are telling all their employees to return, while the Silicon Valley tech companies have made commitments to remote work. Many others are talking about a hybrid model, but there are so many possible varieties of this format that it doesn't mean much to say you will have a hybrid approach. It is reasonable in this case to not be the nail standing up—especially if you don't want to force your employees do something they don't want to do, as competitors for your talent are heading in the other direction.

But here is the big reason we should keep talking about and particularly thinking about work-from-home policies: We do not have much of an idea about how they will work. It just so happens that I have written a little book about this—you knew that was coming, right?—and here is the heart of the problem in two parts.

The first is, we really don't know how well work-from-home actually performed during the pandemic because so many other things have been going on at the same time that are affecting performance. Many businesses have done well, in part, because the economy was awash in fiscal stimulus money. Most employers report that their remote employees performed well but so did the on-site employees, whom we were applauding as downright heroic. Employees were also pulling together in the crisis, in some cases to save their employers, in most cases to save their jobs and in virtually all cases to keep the lights on in society during what could otherwise have been a disastrous time. That's pretty motivating.

There was something else going on that was very important and that we have paid little attention to: Management changed. In many organizations, leaders asked employees for help. In most, they pulled back on micro-managing—because they couldn't do it remotely—and empowered employees by default to take more control over how they performed their tasks, especially making decisions about when to do which ones. In a few cases, supervisors were pushed to check in with employees and have serious conversations about how work was going. When we see subordinates every day, we may imagine we are in touch with them, but of course, that is not the case.

You get the idea. It is easy to think that simply allowing people to stay home caused things to go just as well as during the pandemic, but there were far too many things going on to think that just being out of the office by itself was the cause.

It's a huge leap to assume things will continue to go as they have been with work-from-home after the pandemic. All the pandemic-related factors above go away. We will no longer all be pulling together, driven by all facing the same big challenges. The crisis that made that happen will be over, and now we will be even more divided if we have some workers home and some in the office, as most of the hybrid models imply. Another important difference is that we went into the pandemic with employees who mostly knew each other from face-to-face contact. Now, we have at least some fellow employees whom we have never met in person and, going forward in a work-from-home context, new hires will not have that same face-to-face background experience, even in hybrid offices, because they just won't be together as much.

Then, there are issues about work-from-home that most employers have not thought through completely—and some haven't thought about at all. For example, how do we decide who gets to keep working from home, especially if we think that we should now have more people in the office? Is it based on prior performance? Do local managers get to decide? It is such a perk and so valuable for some people that you can expect more litigation around access. How will supervisors go about managing two groups of subordinates, one in the office more or less all the time, one in the office less or perhaps hardly at all? Treating otherwise equal employees differently may be necessary, but it is a huge challenge for equity issues.

Here's the last issue to think about for now: Human resource professionals know that few things are as difficult as pulling back a popular perk or practice, so the possibility of a mistake—rolling out a work-from-home policy that isn't succeeding and then having to roll it back—comes with really big consequences.

So, this is an issue we had better keep mulling over until we figure it out.

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 hrletters@lrp.com.

An overlooked strategy to drive HR effectiveness during the toughest times

IN THE POST-PANDEMIC WORLD, EMPLOYERS NEED TO FOCUS ON OPTIMIZING THEIR WORKFORCES IF THEY EXPECT TO BE RESILIENT AND ENSURE BUSINESS SUCCESS

The finance and HR system that helps you plan for the next new normal.

Respond rapidly to changes in the world with technology built from its core to be agile. Whether that means reskilling your workforce, creating a great place to work, or returning your people safely to the workplace, Workday enterprise cloud applications give you the agility you need to manage change as seamlessly as possible.

Workday. For a changing world.™

workday.

An overlooked strategy to drive HR effectiveness during the toughest times

For many employers and their HR leaders, the past 18 months have been nothing short of unprecedented turmoil. From supporting an unplanned remote workforce, to meeting changing worker expectations, to redeploying frontline workers to new locations and roles, saying that change has been dramatic is an understatement.

In fact, it's no stretch to say that these COVID-19-fueled challenges came with an amplified, highly accelerated demand for workforce management strategies and solutions that may have been overlooked by most employers pre-pandemic.

Experts believe one such strategy that has been emerging during pandemic times is the growing need for optimizing the workforce. Simply defined, workforce optimization combines the efficiency of automated workforce management with the flexibility of an agile, skills-based talent approach. The result? Improved employee engagement, business continuity and profitability.

In short, while employers in the past have had to pivot in response to changing business conditions, with COVID-19 they faced the most daunting scenario that has ever rocked the business world.

Diana Kearns-Manolatos

According to Diana Kearns-Manolatos, senior manager with Deloitte's Center for Integrated Research, the COVID-19 pandemic certainly has fueled the need for improving and driving workforce optimization as part of a new way to deploy talent management.

"The global pandemic dramatically impacted global labor markets and organizational strategies," she says. "Whether a company was positively or negatively impacted, either scenario resulted in a major shift in business strategy and a need to quickly transform and change with operations and workforce strategies most closely impacted."

In both cases, Kearns-Manolatos adds, organizations started to explore how to use the opportunity for external talent or internal talent marketplaces to move the workforce where it was needed most, and in doing so also began to better understand what skills they have in the workforce today and how to best align them for the good of both the individual and the organization.

Suzy McKee, principal solution marketing manager at Workday, explains that even in pre-pandemic times, jobs were changing quickly, forcing employers to be more flexible and fluid with worker roles becoming transformed as they moved across different teams and tasks. Also, HR leaders were already in a critical role helping their organizations manage the workforce and successfully steering their companies through change. But with COVID-19's arrival, nothing compared.

Suzy McKee

"Operating models changed overnight to react to different consumer behaviors and needs, causing businesses to rethink how they operate, including a renewed focus on health and safety," McKee says. "It's been an incredible rate of change, with dramatic digital

acceleration aimed at transforming those operating models for profitability."

McKee says Workday saw how a radical shake-up in workforce operations had thrown old planning and forecasting models completely out of whack, and clearly demonstrated the need for rapid reskilling and redeployment. For example, McKee cites an Accenture survey that found 93% of executives say their very existence today is jeopardized by operating models that can't keep up.

Many businesses were also trying to get through the pandemic with outdated, siloed HR, workforce management and talent systems — a losing proposition.

Helping steady the ship during unpredictable times

And that brings the discussion to the workforce optimization challenge.

Kearns-Manolatos echoes that while the pandemic has had a dramatic impact on the workplace, the trend toward a more digital, tech-enabled, and more agile workforce was well underway during the past decade.

"The last part of the equation was really embracing remote work and the digital workplace as an acceptable norm, which may not have happened at the scale and speed that it did otherwise. But now that it has, there's no going back," she says.

Workforce optimization, Workday's McKee says, is an approach that can help employers adapt in unpredictable times and quickly pivot the workforce to support change and new opportunities. For instance, she notes, when employers don't have a complete, accurate view of their workforce skills and costs, when they can't continuously plan and execute in an

environment of rapid change, and when they can't support growth at a pace needed to sustain the business, significant risks are potentially lurking around the corner:

- Compliance, including litigation costs and potential fines
- Missed profitability targets
- Poor business performance resulting from a lack of timely, accurate data and metrics, and potentially working off inaccurate business forecasts
- Limited business growth that means employers are not able to scale at the pace needed to implement business changes due to siloed, stagnant processes

"COVID amplified these risks," she says, adding that without the ability to fully optimize the workforce, employers can't keep pace to support changing business initiatives — launching new business models, redeploying workers, supporting worker expectations, or transitioning to remote work — if processes, data and teams are not connected and running smoothly, In short, optimized.

And that scenario amplifies why operational agility is more important today than ever, according to Kearns-Manolatos.

"We live in a world of continuous disruption and change, and therefore, becoming a resilient organization is now a business imperative," she

Workforce Optimization Journey

Workforce Optimization starts at a digitized foundational level and increases workforce value over time.

Administrative Excellence
Digitized administrative foundation
- Transparency into workforce costs & metrics
- Accuracy with one data source
- Adjust processes & connect workflow
- Engaging, simple user experience

Operational Agility
Agility to respond rapidly to business change
- Control labor costs
- Automate decision-making
- Adjust the workforce based on needed skills
- Self-sufficient worker & manager experience

Workforce Optimization
Continuously increase workforce value
- Forecast labor demand & needed skills
- Optimize workforce resources & skills
- Upskill & redeploy
- Worker-first preferences, inspired employee experience

Time / Workforce Value

says, citing Deloitte's 2021 Global Resilience study, which found that six out of 10 leaders expect to see occasional or pervasive global disruption at the scale of COVID-19 and climate change going forward as the norm; yet, 70% don't have complete confidence in their organization's ability to pivot and adapt to disruptive events.

"In this type of environment, where change is the rule, being adaptable with agile operations and a flexible workforce will be a cornerstone for competitive advantage," Kearns-Manolatos says.

Agility's component parts

Workday's McKee breaks down operational agility into these key objectives:

Build the workforce operations foundation needed for administrative excellence — Organizations need to digitize administrative tasks and eliminate the tedium of paper and spreadsheets. Also, this requires a single data source leading to accurate payroll and a clear understanding of workforce metrics, as well as driving connected processes and workflows.

Gain the operational agility to quickly flex and adjust the workforce to change — Employers need a system to help them flex and adjust the workforce to change, as well as to better control labor costs by automating time-consuming manual tasks and decision making. It also entails clearly understanding the workforce skills available so they can accurately and quickly adjust, while also addressing skills gaps and planning for the future. Finally, it helps workers and managers be more engaged and productive with an improved employee experience.

Optimize the full value of the workforce to drive business goals — A fully optimized workforce is possible to achieve, but organizations need to continuously optimize and drive more value from their workforce. For employers with a large hourly workforce, for instance, they need predictive abilities to forecast labor demand and needed skills, as well as the ability to continuously upskill and reskill their workers. Plus, the worker experience, primarily mobile, must allow workers to designate when and where they'd like to work, take additional learning, sign up for additional shifts, communicate with their managers, and generally have more say and control over their work lives.

McKee also says employers need to optimize their workforce because it will deliver more value to the business, calling it an "evolved approach and mindset" — from point-in-time workforce planning, execution and analysis to continuous optimization, including:

- **Workforce Value:** Where customers move on from viewing workers as widgets and labor costs, to engaged, skilled contributors to business outcomes and the organization sees workers not simply as a cost center, and companies are investing in the business by upskilling.
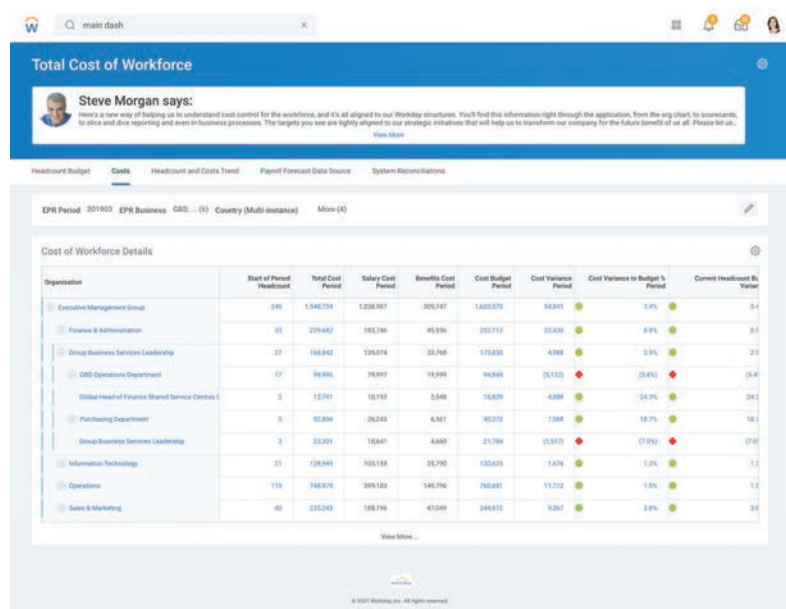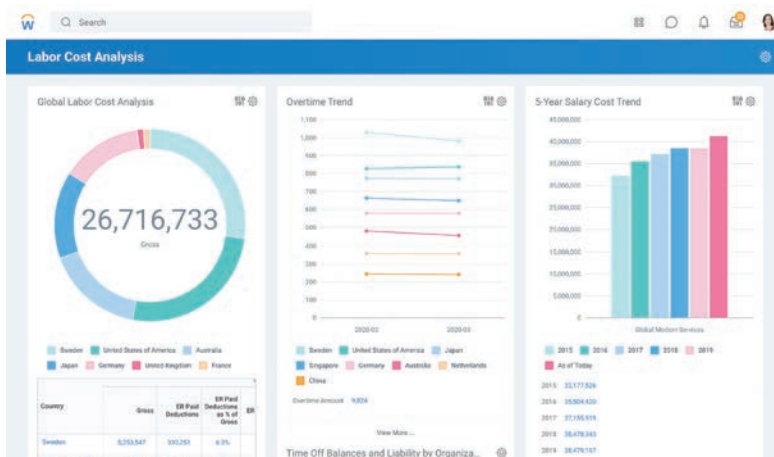
- **Workforce Ecosystem[1]:** Instead of workers being of one type, always in one role or location, shift to a flexible internal and external workforce with skills that can be applied anywhere the business needs it and in which labor costs are clearly understood and managed.
- **Workforce Potential:** Where HR has more than a job profile in an HR system, and instead a clear understanding of a worker's capability, contribution and growth potential as well as a way to better measure labor costs, headcount, worker contribution to profitability, revenue and productivity.

"Older static HR and workforce management systems were not built to sustain the pace of change," McKee says. "They're for a world that no longer exists."

Technology is the critical component

Finally, workforce optimization places a heavy focus on using technology such as artificial intelligence to automate time-consuming tasks, provide critical information to workers and managers right in the flow of work, and make it much easier to create and adjust

[1] E.J. Altman, J. Schwartz, D. Kiron, R. Jones, and D. Kearns-Manolatos, "Workforce Ecosystems: A New Strategic Approach to the Future of Work," MIT Sloan Management Review and Deloitte, April 2021.

new organizational structures to support change and times of unpredictable disruption.

For CHROs and other HR leaders, technology/Human Capital Management, in fact, can help them realize solutions to these previously overlooked challenges.

For example, Kearns-Manolatos says some employers have seen tremendous success over the last year in piloting and expanding their internal talent marketplaces to redeploy existing talent to where it has been most needed in their organization, and as a way to invest in their talent with new career building approaches.

"Internal talent management can't be prioritized at the expense of optimizing the broader workforce ecosystem," she says. "As a result, talent management strategies and technologies need to adapt to think about not only internal employees but the total workforce across a workforce ecosystem structure - including contractors and service providers."

Kearns-Manolatos adds that reskilling the workforce will need to be a key aspect of workforce transformation strategies going forward. The 2021 *MIT Sloan Management Review* Deloitte Future of the Workforce report found 91% of respondents agree or strongly agree that upcoming changes to their organization's business strategy require it to improve access to new capabilities, skill sets, and competencies, which will require employers to think about how to access and curate new skills, enable work automation, engage through digital capabilities, and transform the organization including ways of working.

"Technology and especially HCMs have an important role to play in helping organizations to manage internal and external talent to create a holistic view of the workforce and to support marketplace and skill-building strategies," she says.

McKee says that the swift acceleration into the future of work has presented some added new challenges much sooner than anyone expected, especially the increasingly diverse workforce of hourly, contingent, billable, and gig workers.

"Organizations must be prepared for a more resilient future — one in which there could be continued shocks from disruptions like natural disasters or health crises that must be overcome," she says. "In the midst of continuous shocks they also need to be able to stand up new revenue streams and business models, with a workforce ready to support them."

The goal, she adds, is both to protect the business and increase resilience to better withstand (and potentially even capitalize on) future marketplace disruptions, fluctuations in business demand, and changes in business strategy. McKee explains that while some organizations were able to successfully respond during the pandemic, many were caught flat-footed — i.e., they couldn't harness their workforce to adapt to the massive change. Today, to prevent that from happening again, that outdated technology needs to be replaced with more modern, effective platforms that offer a way to optimize the workforce.

Talent competition is getting even more intense

McKee concludes by explaining that currently there is fierce competition for talent at all levels — for example, citing the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics data point that in April 2021 alone more than 659,000 retail workers quit their jobs in search of better work. At the same time, knowledge workers also are "leaving in droves," she adds, seeking new opportunities often to maintain flexibility and balance in their work and personal lives that the pandemic enabled.

"It's become even more critical to balance the needs of the business with the needs of individual workers across all industries," she says. "The ability for HR and operations to adapt the workforce to change are now strategic differentiators in the marketplace."

She adds that workforce optimization is a critical lever in driving business continuity and profitability through any type of change — whether a major global challenge like the pandemic, a new market opportunity, or new competitive pressure.

"By adopting the previously 'hidden strategy' of effective workforce optimization, employers can do more than just navigate business disruptions, no matter how unexpected. They can emerge even stronger," McKee says.

To learn more about workforce optimization that makes every worker count, visit: **workday.com/workforce**
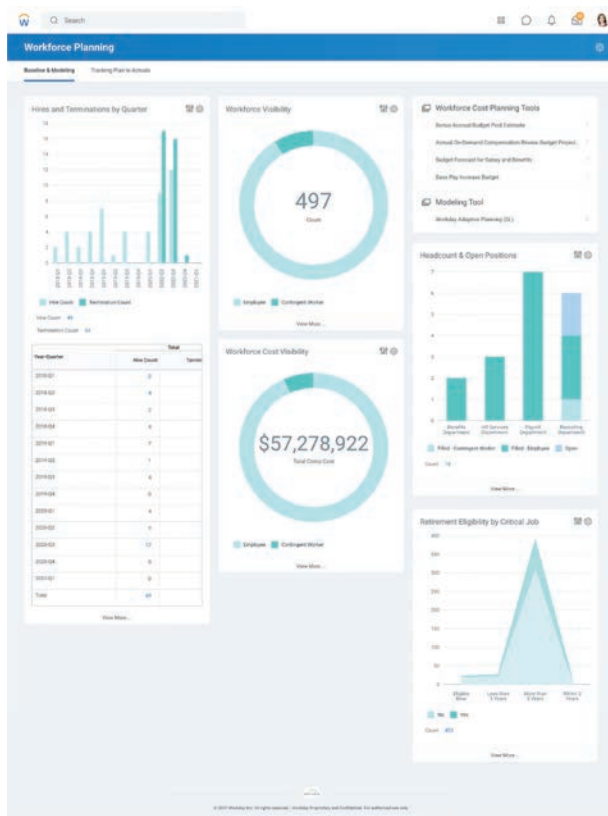
Gain control. Unleash insight.
Discover the future of payroll.

Automating your payroll can help increase efficiency and accuracy so your team spends less time fielding complaints and fixing mistakes. But that's just the beginning. By connecting you to the right tools, people, and data, Workday makes your job less about admin and more about insight. Payroll will never be the same again.

Workday. For a changing world.™

Find out more at workday.com/payroll-solutions

workday.

Closing the Pay Gap with People Analytics

As employers strategize for business after the pandemic, this is a prime opportunity to examine pay equity, experts say.

BY JEN COLLETTA

Organizations around the world are strategizing for the post-pandemic workplace by pressing the reset button—revamping hiring practices, approaches to flex work, organizational culture and more for a new world. It's also a prime opportunity to examine inequities in pay, experts say.

On average, women continue to earn 83 cents for every dollar that men make. Despite significant efforts to close that gap in recent years—including narrowing it by 6 cents between 2017 and 2020, according to a report earlier this year from Visier—the pandemic is threatening that progress. Women, minorities and low-income workers are experiencing greater pay disruption than other populations, which could be among the factors fueling the disproportionate exit of women from the workforce over the last year, says Ruth Thomas, senior consultant at CURO, a provider of compensation management and pay equity software.

Ruth Thomas

Had progress on the pay gap continued at the same rate as it did over the last few years, pay equity could have been achieved within nine years—but, especially if women forced out over the last year eventually take lower-paying jobs, the pay gap could "stall or get even starker," according to the Visier report.

At the same time, as employers struggle to hold onto their diverse talent, it is forcing them to recognize the individuality of their workforces. Before the pandemic, most HR and compensation policies treated employees as a "relatively homogenous body," but the crisis has led to a "humanization of the workforce," says Thomas, who will speak on a panel on pay equity during the Women in HR Tech Summit at the HR Technology Conference, being held Sept. 28-Oct. 1 in Las Vegas.

"Now, we are seeing the emergence of a more individual approach in how we treat employees or recognizing we are all humans and individuals, so there is a need to design more equitable and human-centered workplaces, work experiences and reward packages," she says.

That's prompting many business leaders to evaluate how equitably and fairly they pay employees—the answer to which can best be found through a robust pay equity audit, she says.

While pay equity has long been in the purview of HR, recently pay equity analyses have become more frequent—as opposed to annual reviews, HR is more likely to conduct them quarterly, with close oversight to minimize risk, says Top 100 HR Tech Influencer Lexy Martin, principal in Visier's research and customer value practice, who will present on data-driven DE&I at HR Tech.

That goes hand in hand, she says, with evolving approaches to people analytics. From managing the return to the workplace to monitoring upticks in the pandemic such as with the Delta variant to supporting a remote or hybrid workforce, Martin says, people analytics is emerging as an essential tool in post-pandemic planning.

"The revision in approach [to people analytics] is to expand the analysis to ensure productivity with an empathetic attention to employee wellbeing, equity and inclusion," Martin notes. That has included a heightened focus on eliminating bias during talent acquisition, development and retention, she says.

Lexy Martin

As that shift in people analytics happens, pay equity, Thomas adds, is being recognized as a key strategic imperative—no longer just a regulatory compliance requirement but rather a key retention tool.

Increasingly, Martin expects, organizations will be expanding access to people analytics beyond HR to include people leaders and managers—as expectations for DE&I goals trickle down through leadership. Companies including Panasonic, The Lego Group, Wayfair, Trane Technologies and Pitney Bowes are among those that have already made such moves, she says.

Managers at all levels are increasingly being held accountable for actions to improve diversity, equity and inclusion. "They need to be able to see they must adjust hiring while also adjusting promotions and development opportunities and attending to pay equity," Martin says.

Such shifts are creating enhanced demand for the DE&I tech market, Thomas adds. Artificial intelligence, machine learning, algorithms, text mining, sentiment analysis and natural language processing are among the areas fueling new approaches to people analytics—including as it relates to pay equity.

"These technologies can help to address DE&I challenges across the employee lifecycle by creating consistent practices, simplifying complex decisions—particularly at scale—and tracking outcomes more effectively," Thomas says.

Regardless of the tech employers used to tackle pay inequities, obtaining that data is the first step toward getting efforts to close the gender pay gap back on track.

"Only when you do this can you gain insights of where we have come from and identify where we want to go," she says. "Then, we can set better goals and actions to progress gender equality."

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

The Women in HR Tech Summit will be held Sept. 28 in Las Vegas. Visit www.hrtechnologyconference.com to register.

HR Technology

WINNER 2021
TOP HR PRODUCT
Human Resource Executive®
WINNER 2021

Innovation for a New Era

The 13 winners of this year's Top HR Products competition highlight the direction HR technology is headed.

During yet another challenging year, it was a time of remarkable innovation for HR technology companies.

That is the big takeaway from *Human Resource Executive*'s Top HR Products of the Year competition.

"Going into the process, I was expecting that due to the pandemic we would see fewer submissions and not as many truly innovative new technologies," says competition co-chair and HR Tech Conference program chair Steve Boese. "But that was not the case. We had more submissions in 2021 than in 2020, and as a whole, the quality of the technology solutions was outstanding."

We received about 110 submissions, which our panel of judges reviewed and, after trimming the list, saw in action during demos before bestowing 13 products with the honor of Top HR Product for 2021.

Here are three things we learned from the judging process:

• The pace of HR tech innovation remains fast, and the quality of work continues to be high, despite the devastating effects of COVID-19 on workplaces everywhere, including those creating these solutions.

"Despite some obviously challenging times for all organizations, as a rule, the HR technology solution providers remained focused on their customers and in building new or enhancing existing solutions, which was incredibly impressive," Boese says. "In conversations with many HR technology leaders, we found that they were able to manage the disruptions and the quick pivot to remote working very efficiently and successfully."

• Industry leaders were paying attention in 2020, bringing timely and much-needed solutions this year that address not only myriad COVID-related pain points for HR leaders but those surrounding diversity, equity and inclusion efforts across organizations.

• Large companies and start-ups alike have been putting their best minds at work to solve important problems, particularly around DEI, talent worries amid the "Great Resignation" and employee experience topics.
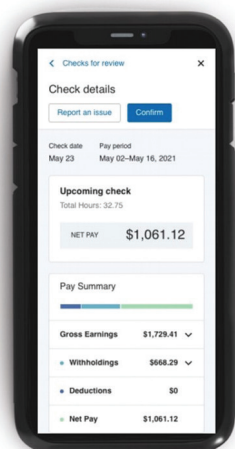
"I would also note that almost all of the largest, most experienced HR technology providers showcased new and interesting innovations this year," Boese says. "This was noteworthy in that, for quite some time, we have seen new innovations in HR tech being driven from the start-up community. This year was one where having depth and resources benefited these large organizations to maintain their development schedules and roadmaps."

Here are the 2021 Top HR Products of the Year:

CORE HR

Paychex: Paychex Pre-Check

What it is: Nearly half of employees today would leave their current employer after two payroll errors, according to the American Payroll Association, and more than a third have paid a personal bill late due to a payroll error, the Workforce Institute reports. Payroll is the foundation of the employer-employee relationship and payroll errors put that at risk. Paychex Pre-Check gives all employees the opportunity to preview their paycheck and confirm its accuracy before payday. This self-review of the gross-to-net paystub is initiated through Paychex Flex, the company's SaaS-based HR software solution. Employees can either acknowledge their pay amount is correct or report an error through the application. This can be done using any device, including smartphone and voice assistants.

Why we like it: Paychex Pre-Check provides employees with insight and ownership into their paychecks. The easy-to-use technology and mobile-friendly design allow employees to confirm their pay and report mistakes while allowing HR administrators freedom from individually confirming timecards. It lets them focus on problems or mistakes immediately and well before they become full-blown payroll errors.

Paycom: Beti
What it is: Beti, a first-of-its-kind technology, further automates and streamlines the payroll process by empowering employees to do their own payroll. And why not? They already manage their own timecards, benefits, expenses and vacation requests. Now with Beti, employees can do their payroll too. Beti identifies errors and guides employees to resolve them before payroll submission, resulting in improved data accuracy, reduced employer liability, increased process oversight and unparalleled employee insight into their pay. Beti puts payroll in the hands of your people.

Why we like it: Its ability to address traditional gaps in employee insight and awareness while providing employees control over their own HR and payroll data are why the release of Paycom's Beti payroll experience is so important and, we think, it's the next important step in the evolution of employee self-service capabilities. With Beti, employees are doing their own payroll. They gain the ability to view their upcoming paycheck—including net pay—in advance, review the details of the payroll calculations, raise any potential issues or concerns to HR and payroll before payday through Paycom's Ask Here feature and use the information to plan their next few days and weeks of budgeting, spending and saving.

DEI
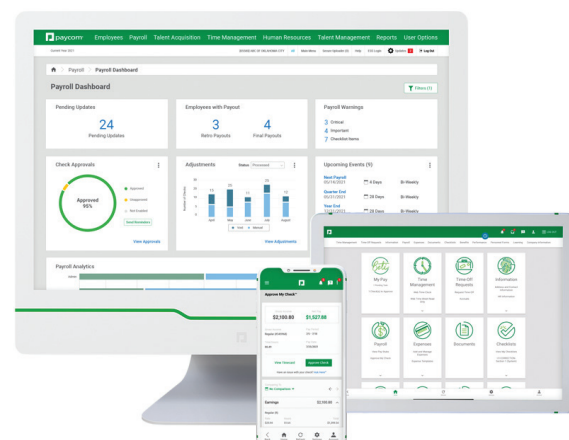
ADP: DataCloud Diversity, Equity & Inclusion

What it is: ADP accelerates organizations' DEI efforts via insights, benchmarks and research-based best practices to drive action. Features include Turnkey Story-Based Insights, which surface DEI trends across the organization through monitoring for glass-ceiling effects and bias in recruiting funnels; DEI Benchmarking, in-line DEI benchmarks based on the 30 million-plus employees that ADP pays each month; Proactive Recommendations and Best Practices, which identify pay gaps based on gender and race/ethnicity, quantify the cost of closing the gaps and provide tailored action plans; Embedded DEI Nudges in HCM Workflows, which provide managers DEI insight in the flow of work to drive scalable action; and Research-based surveys, which offer psychometrically-validated questions to evaluate DEI concepts.

Why we like it: This robust solution provides tools to help HR leaders and organizations plan for, make and track efforts around DEI. Dashboards offer guidance, data and benchmarks for putting your organization into context, including through "considerations" and "nudges" around pay equity, for example, to prompt ideas and thinking for leaders striving to make scalable improvements across their organization. Many options for in-depth analysis and recommendations and heavy reliance on data make this a comprehensive tool that lands at an important moment.
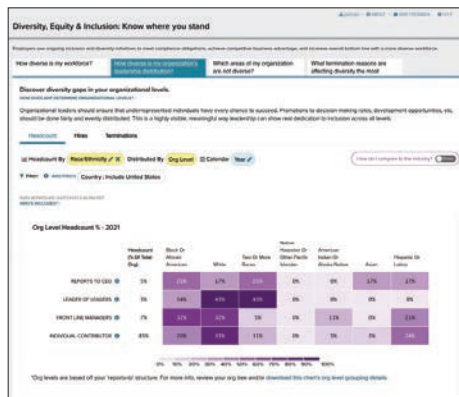
Gem: Diversity Recruiting Insights

What it is: Gem's Diversity Recruiting Insights empowers businesses to improve their recruiting strategy with diversity and inclusivity in mind, offering end-to-end visibility into how candidates across different representations and backgrounds are impacted throughout the recruiting journey. With robust top-of-funnel reporting, recruiting teams can discover and adjust their sourcing strategy toward building diverse talent pools. Hiring teams can then visualize every step of the process to uncover biases and identify opportunities to reduce bottlenecks and drop-offs from underrepresented groups. Organizations can leverage real-time data to build a more diverse workforce with the tool.

Why we like it: Continuing the trend of new, innovative HR technology solutions that are meant to provide support and insights for organizations as they look to improve diversity, equity and inclusion, Gem's solution gives talent acquisition leaders meaningful data and analytics into the progress of DEI goals throughout the recruiting funnel or process. We liked how Gem can examine and provide insights into detailed talent acquisition process steps like screening, first interview, second interview and so on. It's a step beyond initial DEI strategies that often focus on sourcing, i.e., expanding talent pools generally, but don't have the tools to see the DEI impact and effectiveness later in the hiring process. With GEM, these insights are easily discovered, giving talent acquisition leaders the tools they need to address problems.
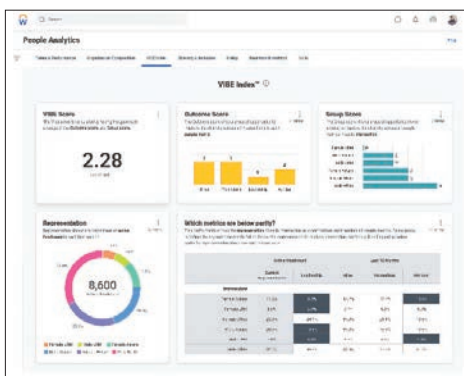
Workday: VIBE Index

What it is: Workday's VIBE Index is a comprehensive belonging and diversity index that enables organizations to measure and compare belonging, diversity and inclusion for parity and equity. Workday developed VIBE (Value Inclusion, Belonging, and Equity) as a unique methodology and approach to creating a great place to work for all. With VIBE Index, organizations can uniquely measure relative performance and outcomes of their efforts across talent acquisition, talent development, leadership development, employee experience and workplace culture to deliver a heat map that identifies the highest opportunity for positive change, as well as a VIBE Index score for overall workplace equity.

Why we like it: As organizations continue to focus on important diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives, HR and workplace technology has begun to develop and evolve in support of these important efforts. With the Workday VIBE index, organizations can better understand and communicate progress, find areas of the organization that need attention and improvement, and benefit from an analytical and data-driven approach to DEI programs. Another feature we appreciated was the ability to connect DEI goals and strategies to additional resources and capabilities in the Workday HCM solution set, thus providing organizations with meaningful and actionable steps to improve and make progress with DEI.

EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE

SAP: Work Zone for HR

What it is: SAP SuccessFactors Work Zone enables organizations to provide each employee with an intuitive, personalized digital workplace that's centered on optimizing the employee experience. Employees are empowered to be productive anywhere, thanks to convenient access to relevant business applications, information, learning, collaboration tools, processes, guided experiences and more. The solution also centralizes employee communications, ensuring people are informed, connected and focused on what matters most.

Why we like it: This is a very rich tool that works to bring together employees' wide variety of applications that they're often using in a single day. Designed with the idea of putting people at the center of the business, it has high aspirations for boosting productivity, engagement and even speeding up decision-making by bringing the apps together and aligning them with the needs of the business. Employees can build individualized dashboards, with everything from HR and IT information to time off, learning goals and anything else they need.
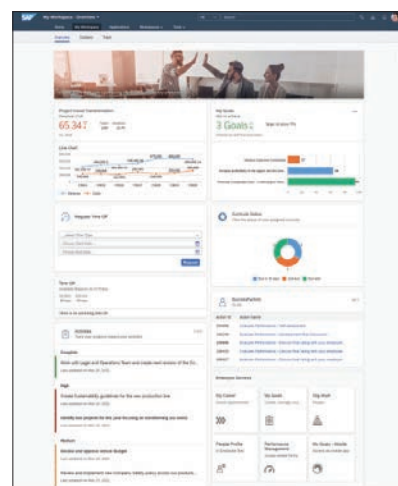
ServiceNow: Employee Journey Management

What it is: In the era of hybrid work, choice and flexibility have become essential for delivering a more meaningful work experience. Employees now require connected, enterprise experiences to navigate their personal and professional cross-departmental journeys so they can continue to remain productive and engaged from anywhere. ServiceNow Employee Journey Management, a new package of enterprise-wide workflow capabilities focused on improving manager and employee experiences as they navigate the moments that matter most in their work lives, helps deliver personalized action plans for moments such as return to workplace, onboarding and transfers, all while providing relevant learning experiences in the flow of work and capturing in-moment employee feedback.

Why we like it: This is an interesting and robust solution that takes a big step toward putting traditional HR work "in the flow of work," aiming to support employees from onboarding to alumni. New in 2021 are features that allow the manager to customize plans for employee journeys, as well as tools for listening to employees, learning opportunities and more. Centered on employee experience, this flexible tool provides both immediate and longer-term results across a wide range of situations.
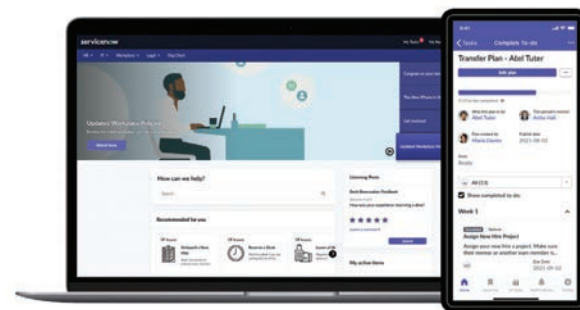
UKG: Pro Coaching and Development

What it is: Organizations are facing a new world of work, and the technology they use must evolve to meet those shifts. The UKG Life-Work Technology approach to designing solutions in service of people inspires and empowers them to thrive both in life and at work. The organization's new talent solution, UKG Pro Coaching and Development, enables people and organizations to achieve true growth and resilience with AI-powered conversational analysis that factors in people's needs and emotions. These unique capabilities, combined with ongoing feedback, improve coaching for leaders and boost engagement and trust.

HR Technology

Why we like it: An important element for employee development is requesting and receiving timely and relevant feedback from peers and managers. UKG's new Coaching and Development solution makes it easy for organizations to collect feedback and then make that feedback actionable and an important development tool. We also liked how UKG applies advanced AI technology to make feedback and comments more easily understandable and categorized, helping people leaders unearth important information and trends. Lastly, the solution provides a simple, intuitive way for managers to create and document the important interactions with their team members, like 1-1 meetings, check-ins, goal-creation meetings and more.
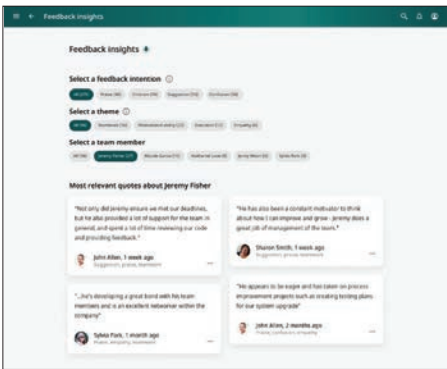
TALENT ACQUISITION

Paradox AI: Experience Assistant

What it is: Imagine a world where your career site instantly evolved as each candidate's journey evolved—transforming with every conversation to give people exactly what they need, right when they need it, without having to search for it. No more navigating between pages. No more logins or portals. No more frustrating experiences. Experience Assistant—the newest skill of Paradox's conversational recruiting assistant, Olivia—transforms how candidates interact with your career site. It automatically brings your most relevant content—videos, blog posts, news, jobs and more—to each candidate's fingertips, all through the elegance of a fast, easy conversation.
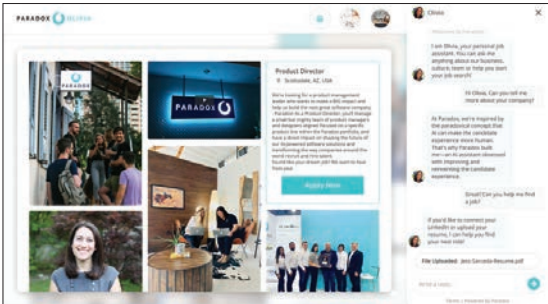
Why we like it: Many organizations have spent countless hours and dedicated resources to creating content designed to engage candidates, describing the organization and the roles that are available, and trying to nurture candidates along the recruiting process. But it can often be challenging to get the right content to the right candidates at the right time. Paradox AI solves this problem with an innovative, AI-driven solution that understands the candidates and then surfaces the best, most relevant content to them, based on their profiles, interests and desired roles. This helps organizations engage and convert candidates into applicants and provides a return on investment for their content development efforts.

HireVue: Builder

What it is: HireVue Builder is the first-of-its-kind solution that scales structured interviewing. It automates the creation of interviews with job-specific validated questions and candidate rating 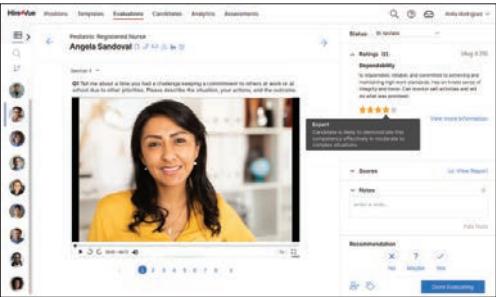guidelines that support better, fairer hiring decisions. The question library, designed by the company's team of industry-leading IO psychologists, is pre-mapped to competencies to provide a more equitable interview experience for candidates. The skills and competencies flow through to the interview evaluation to reinforce consistency and reduce unconscious bias. HireVue Builder can also support an organization's custom interview content alongside the HireVue library, providing companies with an easy, systematic way to evaluate all job roles and levels.

Why we like it: HireVue has a lengthy history of innovation in HR technology, and this continues with the release of Builder, a technology solution designed to help organizations create and deploy structured and repeatable candidate interviews. Traditionally, interviews have been difficult to keep consistent across large organizations, and they often involve hiring managers and other decision-makers who don't have much interviewing experience. With Builder, organizations can achieve consistent, high-quality interviews, which leverage a battery of pre-defined and vetted interview questions and that are easily shared, therefore increasing consistency and fairness in the hiring process.

iCIMS: Video Studio

What it is: Transform the talent experience by showcasing your authentic employee brand through employee-generated videos that transform culture from a buzzword into a competitive advantage on your career sites, in job descriptions, in recruiting marketing campaigns and in direct communication throughout the hiring and onboarding experience. iCIMS Video Studio enables HR and talent teams to produce custom-branded video content in 100-plus languages—without the cost of a production studio—with intuitive, professional editing, integrated social publishing, custom templates and real-time analytics dashboards.

Why we like it: When iCIMS noticed the rise in video consumption online and the need for employee storytelling, the idea for Video Studio came together at a moment when much of the world was stuck at home—watching hours of authentic, even unpolished video. Enter the new solution, which provides an easy interface to allow anyone to record, edit and upload video for a variety of uses. Talent teams can use it to request video from employees for use on job descriptions or elsewhere in the recruiting process. (Potential hires typically trust employees more than the company, research shows.) This tool provides a scalable way for employees to quickly use, edit and push video out on a variety of platforms—in-house sites, career sites, social platforms, even email templates.

Jobvite: Zero-Click Intelligent Sourcing

What it is: Talemetry by Jobvite improves recruiter speed and efficiency with intelligent automation. The greatest challenge recruiters face is sourcing and hiring qualified talent faster. Zero-Click Intelligent Sourcing leverages proprietary, AI-powered candidate matching and requires zero manual effort, saving recruiters valuable time. When a job requisition opens, Talemetry identifies top prospects in your CRM based on job-description requirements and suggests candidates that match previous hires for similar positions. It can also auto-balance the target list to meet your DEI objectives. Communications are auto-generated to prospects, inviting them to apply. The result is more time for recruiters to engage with applicants.

Why we like it: This time-saving tool for recruiters offers an innovative way to decrease hiring time while boosting quality of hires and allowing users to leverage data to boost diversity and other factors for any given requisition. It automatically reaches out to candidates through your CRM, sending tailored emails who are a good match. Tracking and analytics are available in a built-in reporting tool, further easing the load on recruiters.

TALENT MANAGEMENT

Survale: Talent Feedback Platform

What it is: Survale is the only talent-feedback platform that is purpose-built to automatically gather and interpret talent feedback from hello to hire to retire. Survale's core modules—candidateX, onboardX and employ—work together to form a single platform that combines talent feedback with operational data to give organizations a full view of how their people, processes and technologies affect job seekers, new hires and employees. Survale's analytics enable talent leaders to optimize all talent-facing programs and leverage positive sentiment into stronger employer brands, more employee referrals and better performance.

Why we like it: Most organizations seek employee feedback, but traditional requests for feedback are often too generalized, vague, infrequent and latent. With Survale, organizations can ask their employees for actionable feedback more directly tied to the originating transaction or event. We appreciated that, with Survale, organizations can generate this important feedback no matter what other HCM systems are in place that are the systems of record and transaction. This allows organizations to gain insights on diverse HR processes, even if the source systems are not capable of asking directly for this feedback. Generating more precise feedback in a timely manner allows HR and talent leaders to spot trends and areas for improvement more quickly, and to implement mitigation strategies readily.

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

THRIVE AS AN HR LEADER
IN AN EVER-EVOLVING DIGITAL WORKPLACE

It's no secret that new technology is driving HR's transformation. And with the continuing surge of innovative solutions in an already complex marketplace, bringing the HR community together just once a year to gain the expert insight, best practices and practical tools needed to plan for a winning future is no longer enough.

NOW 2 UNIQUE EVENTS EACH YEAR!

Our 24th year!

Human Resource Executive
HR Technology®
Conference & Exposition

Sept. 28 - Oct. 1, 2021
MANDALAY BAY | LAS VEGAS

FEATURING **HR** *Women in* **TECHNOLOGY**®

Registration Opens Oct. 4

Human Resource Executive **VIRTUAL**
HR Technology®
Conference & Exposition

March 1 - 4, 2022

A **FREE** INTERACTIVE **ONLINE EVENT**

Visit www.HRTechConference.com
for details and to register!

#HRTechConf

HR's Next Challenge: Age-Discrimination, Whistleblowing Complaints

Legal experts suggest HR execs bone up on retaliation knowledge and fully document all complaints.

BY BRUCE SHUTAN

When a federal jury in Portland, Ore., recently awarded Suzanne Ivie $2.4 million in damages over her firing from AstraZeneca, it marked the convergence of two legal trends that are catching the attention of HR departments. Her mixed verdict on whistleblower and age-discrimination claims mirrors developments across the workplace and portends more litigation on multiple battlefronts in coming years as the workforce ages and society grows increasingly litigious.

The former executive-level district sales manager prevailed under Oregon's whistleblower statute for exposing a scheme to "off-label" market anti-inflammatory drugs for unapproved uses, with the jury deciding the global pharmaceutical company had retaliated against her.

However, Ivie's attorneys were unable to convince the jury that her firing over a failure to meet mandatory coaching guidelines for which younger employees who committed the same breach weren't fired was a result of age discrimination. They also argued that a new supervisor started calling her "Benatar" in a ridiculing manner after 1980s rock singer Pat Benatar, now 68.

"An employee often does have multiple claims," explains Anita Chambers, a principal of The Employment Law Group, which represented Ivie in her lawsuit against AstraZeneca. "There is definitely retaliation in the workplace, and employers need to be very vigilant about it."

In fact, retaliation claims to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission have more than doubled over the past two decades, soaring from 22.6% of all claims in fiscal year 1997 to nearly 56% of all claims in 2020. Age-discrimination claims during that time have edged up slightly from 19.6% to 21%, the EEOC reports.

Anita Chambers

More than half of workplace-discrimination complaints filed with the EEOC last year involved retaliation—an outcome that numerous types of whistleblower laws seek to prevent. One layer of protection against retaliation is at the federal level where financial, criminal, health or safety violations are examined by the SEC and OSHA. Another involves statutory laws on the books in all 50 states, as well as common laws in some states that protect employees from wrongful termination.

What's important for HR leaders to realize is that employees with grievances are entitled to protection against retaliation, even if their claim is unfounded, according to says Sara Jodka, a member of the Dickinson Wright law firm. And as such, they need to document their response to those allegations.

In the Ivie case, Chambers reports that there was no documentation to support AstraZeneca's claim that retaliation was investigated. Noting that the jury ruled in its favor on five of six claims, an AstraZeneca spokesperson says the company "remains committed to maintaining an inclusive culture that does not tolerate acts of discrimination or retaliation."

Amie Remington, general counsel for LandrumHR, hasn't ever seen a discrimination claim before the EEOC or state agency in her 25 years of practicing law that was not accompanied by a retaliation claim. Her recommendation to HR pros is that they brush up on general retaliation violations and standards and ensure that it's not ever being allowed.

Amie Remington

What's driving litigiousness?

Whistleblower claims are increasing for several reasons. "People are a lot more inclined to speak their mind these days, and a lot of it is attributable to social media," Jodka says. She predicts all types of employment litigation will continue to rise in the coming years, citing employees' strong belief that freedom-of-speech rights are very broad and an onslaught of information that is helping educate people about laws that protect them.

Moreover, thanks to technological advances, there's far more accessibility to courts. Charges that have to be filed first with the EEOC or a state's civil rights commission can be done electronically and without a lawyer. "A lot of states have basically taken their employment law statutes and put them into administrative form," Jodka says. While it often keeps employers out of court, she warns that it still triggers litigation in a different forum.

Sara Jodka

Age discrimination, however, isn't as cut and dried as whistleblowing. With the graying of America's workforce, a growing number of older employees filing claims may seem like a safe assumption. Indeed, the threshold is relatively low: 40 and older is considered a protected age class. But Jodka actually sees more employers discriminating against Gen Z and millennials because of concerns about their work ethic.

While employers appreciate the institutional memory and loyalty of older workers, she says, they also are concerned that much older employees may suffer from "too many types of infirmaries that prohibit them from working." One potential outcome, she explains, is that discrimination lawsuits tie together age and disability claims for older individuals with underlying, disabling medical conditions.

How to stay out of court

But there are ways to avoid litigation. Jodka suggests that HR execs be mindful of what determines a *prima facie* case of age discrimination in their location. In some cases, for example, she says, circuit courts consider an age spread of at least 10 years between the person filing a wrongful-termination claim and their replacement as a key criterion for moving forward with the case.

Other preventive measures include properly documenting subpar performance, as well as training supervisors and managers to have difficult conversations about failing to meet expectations, she says. However, she cautions that HR policies and procedures also must be in place to address all employment conflicts head on so that sales targets or quality control aren't undermined.

Apart from employing fairness and transparency in hiring, promoting and terminating employees, Remington believes it's supremely important for all HR practices to be consistent. She recalls a case years ago that involved a hospital system that was able to show that a certain objective skill was required in every one of the previous 20 or so RN positions that had been filled. As such, the discrimination claim was quickly dismissed after the hospital filed a motion for summary judgment.

One organization in the healthcare field that has been proactive about preventing such litigation is Northwell Health, whose HR department has its share of staffers who began their careers as lawyers. They include Maxine Carrington, Northwell's senior vice president and chief human resources officer, and Vicki R. Kahaner, vice president of employee relations.

Vicki Kahaner

"Having the legal background just made that a lot easier for me to be able to look at a case and understand the parameters that I need to look at to determine whether or not we've crossed the line or if it's unsubstantiated," says Kahaner, noting that employees are openly encouraged to report any wrongdoing.

Few may argue with the supposition that mounting litigation over workplace issues will keep general counsels and HR execs alike busy for the foreseeable future. "There has been an onslaught of lawsuits since COVID to the point of turning clients away because we just have so much work," Jodka quips.

Bruce Shutan is a freelance writer based in Portland, Ore.

Benefits

Using Collective PTO to Combat Burnout

Why some companies are embracing companywide vacation periods.

BY KATHRYN MAYER

Like most companies, tech firm Momentive—formerly SurveyMonkey—noticed the toll the pandemic is taking on its employees.

"We saw this persistent theme of fatigue and exhaustion and [employees] having a lot on their plate with minimal outlet," says Becky Cantieri, Momentive's chief people officer. The company's employee surveys confirmed it. Employees were stressed out, but they weren't taking much of their paid time off, instead holding onto it in hopes they would soon travel or do something more meaningful with it.

In response, the tech firm decided to do something that would force all of its 1,500 employees to take a break with little guilt attached: close down the office and give all of its workers a summer week off. It did so July 5-9, giving the team a chance to "rest, recharge, regroup and catch their breath a bit," Cantieri says.

Momentive isn't alone: Companies including Bumble, Mailchimp, LinkedIn, Podium, Guild Education and more all recently closed down for a week, while organizations like SAP and Thomson Reuters have embraced company-wide mental health days, all an effort to alleviate employee stress and take aim at burnout, which is plaguing workers— and employers—all over the nation.

"From an HR or benefits standpoint, you're trying to maximize the return on investment that you give to your people," explains Katie Morrow, Podium's senior director of people operations. "This is one of the very best—it feels like for everybody, there's a collective sense of relief and energy that comes back when they return."

Momentive's week off came in addition to employees' individual paid time off, paid holidays and another office closure between Christmas and New Year's. "The beauty of the recharge is, for the most part, the entire company shuts down," Cantieri says. "Email traffic comes to a screeching halt, no meetings are scheduled—it [gives employees] the ability to turn it off, knowing that everybody else is turning it off too."

Taking aim at stress, burnout

Research shows burnout and other mental health ailments are continuing to soar as a result of nearly a year-and-a-half of the pandemic and its associated challenges. More than four in 10 employees (44%) say they are more burned out on the job today compared to a year ago, according to a recent survey of 2,800 workers from global staffing firm Robert Half. Nearly half of employees experiencing increased fatigue (49%) blame it on a heavier workload.

"Running on empty can have a negative effect on employees' mental health and wellbeing, and managers should make it a priority to encourage their teams to enjoy a well-deserved vacation," says Paul McDonald, senior executive director at Robert Half.

Employees widely, though, haven't been taking much time off. Last summer, 44% of U.S. employees didn't use any paid time off, according to data from ValuePenguin. Plus, taking individual paid time off often comes at a price, Morrow says.

"A lot of times when you go on vacation, it feels like you're making this tradeoff of having a week off but then coming back to a crazy-full inbox and being bombarded with internal messages on Slack when you're out," she says.

Robin White, Mailchimp's chief people and culture officer, agrees.

"Getting everybody away at the same time removes a lot of that burden that sometimes people still feel when they're taking vacation, but they are still checking in, they're concerned about how that project is or if their boss is sending general communications and they feel they should respond," White says.

'The most refreshing break'

Employers that have embraced the benefit are quick to tout its success. Mailchimp piloted a collective break for its 1,200 employees when it closed down for a full week last year between Christmas and New Year's.

The reaction was overwhelmingly positive. "People were giving us feedback like, 'This was the most refreshing break I've ever had,' so it really hit home for us," White says. It was such a success that Mailchimp closed down its office again in July.

And employee feedback at Momentive has been more than positive, Cantieri says. The company's benefits and perks survey—conducted once a year heading into open enrollment and defining offerings for the upcoming year—found that time off is the most highly valued perk and benefit. Employees specifically mentioned the summer recharge. "They're already campaigning to keep it for 2022," she says. "In my universe, that's what success looks like."

HR leaders say getting everyone away at the same time is especially important given the new stresses and challenges that accompany remote work, including longer hours, fewer breaks and difficulty drawing a line between their personal and professional lives, research shows.

"It's a different kind of energy," White says of working from home. "It can be draining in some ways. People spend a lot of time on Zoom calls— that's a different type of focus and energy than if you're in the office."

While handfuls of companies turned to collective PTO for the first time this year, Podium, a tech start-up with about 950 employees, has embraced it since 2017 and has seen its benefits for years.

"[The collective week off] is just a really great way to make sure that, while everybody was out, they were truly able to take a break and step away, then come back refreshed and ready to run toward our second half of the year goals. So far, it's been something that people truly value, and that's a lot of the reason we started and also continue to do it," Morrow says.

For Podium, the breaks have boosted employees' mental health—and surprisingly, their social health too.

Morrow says one unexpected result has been a greater sense of camaraderie between workers. Employees share pictures of their vacations or what they're doing on their time away in a Slack channel so they "get to share a piece of themselves outside of work, whether it's their family or unique hobby," Morrow says. Groups of employees have even traveled together during the break.

"There's a lot of community and culture that happens when everybody takes the same time," she says. "It creates really deep relationships."

A growing trend

Although there are some things to work out, implementing a company weeklong vacation isn't difficult and has had caused few to no disturbances to business, HR leaders attest. Vital operations—like client or customer support—are handled by a handful of employees who then take another week off shortly after.

"If [organizations] are nervous about it, they can always start with extending a weekend to a three-day weekend or a four-day weekend and that could be a really great way to get people breaks during the summer without having to commit to a full week," Morrow says.

It's a trend that may grow as more employers embrace it and report positive results. In addition to combatting burnout—one of employers' biggest challenges right now—it ultimately could also help in the battle to retain and attract talent.

"We almost have 15 months of pent-up attrition. Employees could leave unless we position ourselves as a very progressive, forward-looking employer," Mailchimp's White says. "It's certainly a good idea for organizations to have collective time to shut their operations down, once a year, twice a year–whatever makes sense—or have a closure over a holiday or a slow time. I think there's a lot of opportunity to play in this space."

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

The World is Going Hybrid. Now What?

Strategizing for a post-pandemic hybrid workplace requires unique considerations.

BY JULIE COOK RAMIREZ

Even as concerns over the Delta variant continue to rise, many organizations are confident the worst of the pandemic is behind us and are rapidly planning for the long-awaited "return to work." While some CEOs are expecting that to mean a return to the traditional office setting, it's becoming increasingly obvious that many companies are going to be adapting to a "more flexible, forgiving work environment," according to a recent report by the Josh Bersin Academy.

"CEOs and their very top executive teams are accustomed to having face-to-face interactions with people, so their expectation is that the recovery from the pandemic will be a big reentry into the offices," says Josh Bersin, founder and dean of the Josh Bersin Academy and a keynoter at the upcoming HR Technology Conference. "Employees are saying, 'Wait a minute, I was very productive during the last year-and-a-half and I'd like to keep doing what I'm doing,' so there's a bit of a tug of war going on."

Once considered code for "not working," Bersin says, the pandemic broke the stigma of working from home and taught employers that it can work. As the job market grows more competitive, employers are having to reevaluate their attitude toward remote work. Already, points out Bersin, the second-most-common "location" for job postings on LinkedIn is "remote."

Yet, not all organizations are sold on the idea of an entirely remote workforce. Consequently, many are looking to a hybrid work environment where employees work in the office on certain days and remotely on others. In the Josh Bersin Academy's *Hybrid Work Playbook*, researchers write that there's no clear model for this new world of hybrid work. However, simply "repurposing legacy policies on remote work" is unlikely to be sufficient.

"Before the pandemic, remote work or work-at-home days were considered a bit of a joke," says Bersin. "Now, it's much more mainstream. We've learned a lot of good things about remote work during the pandemic and, as companies look to shift to a hybrid work environment, they should look upon it as a future-forward design opportunity, not a return-to-work exercise."

As HR leaders seek to formulate their company's hybrid work strategies, Bersin recommends they operate in cross-functional teams, bringing in senior leaders, IT, facilities, safety, legal and management. They should also involve employees in the design and implementation. After all, he says, they are the customer of hybrid work.

McLean, Va.-based Mars Inc. established a team focused solely on the future of work. According to Nuno Gonçalves, global head of strategic capabilities building, the team has been "listening and interviewing and conducting focus groups and surveys to understand where we are collectively and to co-create this future." Because the global food and pet care company operates in approximately 50 countries, the timing of its transition to a hybrid work environment is going to vary based on vaccination rates in each location, according to Gonçalves. In Portugal, for example, where he lives, just 20% of the population had been vaccinated as of mid-June. With vaccination rates in Spain having recently topped 50%, Gonçalves will soon be traveling to Barcelona to meet his boss for the first time. By September, the company hopes to officially begin operating under a hybrid work arrangement.

"We are encouraging somewhere around a 50/50 presence in the office/remote, but we are also providing guidance on what type of work is better done face-to-face and what type of work is better done remotely," says Gonçalves. "We are going to be continuously monitoring our performance as a company and listening to our associates to determine if this is the right strategy or not."

The ability to experiment, learn what works and continuously improve will be crucial for success, says Bersin. Companies can't afford to get stuck in "an endless pursuit of perfection," he says. "Instead, we must adopt agile techniques, such as co-creation, rapid deployment of flexible solutions and sensing and responding quickly to change."

Software company Autodesk plans to measure the success of its new Flexible Workplace Program with 30-, 60- and 90-day assessments, along with soliciting extensive employee feedback.

"This is a multi-year journey and we will continue to test, learn and iterate along the way," says Terry VanQuickenborne, global head of L&OD.

Autodesk's FWP divided the workforce into three groups: office-based, hybrid and home-based. The organization designed the program using its Culture Code—which defines shared values, behaviors and ways of working—as the foundation and later built a set of "FWP Promises," says VanQuickenborne.

"Our promise to our people is multifaceted: to foster an inclusive distributed experience for all, to use our existing company culture as a beacon for future digital and in-person collaboration, and—most importantly—to continue prioritizing the health and wellbeing of our global community," she says.

The majority of the workforce will be hybrid and, as they shift away from a fully remote arrangement—which, she says, leveled the playing field among the entire workforce—it's been important to prioritize their psychological safety, VanQuickenborne says. The company is paying particular attention in this area to underrepresented populations.

"We are emphasizing the importance of building trust and ensuring we continue to build a culture of belonging by providing manager and employees resources focused specifically this," she says, noting Autodesk is also reexamining its talent processes to mitigate for risks involved with potential hybrid and remote work bias.

The organization will also carry over some successful programs it launched to support remote workers. For instance, over the past year-and-a-half Autodesk reconfigured onboarding for new employees—of which it has hired 3,000 since the start of the pandemic—created webinars for managers focused on belonging and inclusion, and debuted "COVID-conscious" workspaces. Its new office in downtown San Francisco offers four floors of flexible workspace that VanQuickenborne says are meant to "create a sense of community and collaboration and whose design was shaped by employee feedback."

Employee feedback has been integral throughout the design of the FWP, she adds. The organization has conducted surveys, listening circles and focus groups and, as the program is rolled out office-by-office, all employees have access to toolkits to support the transition, which include models for determining individual and team arrangements.

"As we move into the 'next normal,' we will leverage the best of what we've learned" since the pandemic started, VanQuickenborne says, and continue to explore new solutions "to ensure that we are meetings the needs of our employees along with the needs of the business."

While Bersin concedes that the world of hybrid work feels uncertain, he points out that HR executives are in a far better place as they plan the transition to a hybrid work model than they were at the beginning of the pandemic when they had to pivot on a dime to a largely remote workforce.

"During the pandemic, most companies went remote through a very rapid design process in which they didn't have a lot of choice," says Bersin. "HR people now have the opportunity to very purposefully design what the hybrid work experience is going to be like, soliciting feedback along the way—so the company lands in a spot where everyone feels comfortable."

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

2 Must-Haves for a Strong Blended Work Plan

Pre-COVID, remote work was embraced only by a handful of employers. Now, of course, that model has grown exponentially due to the pandemic—and it will likely stay that way for the foreseeable future.

"Working from home completely exploded," Nicholas Bloom, William Eberle Professor of Economics at Stanford University and a remote work expert, said this summer during an *HRE* webinar. As the country reopens and employers consider return-to-office plans,

hybrid models of work—in which employees work part-time at home and part-time in the office—will be the most popular trend, he said. Research shows the majority of firms, around 80%, plan to embrace a hybrid work model where employees will work three days in the office and two days at home.

Big-name employers including Apple, Microsoft, JPMorgan Chase and more are on that list. "It makes sense; firms are pretty happy with it and employees really want to work from home," he said.

Further cementing remote work's place: an employee-driven market where employee preference on how they work will surely be listened to by smart employers as they try to retain and attract talent.

"Given how hot the U.S. labor markets are, if you are not offering hybrid, not offering any work-from-home post-pandemic, you're risking losing quite a large number of your employees," Bloom said.

So, how can employers best make the model work going forward? Listening

to employee feedback and utilizing the right technology are two keys, he said.

"Surveys are incredibly important," he said. "You need to find out what employees want. It may seem obvious, but there is a huge variance of what people want," he said, noting that a number of employees want to work in the office full-time, another large number want to work at home full-time and the rest are "somewhere in between" and want to have the hybrid model.

Employee feedback also is important because it allows employers to get data to help explain their decision-making when it comes to work models. "We hear employers complaining about employee complaints and not taking their desires into account," he explained. Collecting data on exactly what they want makes it "much easier to defend your decision."

Meanwhile, embracing the right technology also will ensure remote work's success. Such technology tools as video calls, through providers like Zoom, WebEx and Microsoft Teams, and cloud services, which allow employees to share files or edit documents in real-time, make it fairly seamless for many employees to work remotely. That's different from a decade or two ago when employees relied on

dial-up, setting up conference call numbers and other challenges to working outside of the office.

"If you go back 20 years, working from home was painful," Bloom said. "It was a lot of telephone calls, emailing documents—very slow, very inefficient."

Going forward, there will be even better technology—including virtual reality, better screen-sharing capabilities, better equipment and laptops—that will likely further propel the popularity of remote and hybrid working and make it even easier for both employers and employees. Even since the pandemic began, new tech features emerged that have been helpful for employers, he said.

"Thinking as a company looking to the future, it's clear that technology for working from home is rapidly improving," he said. "A number of things will make this easier in the future."

—*Kathryn Mayer*
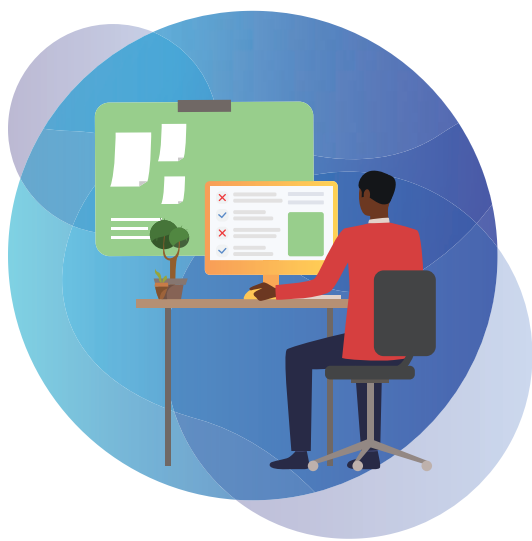
Modern Work Models

70%: Percentage of employers with a flexible work program that plan to adopt a permanent hybrid model

The vast majority of a group of 510 employers with flexible work programs in place since the pandemic began (meaning they have allowed workers to work both at home or in the office) say that post-pandemic they will adopt a hybrid work model—a blend of in-person and remote working (70%), according to data from HR consulting firm Mercer. Meanwhile, 20% will return to a predominately office-based model, and 6% say they will adopt a virtual-first or fully remote model.

What it means for HR leaders
COVID-19 has undoubtedly accelerated the trend of flexible work, although

the model was already popular among employees pre-pandemic.

Although most employers have said they will continue embracing flexible work arrangements during the pandemic and beyond—with research finding that employees have said they will leave their jobs if they don't have the option to work remote—many organizations haven't yet spelled out what that policy would be. Many employers have said they are still deciding how to proceed with their working models.

The new Mercer data, though, find some employers now have a specific plan in place for how they'll approach it. Nearly all (97%) of employers plan to implement post-pandemic changes to

flexible working. Almost half (47%) are actively developing a strategy now and 23% of employers are in the process of implementation or have already implemented plans.

In general, employers are wise to embrace flexible arrangements, including hybrid and remote models, says Ravin Jesuthasan, global leader of Mercer's transformation business and a keynote speaker at the upcoming HR Tech Conference in Las Vegas, especially considering the state of the job market.

"Flexibility will likely have a high impact on an organization's ability

to retain talent," Jesuthasan says. "If an employee isn't satisfied with an employers' flexible working plans, they will likely consider other companies that better meet their needs."

Lauren Mason, principal in Mercer's career business, adds that employers should set guidelines to make it successful: "Employers can and should empower teams to continue to work flexibly but establish guidelines to maximize business outcomes and ensure a consistent employee experience."

—*Kathryn Mayer*

Talent Management

Connecting DEI and EX

Creating a diverse, equitable and inclusive workforce requires HR leaders to integrate DEI strategy into employee experience practices.

BY EMILY STROTHER

Over the past year, many organizations made new or heightened commitments to diversity, equity and inclusion. However, Gartner research shows that organizations are still missing an opportunity to realize a fully diverse and inclusive workforce because they are implementing DEI goals and outcomes separately from those related to employee experience.

According to the *2021 Gartner EVP Employee Survey*, 82% of employees say it is important for their organizations to see them as a person, not just an employee. Yet, only 45% of employees believe their organization actually sees them this way. To be fully satisfied with their experience, most employees want to be able to bring their full selves to work—without negative repercussions.

Traditionally, most organizations invest separately in employee experience improvements—such as onboarding updates and flexible work—and DEI-related investments, including DEI training and diversity recruiting. To have a lasting impact, HR must ensure that organizations integrate DEI into business strategies and talent processes, which can improve the everyday employee experience.

To successfully integrate DEI and employee experience, HR leaders should focus on four key areas:

Use personas to recognize where employees might not feel included

Employee personas—fictional characters created as proxies for certain segments of employees with shared characteristics, priorities, challenges, motivations, behaviors and goals—can serve as an effective tool to help capture a holistic understanding of what different employees value and how they are included as part of the organization's culture. Organizations can use employee personas to help employees reflect and change behaviors that inhibit others from bringing their full selves to work, ultimately better enabling inclusion and belonging.

HR LEADERSHIP   By Eva Sage-Gavin/Columnist

Future Foresight is Key for Bold Leadership

We've all heard the saying "hindsight is 20/20." That's true, but after what we all went through in the year 2020, is it enough?

Instead of solely looking to the past for answers, leaders are increasingly expected to anticipate—even design—the future. It seems to me that bold leadership in 2021, and beyond, centers less around the lessons of history and more around anticipating what's to come.

I've been so inspired to see how the brightest minds and boldest thinkers in business have embraced the fast and furious changes we're all experiencing. Transformations that might have taken years are now happening in months or even weeks. Leaders in this brand-new era must be open to brand new ways of doing things.

The companies that are breaking through are often the ones proactively revisiting and reinventing notions about what is possible. Transformation is happening most successfully when CEOs and CHROs are focused on the future, clear about the big bets that are key and aligned to act—fast.

So, how can leaders hone this "future foresight"?

New research from Accenture offers signals of business change for leaders who are navigating this massive transformation and strategies for how to make it work in practice. An "interactive radar" allows users to scan which signals matter most to different executives across the C-suite. I wasn't surprised to discover that both CEOs and CHROs have two of these signals in their sights: learning from the future and pushed to the edge.

The first focuses on the power of analytics and AI to help predict the future and the second on how leaders are pushing power to the "edges" of their organizations. Together, these themes, particularly in terms of their impact on talent, sharpen future foresight.

Put your money where your mission is

The companies that have mastered learning from the future are the ones that approach it as a central strategic pillar—seeing investments in predictive capabilities as essential to and part of the broader corporate strategy. It's heartening to see that 88% of C-suite survey respondents in recent Accenture research said that using more forward-looking analysis to better predict and respond to future events will be important to success.

Often, that will mean a member of the C-suite has to lead the way in embracing and evangelizing transformation.

Indeed, the respondents to our survey whose organizations excel in this area were 26% more likely to have a member of the C-suite directly accountable for developing their firms' ability to learn from the future.

Think outside the box

Anticipating a range of future possibilities demands that we begin focusing on the questions, not the answers. A "clean sheet" approach can seem overwhelming, but it's also liberating and boosts creative thinking.

Technology can help, but there's also much work to be done in terms of transforming organizational culture and the mindsets that can really hold us back.

To me, this is where "edge organizations" come into play: The idea that it's the people closest to the edges—to clients, customers or work—who often have the answers or at least the right questions.

Indeed, 71% of survey respondents said that they have already, or are planning to, decentralize decision-making in parts of their business. That's good news because expanding decision-making and accountability from top to bottom and edge to edge can help bring diverse perspectives to the table.

Talent, talent, talent

For me, it always comes back to talent and people. We simply won't be able to execute any of this if our teams aren't on board. This is of particular concern these days when there is a shortage of workers and we are experiencing what has been called "the great resignation," with millions of Americans leaving their jobs.

How do we keep people in the workforce, particularly when there's uneven supply and demand by industry? Redesigning structure and decision-making processes demands rethinking the skills of the workforce.

People will not only need high EQs to succeed in new roles, but they will also need excellent "creativity quotients" (CQs), "technology quotients" (TQs) and "sustainability quotients" (SQs). We must empower our people to make choices based on their strengths and interests and equip them with the training and tools to chart their own courses.

As many have said, "The best way to predict the future is to create it." Now is the time for leaders to do just that.

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.

Let's make the workplace worth smiling about.

HR solutions that will keep your people happy.

ÜKG

Our purpose is people

Learn more at UKG.com/why-ukg

Delta is Changing the Game for HR

With the highly contagious variant continuing to spread, HR leaders are rethinking office returns and other strategies.

BY KATHRYN MAYER

Like many employers, software company Paylocity had moved its employees remote due to COVID-19 early last year. Some of its employees had returned to the office by summer, and with COVID-19 cases on the decline and the country moving toward a new normal, the company was planning to officially reopen its offices for its workers after Labor Day.

But the Delta variant—the highly contagious COVID strand that is surging in much of the country—is changing those plans.

Cheryl Johnson

"We have now put a pause on that and said, 'Hey, let's put it out until October and keep an eye on what's going on,' " says the firm's CHRO, Cheryl Johnson. "The Delta variant is something myself and the senior leaders are keeping a very, very close eye on."

Paylocity is among the scores of employers that have reexamined and changed their return-to-office plans in recent weeks. After widely embracing remote work for well over a year, a number of organizations had planned for a return to the office in September. Now those plans are being put off, at least by companies that can continue with remote workers. Twitter made the decision to close its re-opened offices in New York and San Francisco, as well as to pause future office re-openings. Facebook announced it will delay its plan to return U.S. employees to their office until January 2022. Many others, including Apple and Google, delayed their return dates from September to October.

"As Delta variant cases rise, some businesses that can operate with remote employees are delaying return-to-work plans based on guidance from the CDC and local health officials," says Traci Fiatte, CEO, professional and staffing at Randstad USA.

The change comes in the midst of other alterations happening rapidly because of the COVID surge: After the CDC reversed its mask guidance—now recommending wearing them in most indoor places—most employers are mandating mask-wearing in offices after allowing vaccinated workers to shed them in previous months. And more employers are getting

Traci Fiatte

more aggressive about their vaccination push, with employers like Tyson Foods, Microsoft, United Airlines, IBM and more now requiring inoculation against COVID-19 for their workers.

These changes of plans—including pushing back a return to the office—are not only the safest strategy in keeping employees healthy, they also are the smartest one to retain workers, experts say.

Recent research show employees—even vaccinated ones—are growing fearful of the Delta variant, with many saying their biggest concern about returning to the office is a fear of getting sick. Not listening to employee concerns, and neglecting health and safety, is a surefire way to lose workers, especially in a hot talent market where companies are struggling to keep and hire workers.
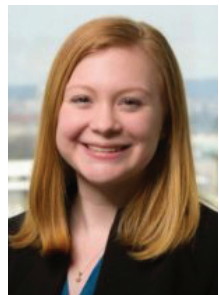
"COVID safety is especially important given today's tight talent market," Fiatte says. She notes that a recent study from software firm Nulab finds that workers who felt unsafe at their jobs due to COVID were three times more likely to look for another opportunity.

Engaging with employees and finding out what they want and need to feel safe is key for employer success—as is continued open dialogue, Fiatte says.

"Top companies are embracing agility when developing return-to-work plans in the midst of changing health guidelines. Companies should consider surveying employees to determine their priorities and comfort levels about in-person work," she says. "Leaders should also frequently communicate return-to-work plans to provide employees with the most up-to-date information."

Yet, Gartner research shows less than 40% of organizations have experimented with or plan to create employee personas.

Emily Strother

Progressive HR functions can utilize personas to highlight challenges employees report having when bringing their full selves to work. These personas can then be used to challenge employees to understand their colleagues and identify actions they and their teams can take to increase overall inclusion. For example, as businesses navigate their return-to-the-workplace plans, personas can help leaders and managers anticipate and mitigate employee feelings, fears and challenges about returning to the workplace.

Map employee journeys to identify bias in the employee life cycle

Employee journey maps serve to visually track how employees engage in common, day-to-day experiences across the employee life cycle, an example being new employee onboarding. The onboarding journey map consists of the orientation session, setting up technology and joining a team meeting.

Interestingly, Gartner research shows only half of organizations have started mapping employees' journeys or plan on doing so. This is a missed opportunity, as journey maps allow organizations to identify gaps between the actual and desired employee experience.

Analyzing journey maps through a DEI lens, specifically, allows HR leaders to identify the touchpoints where employees may experience bias, which stakeholder is accountable for the employee experience at that stage and how employees feel during that experience. A remote employee, for example, might feel the onboarding process is biased if new hire trainings are exclusive to on-site employees.

More importantly, examining how employees connect—or don't—with DEI efforts as a part of the employee experience can increase empathy and create a way for HR professionals to evaluate whether and where change is needed within an organization.

Equip managers to foster psychological safety

Psychological safety is the shared belief that members of a team feel comfortable taking interpersonal risks. HR professionals building a more diverse and inclusive environment must be thoughtful in their approach to creating an environment that is safe for all employees to contribute within.

Employees must feel empowered and comfortable sharing their whole selves with their teams; this is where psychological safety plays an integral part in the employee experience. After all, psychological safety has been linked to significant workplace benefits, such as higher levels of learning, innovation, teamwork and employee authenticity.

HR can promote better psychological safety by helping managers have more effective conversations. For instance, managers should ask employees for their input, then acknowledge, celebrate and contemplate that input and provide closure that follows up on employees' concerns and questions. HR must also work with managers on how to clarify roles and expectations, listen to employees, trust their employees and transparently discuss mistakes and concerns.

Boost employee participation in ERGs or real talks

Typically, most organizations provide two ways for employees to come together with their peers and share their diverse experiences: employee resource groups (ERGs) and real talks.

ERGs—also known as affinity groups, business networks and people networks—bring together employees in the workplace based on shared characteristics or life experiences. Common examples include groups for women, racial or ethnic minorities, the LQBTQ+ community and veterans. Real talk conversations are sessions that encourage all employees to participate in frank discussions on potentially difficult topics that help foster empathy and belonging. Both of these tactics help create a safe, empathetic and actionable space for employees to share their own voices and elevate those of their peers.

HR leaders should communicate with managers and employees to ensure they are aware of opportunities to improve their employee experience through these communities and events. They should also enable managers to talk to employees about these opportunities and follow up with managers and teams after ERG and real talk participation.

Progressive organizations are embedding DEI into employee experience strategies to ensure they are inextricably linked for employees—regardless of whether they are remote, in an office or merely catching up over coffee with a colleague.

Emily Strother is senior principal, research in the Gartner HR Practice.

Q&A
ON TECHNOLOGY

Christina Cutlip
Senior Managing Director
Institutional Financial Services,
TIAA

Q: What are the biggest challenges facing HR leaders today as far as HR technology is concerned?

A: Our clients and our people leaders are focused on how to optimize technology to accommodate an increase in flexible work arrangements. Everything must be considered, from the basic VPN to special equipment required for effective virtual appointments. With increased flexibility comes increased risk. Use of home networks to retrieve work emails and data is of real concern. Balancing safety and ease of access to pertinent but also sensitive information is key. Additionally, having a solid IT support system for both on- and off-site associates is imperative. Much like the institutions we serve, we want associates to be able to serve clients and do their jobs efficiently, but with a safety-first mindset.

Q: Where do you expect to see HR leaders focusing their attention in the coming months as they attempt to address those challenges?

A: Working with human resource leaders from a wide range of institutions and sizes gives us insight into how a variety of organizations are moving forward. As TIAA transitions to a hybrid model of work, where associates are spending part of their time working remotely and part of their time working in the office, continuing to prioritize information security is crucial. We've all seen the stories about ransomware and other cyberattacks and no one wants to be the next headline. Maintaining the right cybersecurity protocols, the technology and—most importantly—the team to support it all are essential. We've been using technology to collaborate with clients and colleagues for years. Through the pandemic, we've relied on those same applications for seamless transition to fulltime remote work. We'll continue to focus on collaboration among teams who might not be within the same four walls, or even the same time zone.

Q: What areas of employee HR technology are especially ripe for innovation?

A: From apps that allow associates to reserve desk or collaboration space in the office to increased data security offerings, HR technology will likely see innovation across a wide range of services that promote and enable collaborative work in offices designed for flexibility. Additionally, as institutions focus on the overall wellbeing of their employees, there's real opportunity for continuing education on personal technology security and using updated safety tools such as voice biometrics, as well as increased awareness of phishing/vishing schemes. The broader acceptance of technology opens up opportunities for HR to innovate and improve efficiencies by eliminating manual processes, provide broader educational opportunities focused on closing systemic gaps like financial and health education, and collaborate with outside business partners to provide a wide range of educational opportunities for employees.

Q&A
ON TECHNOLOGY

Elisabeth Giammona
HR Manager
Envoy

Q: What are the biggest challenges facing HR leaders today as far as HR technology is concerned?

A: One of the most exciting developments in HR has been the proliferation of new technologies and tools. But this increase in tools also leaves HR teams asking the question: Should we invest in one platform that does a lot of things decently, or many specialized tools that do one thing well? Most small or quickly growing companies don't meet the size requirements of an all-in-one HRIS, so we have had to rely on multiple tools. This presents the challenge of finding technologies that integrate and ways to combine all the data collected from the different HR and workplace platforms to better understand and serve our workforce. As the HR technology market has exploded, the ability to connect data from different systems hasn't kept up.

This becomes even more important in a hybrid work environment where employees—and HR teams—are working differently than they had in the past. We need HR technology to help understand how and where people are working and then allow us to make smart recommendations and programs that meet employees where they are. For example, as we think about offering relevant, meaningful benefits to employees—whether they are in office, remote or hybrid—we need technology that helps us develop, manage and administer those benefits in a scalable way.

Today, HR professionals are grappling with a suite of disconnected tools, plus increased compliance and reporting requirements as employees are more and more dispersed. Not to mention, we need to continue supporting employees with career growth, learning and development, preventing burnout, mental health and more. To manage all of this, we need connected HR technology that can ease our administrative burdens so we can focus on providing partnership and support for our workforce.
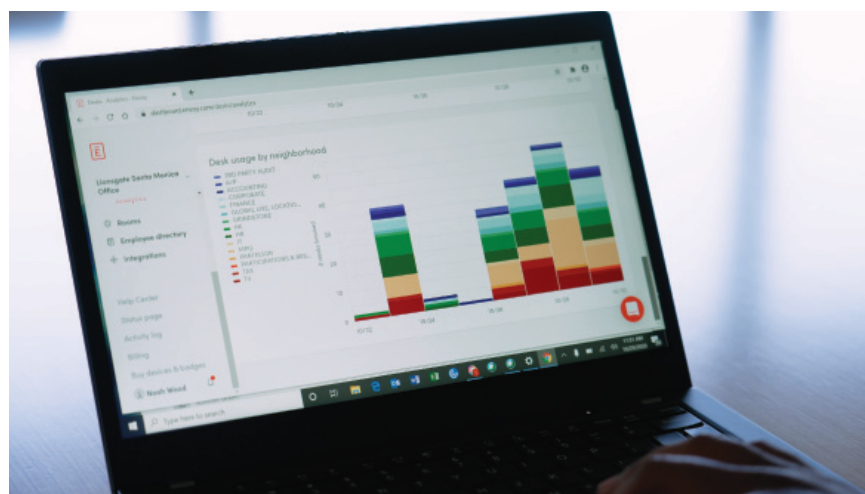
Q: Where do you expect to see HR leaders focusing their attention in the coming months as they attempt to address those challenges?

A: HR leaders will be working in real-time to understand the impact of the evolving new normal.

Before COVID, we all had a pretty standard work rhythm. Most of us went into the office five days a week. We dealt with a commute and had an assigned desk where anyone could find us.

During the pandemic, we became green dots on Slack that showed we were online. Since no one knew when restrictions would be lifted, many of us just dealt with the inadequacies of our work environment.

As workplaces reopen, many employees will be hybrid and we will need to adapt and figure out the new rhythms. HR leaders should focus their attention on supporting employees with the continued evolution of where and how they work in meaningful, modern ways—and they'll be relying on connected HR technologies to do so.

Q: What areas of employee HR technology are especially ripe for innovation?

A: Data analysis and reporting within HRIS is very basic in most systems. If we're lucky, we get top-line information about employee populations, tenure, engagement or turnover. As HR evolves, there's more demand for data, so having technology that keeps up with that evolution will be huge.

Additionally, though it's not the most exciting part of HR, compliance is an area ripe for innovation. With new local, state and federal regulations making compliance even more complicated, HR technology can automate the manual and mundane tasks. This will free up mental space and time for HR professionals to provide more counsel on engagement, performance and growth.

For example, leave management is a sensitive area that is critical for companies to manage. Leaves are typically stressful for employees, managers and HR—and they can often come with a lot of compliance issues and paperwork. Because leaves and disability provisions are so regulated, and because companies overlay their own policies on top of those requirements, it seems like HR technology companies aren't interested in innovating in this area. But ask almost any HR professional and they would tell you simplifying leave management would be a huge weight off their shoulders—and would help reduce risk for the company too.

Rework work

Create a workplace that teams love with Envoy.

Envoy's people-centric platform automates the mundane tasks you need to do to stay in compliance, meet local and CDC guidelines for social distancing, plan capacity, perform contact tracing, and more.

In an Envoy workplace, you don't have to choose between safety and great experiences. You can feel confident welcoming employees and visitors on-site, manage hybrid scheduling, flex your space, and optimize deliveries—all from a single dashboard.

Don't just come back, come back to better.

E Envoy   Make hybrid work

Desks | Rooms | Visitors | Deliveries | Mobile | Protect

Q&A
ON TECHNOLOGY

Ulises I. Orozco
Co-Founder
PTO Genius

Q: What are the biggest challenges facing HR leaders today as far as HR tech is concerned?

A: As companies shifted to remote work in an effort to mitigate the challenges presented by the pandemic, they inadvertently generated a new wave of technical challenges. Often overlooked and deprioritized, digital transformation, cybersecurity and engagement at a distance have now all jumped to the top of the list for the modern HR leader in today's hybrid workforce.

HR will excel if leaders proactively look to leverage new technologies to create secure, responsive and reactive working environments that help employees get work done while prioritizing their health and engagement. Leaders who fail to consider the needs of the hybrid workforce will likely fall behind and feel the impact of delaying in the form of increased churn and lower engagement and retention.

Q: Where do you expect to see HR leaders focusing their attention in the coming months as they attempt to address those challenges?

A: Creating a comprehensive action plan with clear deliverables and KPIs while identifying potential vendors that specialize in modern technologies would be the most impactful use of resources. I expect organizations to leverage their brokers, PEOs and consultants for guidance and leads on innovative solutions and vendors. I also expect HR leaders to hold these vendors to a higher standard than ever before. Security, scalability and reporting capabilities are now "must-have" requirements, not just "nice-to-have" features when vetting solutions. Multi-faceted solutions that creatively address multiple issues will have the advantage as companies look to optimize and turnkey their integrations.

HR leaders will not only turn to their relationships, but will also look to better educate themselves in the basic principles of technologies like artificial intelligence, machine learning and methodologies like predictive modeling and prescriptive analytics.

Q: What areas of employee HR technology are especially ripe for innovation?

A: Anything around wellness and childcare are specifically ripe. We've historically addressed these with on-site gyms and childcare centers but, in the hybrid workforce of today, yesterday's solutions simply don't work.

Zoom yoga classes are a good start, but not enough to truly address the increasingly complex needs of the hybrid employee. We're presented with an opportunity to transform and optimize the role health and wellness have in the workplace and in our lives.

Employees with children are struggling with sending their children back to school. The alternative—keeping the children at home—causes strain on the employees' attention and elongates the workday, further exacerbating and accelerating burnout and stress. I'd be interested in seeing how start-ups are going to potentially address childcare away from the office.

I think someone out there might already have the next big idea in one of these two verticals. I'm interested in seeing how the next wave of creative and nimble entrepreneurs will tackle these problems.

Marketplace

INSIDE HR TECH   By **Steve Boese**/Columnist

Tech's Role in the Skills-Based Market

Most organizations are facing similar challenges in this second half of 2021. Of course, emerging from the pandemic, navigating employee safety and wellbeing, and managing new ways of working are likely still primary concerns. But there is also a second set of HR challenges that, if not at the top of HR's list of priorities, is quite likely very near it. These are some of the talent challenges that were, pre-pandemic, at the front of the HR agenda: improving diversity, equity and inclusion; finding new talent to fill open roles; and helping existing employees develop their skills and see potential opportunities for continued growth in the organization.

Both HR leaders and leading HR technology providers are reexamining these challenges, as the conversation around talent—finding and engaging more diverse talent and developing talent to meet current and future organizational requirements—is transforming to one about skills, the fundamental aspects of an employee profile and job/task role. Simply put, an individual candidate or employee possesses a set of skills that are readily identifiable from their work history, education and other experiences. And most job/role descriptions have a set of requirements listed that any suitable candidate for the role needs to have (so the employer thinks) to be considered for the role, and by extension, to have a chance to succeed in the role. Traditional matching for open roles was initially a review of a resume or CV against a job description, either manually by a recruiter, and, later, via a keyword-matching process inside an ATS: Look at the resume and see if what it literally contains matches closely enough with the text of a job requisition.

But that keyword-matching process, while an improvement over the "gut feeling" of a recruiter or hiring manager, has always had limitations. It highly favors candidates who learn how to "game" the system and stuff their CVs and profiles full of the keywords they expect for them to match the job req. These candidates may then be rated more favorably by an ATS over similarly qualified candidates who simply do not understand the keyword game they are playing.

The process also impedes and lengthens employers' ability to fill open roles. If a new job req states that a very specific technical skill is required and no candidate directly includes that in their CV or profile, then the search for the "right" candidate can go on and on. Finally, the overall process has tended to favor candidates similar in background to prior successful candidates, thus negatively impacting the employer's desires to develop a more diverse workforce. What has been needed is a better way to match talent to roles and then help employees continue to progress.

To meet this need, many HR technology companies have begun to focus on skills as the means for better job matching and enhanced employee development. The basic idea is to ingest a vast number of candidate and employee profiles and use advanced technologies like AI and ML to interpret these profiles primarily looking at job history, and then build a classification system, or ontology of named, specific skills from this data.

Additionally, AI technology is being applied to not only define skills, but also as a prediction mechanism that can evaluate a profile and determine which undisclosed skills a person is likely to have based on their self-identified skills and job history. This helps solve the problem of candidates who do not know how to "game" the system. Finally, these skills technologies can also examine all the roles in the organization and go on to create an overall skills library that allows HR leaders to assess skills their employees possess against skills the organization needs—facilitating more advanced workforce planning and updated recruiting strategies.

There are many benefits of an AI-driven, skills-based approach to talent management in terms of making positive progress in DE&I. AI can remove many human biases that often emerge when a recruiter evaluates a CV: things like a person's name, where they live, the schools they attended, all of which can lead to unfair or unjustified impressions or conclusions. In a skills-centric matching system, only the actual skills matter—not how or where they were acquired. It also helps employers cast a wider net in their search for talent, as these skills technologies help expose skills in candidate populations that previously would have gone undiscovered. And in terms of career development and planning, the newest of these HR tech tools can provide employees dynamic career path options, considering their skills profile, their goals and the skills they need to make progress along their journey.

If you are interested in seeing how this skills-centered approach to talent management is manifesting in HR technology, register for the HR Technology Conference, taking place Sept. 28-Oct. 1 in Las Vegas, where there will be an entire track devoted to learning and reskilling. Placing skills at the center of the talent management conversation is just one of many emerging themes in HR tech, and it's one where I expect continued development in 2021 and beyond.

Steve Boese is chair of HRE's HR Technology Conference & Exposition® Sept. 28-Oct. 1 in Las Vegas. Send questions or comments to hreletters@lrp.com.

It's going to be **EPIC** ...
DON'T MISS IT!

Yesterday's Good Benefits Strategy Won't Work In Today's New Work Reality.

Position Your Benefits Strategy to Drive Maximum Business & People Results Now and Into the Future!

Human Resource Executive®

HEALTH & BENEFITS LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE™

ARIA Resort & Casino
Las Vegas
April 5 - 7, 2022

www.BenefitsConf.com

Get ready for the ultimate reunion of the benefits industry!
Join the ranks of other forward-thinking HR & benefits professionals
at **HBLC 2022** when it returns to Las Vegas for the first time in 3 years!

Secure your spot now with **Promo Code HRE75**
to **SAVE** an **EXTRA $75.00** off the lowest rate!

Stay Connected

in • twitter • f • instagram

#BenefitsConf

Give your **voluntary benefits** a new leash on life

My Pet Protection®

Our most paw-pular coverage plan, now with more options:

- ✓ **Three levels of reimbursement: 50%, 70% and 90%***
- ✓ **Same price for pets of all ages**
- ✓ **Use any vet, anywhere, with no networks**
- ✓ **Optional wellness coverage**
- ✓ **Easy enrollment**

Go to **petinsurance.com/hrexec** or call **877-263-5995** to start offering this benefit.

Nationwide®
is on your side