

HR Trends You Need to Know About

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The workplace in 2020 is now distinguished by a workplace where the rapid pace of change is the new constant in the world of work! This has been exacerbated by the Coronavirus pandemic that has rocked the world. This article compiles some trends that have been observed in previous time that may potentially transform the workforce even further in time to come.

Working from home

The most evident trend in the workforce is that more and more employees are starting to work from home. An April 2020 Gartner report, “9 Tips for Managing Remote Employees”, reveals that almost half (48%) of workers are likely to operate remotely at least part of the time after the COVID-19 pandemic, compared to 30% before the pandemic. The April Gartner CFO Survey showed that after the outbreak, nearly three quarters (i.e. 74%) of CFOs plan to increase remote work at their company. Hiring managers will need to emphasize digital dexterity and digital teamwork skills if they are to thrive in a world of increased remote work. HR needs to understand how the remote work environment affects performance management, in particular how targets are set and how workers are evaluated.

Safety/Protection and Worker Wellbeing

Many companies concerned about the future of work focus on the massive disruption of jobs, automation, and workforce demographics. All of this is important but HR leaders need to start with making worker wellbeing a priority! With the ongoing #BlackLivesMatter protests which have been sparked by the death of George Floyd, safety may become one of employees’ highest priority, whether it concerns their families, coworkers, clients or societies. These protests could create a permanent change in behaviour. Companies should be preparing for a workforce that would demand more empathy, honesty and openness from their leaders, a skill set that leaders need to be able to virtually execute and exhibit. Also, worker wellbeing is impacted by several macro trends such as the growth of the digital economy and the increased need to develop resilience while we are being bombarded by constant social media notifications. The first step is defining worker wellbeing in a holistic way, including physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual lenses. Then identify specific practices that can improve wellbeing. This makes wellbeing tangible rather than an abstract concept.

Differentiation of critical skills and critical roles

Leaders are redefining what critical means to include: employees in critical strategic roles, employees with critical skills and employees in critical workflow roles.

“Separating critical skills from critical roles shifts the focus to coaching employees to develop skills that

potentially open multiple avenues for them, rather than focusing on preparing for a specific next role,” said Emily Rose McRae, director in the Gartner HR practice. “Organizations should reevaluate their succession plans and may expand the range of roles considered as part of the development path for a given role’s potential future successors.”

HR leaders are encouraged to consider the following

- Current and Future Leadership - Re-evaluate which positions require succession planning and strengthen possible successor growth pathways.
- Critical skills and competencies - When thinking about succession planning HR leaders should consider motivating workers to build critical competencies that increase their options instead of merely just preparing them for the specific next job.
- Future of work - Reengineer workforce planning to focus on critical skills versus critical roles.
- Talent agility: Offer workers in critical positions who lack essential skills greater career development support.

Prepare for a New Blended Workforce

When we think of the blended workforce, we often think of full-time workers working side by side with contract and gig workers. In 2020 when we refer to the "blended workforce," we mean humans and bots working together.

Research among 8,370 global HR leaders, hiring managers and employees conducted by Oracle and Future Workplace found that half (50%) of workers already use some form of A.I. at work, up from 32% in 2018. As Gartner predicts, by 2021 25% of workers will use a virtual employee assistant (VEA) daily, an increase from less than 2% in 2019. This includes Amazon Alexa for Business and an array of conversational bots used for all types of HR processes. Knowing how to orient, develop, engage, and work side by side with a bot will be the newest skillset for 2020, as human and bot teams will work together and, in many cases, outperform either humans or bots working on their own! How you orient, develop and engage your

Focus on Building Ethical AI

A key issue for companies will be to use AI ethically and responsibly. Beyond understanding emerging laws governing AI, HR leaders must be prepared for issues related to employee data privacy. In the Oracle and Future Workplace research, AI @ Work, conducted among 8,370 global HR leaders, employees and managers 80% of employees shared their company should ask permission before gathering data on them using AI and 71% said they are at least sometimes concerned that there will be more data security breaches as companies use AI in the workplace.

Consider Soft Skills to Be Power Skills

As more routine tasks are taken over by AI in the workplace, as depicted in McKinsey's Global Institute

report, Jobs Lost and Jobs Gained, there will be an increased need for workers to hone their soft skills. These include a combination of soft skills, critical thinking, and digital skills. Taken together, these skills are the new expectation for employability in 2020 and beyond.

Audit Your Workplace Environment for Physical, Emotional, and Environmental Attributes

When you think about creating a healthy workplace environment, you probably think of fitness centres, standing desks, or even meditation rooms. These are just some of the workplace benefits that make up the \$3.6 million spent on workplace wellness in 2019. But is any of it paying off?

Future Workplace and View recently surveyed 1,601 workers across in America to figure out which wellness perks matter most to them and how these perks impact productivity. Surprisingly, the results showed that employees want the basics first: better air quality, access to natural light, and the ability to personalize their workspace. Half of the employees surveyed said poor air quality makes them sleepier during the day, and more than a third reported up to an hour in lost productivity as a result. We can look to adopt some of the survey's findings in the workplace in Africa.

Explore Virtual Reality for Corporate Training

Virtual Reality (VR) may not have reached its potential yet, but it is growing in corporate training. According to ABI Research: the VR training market will reach \$6.3B by 2022. VR based training can be used for a range of training as diverse as safety training, customer service training, leadership development, and re-inventing the employee experience. Research is showing that immersive learning can facilitate behaviour change in developing new skills in the workplace.

Recruit for Skills Rather Than College Pedigree

More companies are piloting skills-based hiring or the practice of setting specific skills and competency requirements for a job rather than only looking at a candidate's credentials. Many companies realize they need to tap into new sources and relax some of the requirements they held in the past to find candidates for open positions. According to GlassDoor, companies as varied as Apple, Bank of America, Google, and Nordstrom will now consider and hire candidates without a college degree.

Research conducted by Wiley Educational Services and Future Workplace with 600 HR Leaders found the majority of companies are open to hiring "non-traditional workers." More than half (53%) would hire someone with some college coursework but no degree, or a person who had not attended college but earned industry certification (52%), while only 10% said they would not hire someone who didn't have a college degree. (Wiley/Future Workplace Study).

Make Your Workplace Experience a Top Priority

Workplace experience is the application of user experience to the workplace, re-imagining the physical,

digital, and cultural aspects of work. This "employee as customer mindset" requires a total re-thinking of the moments that matter to segments of employees – those starting their first day on the job to those exiting the organization. Work needs to be as frictionless, digital, and personalized as the rest of our lives.

HR leaders at companies ranging from IBM Airbnb to HP are executing on this by forming cross-functional teams of HR, Real Estate, and IT and developing a shared vision to identify moments that matter to various segments of workers. As the workplace experience becomes more of a priority, we will see more HR leaders creating personalized employee experiences.

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