2022

EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT **TRENDS & FORECASTS**

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2022 Inspirus Trends & Forecasts Introduction

We're pleased to present our 2022 Inspirus Trends & Forecasts Report. The 2021 report was met with great enthusiasm, and we'd like to send a heartfelt thanks to everyone who reached out to us to express their delight. The 2022 edition builds on that momentum, continuing to deliver fresh insights, unique perspectives, actionable strategies and best practices.

If Q4 was any indication of what we'll encounter in 2022 and beyond, we're seeing a marked increase in employee engagement programs specifically tied to employee retention goals. By now you've likely heard of the "Great Resignation," a term coined by Anthony Klotz, an organizational psychologist at Texas A&M University. In short, a record number of employees quit their jobs in 2021 — 4.3 million in August and another 4.5 million reported in November. Why? The global pandemic has made workers reevaluate what they are actually getting out of their jobs — or more pointedly — what they aren't. Most are not feeling valued, not being acknowledged for their hard work, or aren't sharing a sense of purpose or community with their peers or their employer. The shining light we see is that organizations witnessing this phenomenon are recognizing the need to invest in employee experience and engagement programs to retain their employees and mitigate their attrition rates. Bravo!
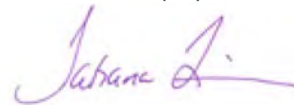
This report uses the collective wisdom and thought leadership of our Inspirus team to reveal what we see as trending now and our vision of how these trends impact the future of our industry and our clients' programs. And, as a part of the multinational Sodexo Group, we're able to layer in insights that drive quality of life from the prestigious Sodexo Quality of Life Institute. Our comprehensive findings have been divided into the nine critical dimensions of rewards and recognition programs.

For example, in the area of strategy we're seeing a critical need for organizations to find a balance between their on-site business needs and the needs of their employees (who desire remote flexibility). We offer some 'back to the office' strategies to entice workers who must perform business-critical tasks in the workplace. We've also found companies are still struggling to weave diversity, equity and inclusion into the fabric of their organization. It's happening, slowly, but needs to happen as part of a concerted strategy and not simply as an inspirational vision.
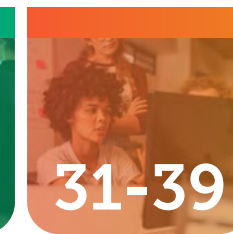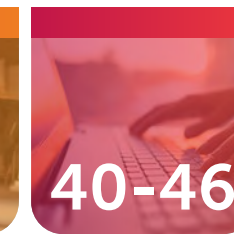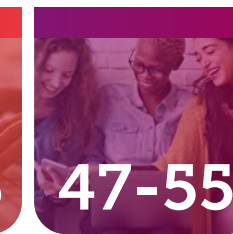
Regarding leadership, we see the need to address employee anxiety around returning to work — and to do so with empathy. There's much talk about the "new normal" and what that means to different organizations. Unfortunately, anything resembling "normal" might not happen for some time. But leadership can reshape how we work, and communicate why we work, to foster a sense of belonging and promote community.

These are just a tiny fraction of our findings — there are many more in the pages that follow. I hope you find this report holds value for you and your organization.

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TRENDING

Balancing Remote Work Flexibility (for the Employee) with On-site Business Needs (for the Company)

The forced exodus of many employees to their homes to work during the pandemic has changed the work experience forever. After months of working from their homes, many employees are reluctant to return to their physical workspaces. While some employers are taking a hard line approach and *requiring* all employees to come back, or else, others are being more practical.

> In the face of what is being called the "Great Resignation" or the "turnover tsunami," how organizations successfully address this challenge will be critical to their sustainability.

Still, while employers certainly need to consider employee needs and preferences, they must also ensure that they are adequately addressing business needs. How can you strike the right balance for your organization and your employees? Here, we look at some strategies for enticing employees back into the workplace, as needed, for business-critical tasks.

Craft a back-to-work strategy

Things have changed during the pandemic. That means that the way you worked before the pandemic isn't likely to be the way you work after. As you begin bringing employees back to the workplace, it's important to think strategically about exactly who needs to be on-site, who can work remotely, and how to ensure these decisions are consistent and equitable.

Some jobs simply can't be done off-site — at least for now; manufacturing jobs,

for instance. Some people don't have the competencies to work productively in a remote environment. Your policies and processes for determining who can and who can't work remotely need to consider both the work that needs to be done, and the competencies required for completing those tasks.

Once you've created that strategy, it's important to communicate it transparently and broadly to all employees. Make the process of transitioning back as clear and straightforward as possible to help employees prepare, and to ensure they understand the business rationale behind your decisions.

Offer a place of community

In a hybrid work environment — where some employees are on-site, and some are working virtually — it's important to find ways to create and build connections so everyone feels connected and engaged. Without the proverbial water cooler, providing a centralized place to gather will build community by allowing employees to interact with, engage, collaborate and recognize each other. Employee engagement platforms, like Inspirus® Connects, bring people together to share, collaborate, and give feedback wherever they may be physically located.

Motivating using rewards and recognition

Recognition is one of the most powerful drivers of engagement, and it's the secret to sustainable success. Employees want to be recognized and rewarded for their efforts, and companies are wise to do so. Using rewards and recognition send signals not only to the employees being recognized, but to others as well — it's a

Balancing Remote Work Flexibility, cont.

clear way of conveying what the company values and highlighting best practices and top performers. Encouraging the right behaviors at your organization — like diversity and inclusion, leadership, safety, health and well-being, and innovation — encourages them to be repeated, and will elevate performance and increase productivity.

Automating that process can help. Using a technology-enabled platform provides a user-friendly, central repository where all employees, their supervisors and managers, as well as HR leaders, can interact, collaborate, celebrate accomplishments, and share and receive recognition.

> While feedback from supervisors and managers is valuable, peer-to-peer feedback is said to be even more powerful!

Communicate consistently, and with transparency

Communication has always been a critical factor in ensuring employee engagement. In a hybrid work world though, it has become even more apparent just how important communication is to ensure both engagement and productivity.

The uncertain business and social environment has also heightened the need for communication and transparency to ensure employees are up-to-date and informed about company goals and objectives, health and safety practices, opportunities for employee development, work-life balance and more.

Focus on diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) to represent all employees

DEI has become top-of-mind at most organizations these days. Every employee is unique — every employee reflects some element of diversity. Recognizing and celebrating that diversity, and ensuring that all employees have the opportunity to be heard, is critical for ensuring engagement and longevity.

Organizations are doing a variety of things to build DEI. For instance:

- **Building a strong pipeline of diverse employees,** starting with recruitment. Casting a wide net, using recruitment channels that focus on specific types of candidates, building diverse interview panels, etc., are all effective ways to ensure that diverse candidates are joining the organization.
- **Using employee resource groups (ERG)** to provide forums for employees with similar characteristics and interests to come together. These can range from groups for employees with various ethnic backgrounds (e.g., Asian American, American Indian, etc.), to groups reflecting shared experiences (e.g., employees with children, veterans, etc.).
- **Clearly conveying your philosophy around DEI,** and expectations of all employees, by modeling desired behaviors from the top of the organization, rewarding and recognizing these efforts among employees, and communicating openly, transparently, and frequently about the importance of DEI.

DEI efforts are for everyone. Recognizing and celebrating the value of differences can help organizations build a strong culture that supports all employees.

Incorporate change management strategies

Business leaders lamented the rapid pace of change before the pandemic. They had no idea! In today's volatile business environment, change is a constant that must be effectively managed. That requires planning with the understanding that plans must change as the environment — internal and external — changes. Leaders must demonstrate strong leadership by communicating broadly and transparently, and engaging employees in the change management process.

Focusing on engagement by building a strong community that offers all employees a place to come together to learn, share and collaborate, and recognize each other can help your organization navigate changes of all kinds — together, and with shared purpose. ♥

TRENDING

Making Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) a Strategy, Not an Afterthought

According to the US Census, "Americans identifying as multiracial grew from about 9 million to 33.8 million between 2010 and 2020." The country is becoming increasingly, and rapidly more diverse. As Business Insider has noted, we are "becoming a more diverse country and will eventually be a majority-minority one."

That same diversity should also be represented in organizations at all levels, but especially in leadership ranks. But diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) is about more than simply building a diverse workforce. It requires taking steps to promote inclusion and ensure equity to fuel a strong and positive employee experience.

It's a trend that can cause fear — or drive innovation. The difference between the two requires making DEI a strategy, not an afterthought.

Making it real
Building a strong culture around diversity and inclusion requires more than just words in a mission statement. According to ICIMS Insights, 2021 Workforce Report,

84% of HR professionals are concerned their organizations' current recruiting and hiring tools aren't reaching diverse talent pools.

People are what drive business and change. Those people themselves are changing. According to Pew Research Center, the "post-millennial" generations entering the workforce will be the most diverse in history. McKinsey & Company reports there is $12 trillion in additional GDP on the table if we can find a way to close the gender gap by 2025. And there's $2 billion in potential revenue

if we can expand "financial inclusion efforts" to extend more services to black Americans.

Considering those numbers, incorporating DEI into your 2022 business strategy makes smart business sense.

But the effort must be real. Companies need to make sure that their DEI efforts are real, and not lip service, or employees and potential new hires will quickly lose trust in them. In this competitive hiring environment, no organization can afford to take that risk.

Weaving DEI into your organization's fabric
In our 2021 Trends Report, we predicted that DEI would need to be woven into the fabric of organizations to reap the rewards of diversity and drive change. That's happening. But it needs to happen as part of a concerted strategy and not simply as an inspirational vision.

We noted that these efforts would obviously benefit those who have suffered from exclusionary business practices in the past, but also noted that businesses would benefit as well. In fact, studies, including this one from McKinsey, have pointed to the positive potential that DEI can have for organizations, noting that diverse companies are more likely to outperform less diverse companies in terms of profitability.

What's required?
- **Adopting a "no workplace bullies" mindset**. Bullying, of any kind, should be part of a zero-tolerance approach to building a respectful business climate.
- **Ensuring that diversity, equity, and inclusion is part of the fabric of your organization's culture.** This is an ongoing process, not an event or policy. It starts at the top with senior leaders modeling the behaviors they wish to see and ensuring an open, inclusive culture for all.

Making DEI a Strategy, cont.

TRENDING

- **Addressing bias by adding it into diversity training** — not as a one-time event, but again, part of an ongoing process to ensure that your organization achieves real results. This can include training employees to recognize unconscious bias in themselves and others, and elevating the conversation by being transparent in rooting out incidences of bias of all kinds.
- **Incorporating bias assessment into performance reviews**. If a strong DEI culture is what your organization really wants, it needs to reward efforts toward making that happen — and constructively address incidents where it's not.
- **Applying metrics.** According to a recent study by HR.com, most companies fall short in the area of DEI metrics and training. "Among those that apply metrics, most rely on basic compliance-oriented workforce demographic metrics (50%), while fewer evaluate diversity within the leadership ranks (38%) equal job titles (30%), diversity goals related to succession planning (28%) and recruiting outcomes (28%)." And less than half (42%) offer DEI training of any kind (including the bias training noted above) to all employees. So making DEI a conscious part of your strategy can only improve these numbers.

Elevating the discussions and actions in your organization around DEI to a strategic level can help ensure that real change takes place. And, in the process, you can turn DEI into a competitive advantage. Changing corporate culture is not an easy thing to do, but it's the right thing to do.

DEI as a competitive advantage
Companies are widely realizing that a sincere and strategic focus on DEI has competitive advantages both from a talent, and customer recruitment and retention standpoint. Companies with a strong DEI culture attract top talent — people want to work in a diverse, equitable and inclusive environment with companies that have eliminated bias.

Diverse environments are also ripe for innovation, as companies actively and proactively seek input from employees at all levels, of all tenure, and from all types of diverse backgrounds. Diverse teams have consistently been shown to

be more creative, more adaptable, and more innovative. For example, according to a report from BCG, companies with more diverse leadership teams have 45% higher innovation revenue than those that don't.

Effective DEI efforts can reap many rewards. The lack of these efforts can also reap heavy sanctions. Workplace discrimination has both moral and ethical consequences and can be costly. Today's progressive organizations recognize the real value of DEI. They also know that doing so requires commitment to ongoing effort.

In an article from Forbes, leadership strategist Esther Choy offers three simple, but insightful ways to "increase empathy and embrace diversity in the workplace":
- Assume the best of others
- Ask good questions
- Listen aggressively

The increasing diversity in our country and in our workplaces, says Choy, offers "an exciting opportunity for those prepared with an empathetic imagination."

Maintaining a diverse, equitable and inclusive workplace is an ongoing effort. It involves supporting initiatives, rewarding behavior, celebrating achievements, and embracing cultural differences. These efforts can be made efficient and sustainable through employee engagement platforms like Inspirus® Connects — a technology-enabled platform that offers a central location for employees to interact, celebrate accomplishments, share and receive recognition, collaborate with each other, and discover more about their company and initiatives — including DEI initiatives. ❤️

FORECAST

Incorporating Mental Health into a Holistic Employee Engagement Strategy

According to McKinsey: "Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, one in four Americans over the age of 12 had a mental or substance-use disorder." That's a startling statistic that has likely gotten worse after several months of uncertainty, health risks, and unsettling changes impacting both work and home lives.

The pandemic has created unprecedented anxiety and stress in the workplace. Going back into an office is amplifying that. In our 2021 Trends Report, we noted that: "While mental health awareness has been on the rise in the workplace, and in society as a whole, for several years now, the total upheaval of everyday life brought about by the pandemic has made it an even more pressing matter." Now, a year later, it is more critical than ever for mental health considerations to be incorporated into organizations' wellness strategies in 2022 and beyond.

Doing so will go a long way towards contributing to a positive team culture, driving engagement, productivity, and loyalty — critical in today's tight and competitive employment market. According to Deloitte's 2021 Global Human Capital Trends report, organizations that integrate well-being into the workplace, by giving employees the tools they need to perform at their best, are more sustainable and position themselves for future success.

Incorporate mental health benefits into your total benefit package

A good starting place for ensuring the right focus on mental health is forging a path where mental health benefits are part of the total benefit package, and not an "add-on." Wellness initiatives should, naturally, include taking care of mental, just as much as physical, health.

Foundationally, incorporating mental health benefits into the total benefit package will set the stage for elevating mental health conversations to the same plane as conversations around physical health.

As we noted in our 2021 Trends Report: "Improving the way your organization approaches employee mental health can be done on a personal level, through regular check-ins and an overall increased sensitivity to mental health issues, or at the organizational level, by providing greater mental health resources and mental health benefits to all employees."

What constitutes these benefits will be both broader and more specific than ever before and will include such things as mental health days; greater flexibility for employees including flexibility in when, how long, and where they work; and fitness benefits in recognition of the critical connection between physical and mental health.
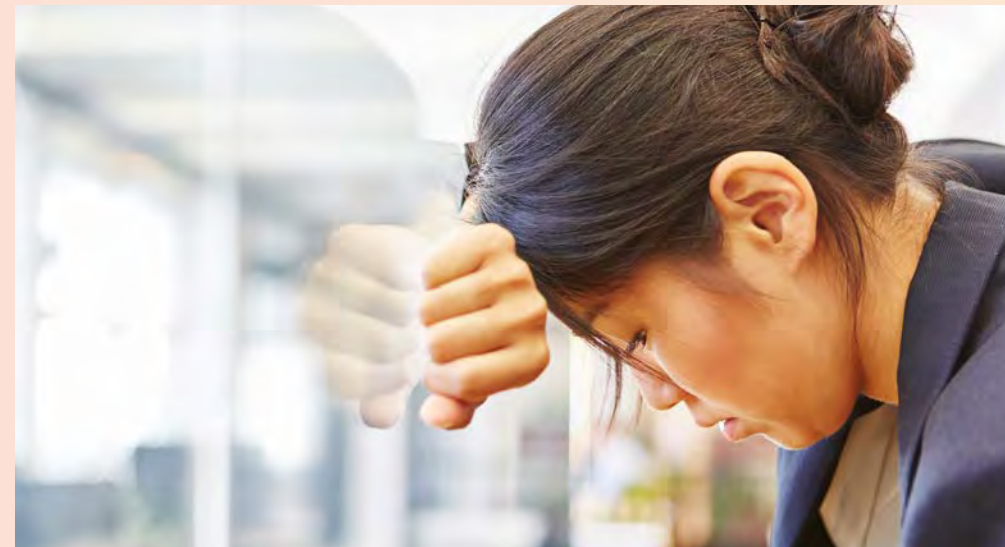
Incorporating Mental Health, cont.

Destigmatize mental health issues

Mental health considerations and conversations have long been marked by stigma, making employees hesitant to raise concerns or ask for the help they need.

Employers have an opportunity to address the stigma of mental illness. Unfortunately, many don't recognize that opportunity according to [McKinsey research](#). They indicate that although 80% of the full-time employees they surveyed "believed that an anti-stigma or awareness campaign would be useful, only 23% of employers reported having implemented such a program." Strikingly, when asked to prioritize their top mental-health initiatives, reducing stigma came in last, with only 17% citing it as a priority.

Their top concern — improving employee productivity and engagement (35%). Interestingly, reducing stigma would certainly have an impact on that top priority!

> Shifting perceptions of mental illness and addiction will help employees be more open about their own experiences and concerns — and more empathic about others' needs.

An employee engagement platform can offer a safe place to start these conversations and share stories.

Remove discrimination

Why is it that employees with physical illnesses — like diabetes, for instance — feel more open to talk about their health concerns than employees with mental illnesses? It's part of the stigma of mental health conversations, but also strays into areas of discrimination. Organizations will need to create a culture of openness and transparency around conversations about all aspects of employee health and wellness — including mental health. Removing this discrimination is healthy, both for your employees and for the organization.

A "healthy balance" between mental and physical health benefit offerings

When you look at your benefit offerings, how many offerings do you have related to physical health versus mental health? It will be important to achieve balance here. Your benefit offerings convey a strong signal about what you believe is important in terms of employee support. If you have few offerings related to mental health, it signals that you don't believe mental health concerns are prevalent — or important.

Promote a psychologically safe culture

We've noted that encouraging and amplifying conversations around mental health is important, but it bears repeating. Promoting a psychologically safe culture can be a great way to proactively bring issues out into the open — and ensure that employees receive the resources and support they need.

This starts at the top. When senior leaders freely share their own personal concerns — e.g., the stress and anxiety they may be feeling during the pandemic, and how they deal with that stress in healthy ways — they pave the way for employees to join in those conversations and start their own.

Using a recognition platform like Inspirus® Connects can start and even foster those conversations and share them broadly — leaders' responses to employee comments will provide strong models for others to emulate, and prompt employees to start and engage in their own conversations related to mental health concerns and issues.

A [healthy workforce is a motivated workforce](#). [Incorporating wellness](#), and including mental health wellness into your engagement platform can be a terrific way to keep it top-of-mind and to provide employees with at-the-touch-of-a-fingertip access to information and resources. ❤

Leadership

TRENDING

Listening to Employees vs. Hearing Them: What's the Difference?

It's no secret that attracting and keeping great employees has become a major post-pandemic challenge for many organizations. Just turn on the evening news or open your local newspaper. You're bound to see story after story about the "Great Resignation" and how people are quitting or changing their jobs in droves. For employers, demonstrating a high level of employee appreciation has become incredibly important in retaining talent.

One of the keys to keeping a talented and loyal workforce is making sure that employee communication and engagement is a priority from the top down. A trend we've been seeing recently is a push to re-train management in the simple, yet transformational, art of listening.

But what is listening really, or what is really listening? How is listening different from hearing? And how can changing your communication style to active listening help you nurture and retain your best employees?

Hearing vs. listening

Aren't hearing and listening the same thing? No, not even close.

Merriam-Webster defines hearing as *"the process, function, or power of perceiving sound; specifically, the special sense by which noises and tones are received as stimuli."* Listening, on the other hand, means *"to pay attention to sound; to hear what someone has said and understand that it is serious, important or true; to hear something with thoughtful attention and to give consideration."* The key phrase in this definition is "thoughtful attention."

Hearing is passive. You hear people all the time, but you're usually focused on yourself and are thinking about how you're going to respond or even talking over them before they've finished. You don't really hear what they say because you're not truly listening. Listening requires giving complete focus and your full attention to another person.

Hearing involves only the ears, whereas listening involves the whole person. When you are actively listening, you're making eye contact, you're nodding, you might even be taking notes. You're not only trying to hear what the other person is saying, you're actually trying to understand why they are saying it. You're holding your response until you have all of the information, have processed the information, and then after listening and processing, you are able to form a thoughtful response and seek even further clarification.

Whenever you get confused about the difference between hearing and listening, just remember this: hearing is all about you, listening is all about the other person.

Listening to Employees vs. Hearing Them, cont.

Actively listening is key to hearing

Listening fully to another person demonstrates the highest level of respect towards them. It makes that person feel validated, important, and understood. Understanding is the whole entire point of listening. By letting go of your need to control or dominate the conversation, you establish a bond of trust, which increases your capacity for real communication and leads to higher levels of respect among your employees and teammates.

Empathetic listening is the holy grail of communication. A study conducted by Development Dimension International (DDI) determined that empathy is the greatest single leadership skill a manager can possess. Listening with empathy and compassion is more important than ever, especially after everyone has collectively gone through the isolation and trauma of a global pandemic.

> When people are really being listened to, they not only feel heard, they also feel seen. This makes them feel appreciated and more like a true part of the company.

As a result, this makes them more inspired and motivated. According to the EY Belonging Barometer Report, employees who feel a strong sense of belonging are 3.5 times more productive and motivated to contribute to their full potential.

How to be a better listener

If you want to become a better listener and provide a better employee experience, you're going to have to learn to be quiet. The goal is to make people feel safe enough to communicate honestly with you. You do that by showing respect, empathy and patience. Here are a few tips...

- **Don't multitask** - Give the person you're listening to your full attention and make eye contact. Don't be glancing at your phone or computer.
- **Don't interrupt -** Don't talk over the person while they are speaking. Hold your thoughts and response until it's clear that the other person is finished and waiting for you to speak.

- **Listen for the "why"** - Try to understand the actual meaning of what the person is trying to convey. Pay attention to non-verbal cues, such as body language and tone of voice.
- **Ask thoughtful questions** - Take the conversation to the next level by asking insightful, open-ended questions that give the person an opportunity to explain their feelings even more clearly.
- **Avoid using the word "but"** - When people hear the word "but," they feel negated. Try replacing it with the word "and" instead when presenting another point of view.

Also, in a constantly-evolving, post-pandemic environment, it's important to find new and interesting ways to listen to your employees. In addition to the "my office door is always open" mantra, find other creative methods for building a team culture that allows employees to express themselves. This could be through an employee engagement or employee recognition platform that encourages collaboration and communication in ways that might be more comfortable for some folks. Or you could consider hosting monthly roundtable discussions with different themes. The point is to get people talking, and more importantly, listening.

If you're still having problems listening, remember this quote from Bernard Baruch: "most of the successful people I've known are the ones who do more listening than talking."

Also, remember that you're listening to retain. Not just the meaning and understanding of what your employees are trying to say, but in order to retain your employees themselves. ♥

TRENDING

Addressing Employee Anxiety About Returning to the Office

Employees are nervous about being back in the office. Business leaders must address this anxiety or face losing staff to the "Great Resignation," a term coined by Texas A&M psychologist Anthony Klotz describing droves of employees who left or changed jobs during the pandemic.

In a recent study from UpCity, 53% of employees said they would feel some or a high level of stress about going back to work in an office. Some reasons for this anxiety include continued concern about the COVID-19 virus and its variants, unvaccinated co-workers, and a reluctance to change after finally settling into a new normal of working remotely.

Given the fact that it's much easier and cost-effective to keep employees than hire new ones (especially now),

> it's important that management understand the anxiety their staff is feeling and do everything they can to make them feel comfortable returning to the workplace.

Here are a few suggestions.

1. Create a safe space for discussion
Start by opening up the lines of communication and talking to your employees. Tell them you really want to know how they're feeling about coming back to the office and their major concerns. This could be done through a corporate-wide confidential survey, individual department meetings, or one-on-one meetings between a manager and direct reports.

The key is to create a safe way for employees to communicate their feelings honestly, without fear of retribution from their managers or co-workers.

2. Listen to your employees
There is a big difference between hearing your employees and actually listening to them (see previous Leadership trend, "Listening to Employees vs. Hearing Them: What's the Difference?" on page 11). Truly listening to people in an attempt to understand, rather than just respond, makes them feel validated.

Some people may be concerned about being exposed to the virus if they live with an elderly or vulnerable person. Others may have lost loved ones to the virus and are now the primary caregiver for their children. Listening to their specific concerns not only makes them feel better as employees, but it gives you a roadmap to address the issues that are holding them back and perhaps even causing them to consider seeking employment elsewhere.

3. Practice empathy
Empathy is the ability to put yourself in another person's shoes in order to really understand where they're coming from. Listening is just the first step. Now you need to understand.

In a recent report from Businessolver, 1/3 of employees said they would switch companies for more empathy. 40% would work longer hours and 56% said they would stay with a company if they felt valued. What this tells us is that making empathy a part of your overall corporate mission statement could be one of the biggest factors in employee motivation and retention going forward.

4. Address safety issues
For those employees with continuing concerns about COVID-19, you need to clearly communicate all the steps you're taking as a company to protect them and their families.

Perhaps you have a dedicated email address where staff can ask questions, or a special page on your corporate website or employee engagement platform that

Addressing Employee Anxiety, cont.

contains information about your health and safety protocols. This site needs to be updated on a regular basis and employees should be notified through email or instant messaging alerts.

5. Be transparent

Explain why your company feels it's important to have employees back in the office and be completely transparent with your messaging.

Roll out your return-to-work strategy slowly, or even in phases, in order to get staff used to the idea of coming back. Don't just pick an arbitrary date and tell everyone that's the day they have to be back in the office, especially if you're concerned about reducing employee turnover. Transparency, flexibility and communication can go a long way in motivating your staff to stay.

6. Create a routine

Asking your employees to come back into the office after almost two years of working from home is asking them to step outside of their comfort zone. They just got used to their remote routine. We all know how difficult it is to embrace change, especially with all the added emotional anxiety caused by the pandemic.

The best thing you can do as a leader to help your employees feel comfortable coming back is to create a strong team culture through a new office routine. Host catered "welcome back" breakfast meetings every Monday or trivia-happy-hours every Friday. Perhaps you can offer staggered work hours for employees who like the increased work-life balance they experienced working remotely. Capitalize on the camaraderie that so many people enjoy about being in the office by implementing an employee recognition program. The key is to create a positive and rewarding routine that makes your staff look forward to coming into the office every day.

7. Prioritize employee appreciation

Given the "Great Resignation" and current state of the job market, it is now more important than ever that your employees feel appreciated and rewarded for a job well done.

Most companies have a history of focusing on penalizing negative behavior rather than rewarding the positive – that must change. Having an effective employee recognition communication strategy along with a robust employee recognition

program is imperative if you want to keep your employees happy or keep them at all.

8. Be flexible

If the pandemic taught us anything, it's to be flexible. Nothing is set in stone and, as we all now know, anything can happen at any time.

Be flexible with your employees, your protocols, and your overall business plan. Demonstrating flexibility as a leader and as an organization can have a huge impact on employee morale and employee willingness to return to the office.

Employees are a top priority

There are many ways to support your employees returning to work, but it all starts with understanding their anxiety about returning in the first place. Listen to them, practice empathy, and do everything you can to let them know their health and well-being are your top priority.

Genuine concern for another human being is the most powerful form of motivation.

♥

FORECAST

The New Normal: Engagement, Empathy & Embracing Hybrid-Work

A new normal.

That's the phrase everyone uses when discussing post-pandemic life. But do you even know what a new normal looks like for your company? If you don't have a clear vision of how your organization should be functioning now, how can you expect your employees to perform at their highest levels?

The truth is, anything resembling "normal" in the workplace might not happen for quite some time. In a recent survey conducted by Deloitte and *Fortune*, only 1 in 10 CEOs (11%) are confident that the effects of the pandemic will be over by mid-2022. More than 1 in 3 (35%) believe that won't happen until the end of 2023. So, what do you do in the meantime?

Now is the time for leaders to re-imagine everything.

The pandemic has forced us to think differently about how we work, and even why we work. In order to survive in a post-COVID world and excel as a leader, your new normal will need to be all about engagement, empathy, and fully embracing the hybrid work model. Here's why.

A clear purpose will re-engage talent
In case you haven't been paying attention, finding and retaining quality talent is a big challenge these days. The Society for Human Resources Management (SHRM) reported that recruiting is the number one challenge companies are currently facing. In order to hire and keep the best workers in 2022 and beyond, you will need to focus on employee engagement strategies.

Engagement starts with purpose, and after going through almost two years of a global pandemic, everyone is craving meaningful purpose in all aspects of their lives. It's your job as a leader to define what that looks like at work. You not only will need to have a clear and meaningful corporate purpose and mission, but you will also need to ensure that a sense of purpose permeates throughout the entire organization.

Engagement is also about recognition and rewards. Part of building a team culture is communicating to your employees how much they matter. It's a good idea to have an employee recognition program that rewards them for outstanding performance. Recognize your employees. Promote them. Re-skill them. Do whatever it takes to keep them happy and productive as part of your overall purpose. If you don't, rest assured another company will.

Leading with empathy will be required
Another important key to post-pandemic leadership is empathy. According to a recent study by Catalyst, 76% of employees reported a higher level of engagement when they experienced empathy from their leaders, and 61% said they were able to be more innovative. Also, a majority of women surveyed said they would be less likely to leave an organization if they felt respected and valued.

In their "2021 EY Empathy in Business Survey," Ernst & Young (EY) found that 88% of respondents felt that empathetic leadership created loyalty among employees. Ginnie Carlier, Vice Chair of Talent at EY, made it her mission to improve the mental health and well-being of her employees through empathy. In an interview with Forbes, Carlier stressed the need for "managers to actively listen to their employees and hear what they are saying. Based on the feedback, the leaders should then take appropriate actions."

Leading with empathy requires you to put yourself in your employees' shoes. That's

The New Normal: Engagement, Empathy, cont.

where the real change begins. Cultivating community and inspiring loyalty through empathy means your employees are heard and understood. Once you get where your employees are coming from, you will then be able to lead by example and embody the behavior they want to see in the office.

Embrace hybrid work or lose talent

Another way Ginnie Carlier of EY is putting empathy into practice is by being open to the different ways her employees want to work. The company has implemented a flexible work arrangement that allows people to work remotely, in the office, or a combination of both. "The employees are treated like adults who can make their own informed decisions on what type of schedules work best for them," she said.

> If you don't allow remote or hybrid options, you will risk losing your best talent.

A recent McKinsey report found that almost 90% of employees who took new jobs did not have to relocate because more companies are now "location agnostic." People got used to being able to do their jobs from home and enjoyed the work-life balance that it provided them. If you try to force them to come back into the office after they've proven they can be productive remotely, you're going to lose them to another company who can and will accommodate their wishes.

Once you embrace the hybrid model, you'll need to fully support it by investing in the latest technology to keep your workforce connected. Everything is moving at warp speed and your network connection and technology should do the same.

Business transformation

A post-pandemic new normal will mean different things to different organizations. It's up to each leader to take everything they've learned over the last two years and use that knowledge to transform the future of their business.

> Transformation begins and ends with your employees.
>
> Leadership must find new ways to engage their staff, lead with empathy, and give people the freedom to work the way they want.

It's the only way companies will be able to survive this and any future pandemics. ♥

FORECAST

The Importance of Post-Pandemic Workplace Resilience

One of the many things we learned from COVID-19 was just how truly unprepared most companies were for a pandemic and the overall effect it would have on employees, office culture, and the bottom line.

Now, leaders are tasked with how to make the workplace itself more resilient. Prior to the pandemic, the corporate world wasn't really concerned with the idea of resilience, meaning the ability to recover quickly from a disaster. In a [2019 McKinsey report](#), less than half of board members surveyed said that corporate resilience or the ability to manage a downturn was on their current agenda, and only one-fifth believed a lack of resilience was a significant challenge. Boy were they in for a rude awakening.

Going forward, resilience will need to be ingrained in the overall culture of an organization if it wants to survive another pandemic or natural disaster. Here are a few suggestions as to how leaders can create a more resilient workplace.

Make resilience a part of your mission

Shared experiences spur process innovation.

Organizations will need to capitalize on the shared experiences of their employees after the last two years of a global pandemic.

Nothing strengthens culture more than diversity and the experiences that people of different backgrounds bring to the table. Ask all of your employees to share what they learned during the pandemic. Find out how they themselves practiced resilience as they adjusted to working from home and dealing with loss and anxiety. Everyone was forced out of their comfort zones. How can these shared experiences and lessons be incorporated into your business plan going forward?

Not only will the act of involving your workforce as a whole in crafting your new mission statement yield powerful insights for your business, it will also motivate and inspire your employees as they will feel part of something greater than just collecting a paycheck.

Give your employees the technology they need

Technology is the new water cooler. It's changed the way we communicate. It doesn't matter if your staff is back in the office, working remotely, or in some sort of hybrid arrangement. Technology is the glue holding it all together.

Providing new ways for your staff to interact, collaborate, and share wins with each other is vital to overall morale and productivity. It's also important to have [employee recognition programs](#), given the need to turn up the volume on employee appreciation in order to prevent staff from leaving.

The Importance of Post-Pandemic Workplace Resilience, cont.

It will be critical in 2022 and beyond to embrace technology as part of the new office culture. Some of your employees will want to keep their flexible work arrangements, and if you want to keep them, you'll need to oblige. Investing in technology that's faster, more secure, and that helps keep your employees engaged will be an important part of any resilience plan going forward.

Build a resilient community

Creating an inclusive culture and community is not about a location, it's about people. The typical nine-to-five office environment is no more, and it's time to celebrate all the different ways people like to work in order to create a more inclusive workplace.

Some people have felt major isolation during the pandemic and can't wait to get back into the office. Others have enjoyed an increase in work-life balance and prefer to remain at home. If these workers have proven they can do their job remotely for the last two years, it will be hard to convince them to come back into the office. It is much better to embrace the new normal of remote and hybrid work arrangements and keep your employees rather than lose them to another company. Again, community is about people, not location.

Figure out how your employees work best and use that to your advantage. Make sure to include remote workers as part of in-office meetings and celebrations. Use employee engagement technology to keep everyone connected. Don't be afraid to reshape what "community" and "culture" looks like in your organization.

Ask for regular feedback

Another important lesson the pandemic taught us is how quickly things can change.

Don't forget to check in with your employees on a regular basis to see how things are going with them, and what might have changed in their world.

Employees may change their minds about where and how they work. Some may want to come into the office a few days a week and some office workers might want to start working remotely again. They may also have new ideas on how to improve the company culture as a whole. Organizations that encourage employees to share their opinions and ideas, and then incorporate that feedback into their engagement strategy will create a comfortable environment where everyone feels heard.

A culture of resilience

Creating a new office culture doesn't happen overnight. It will take time, commitment from leadership, and a continuous feedback loop in order to fine tune a new normal.

By leveraging what we learned from the pandemic, organizations will create a much more resilient and inclusive workplace in which employees are empowered to do their best work, regardless of where they work. ♥

Workforce Segmentation

Employees are Prioritizing their Values and Evaluating their Career Choices

TRENDING

Employees are Prioritizing their Values and Evaluating their Career Choices

What do employees want from their employer and their workplace? The question isn't new, but the answers are changing. What it takes to attract new talent, and keep your current workforce engaged and satisfied, is rapidly evolving. Employers must adapt in order to remain competitive. It's time to evaluate, update, and, in some cases, replace traditional strategies for employee engagement with fresh ideas that meet the needs of workers today, tomorrow, and beyond.

This year brought enormous upheaval in the workforce, and recent research predicts the "Great Resignation" will continue into 2022 and may even worsen.

A Bankrate survey in August 2021 reports that 55% of people in the workforce are likely to look for a new job within the next 12 months.

That's up a bit from the 52% reportedly seeking new jobs in 2021. A whopping 56% of people, including the lowest paid workers, named flexibility as their primary reason for looking to jump ship.

What employers need now are comprehensive employee engagement strategies that help reduce employee turnover, and that take into account the differing needs and priorities of a multigenerational workforce. What works for Millennials may not satisfy Gen X employees, and what matters most to Baby Boomers may not be important to Gen Z. As we outlined in our 2021 Trends Report, a one-size-fits-all approach no longer works, and employers need to consider the unique needs of each segment of their employee population in order to successfully build a culture that keeps employees engaged.

What do employees want in 2022 and beyond?
Overall, we know employees want flexibility — they want more control over their work schedules, options for remote and hybrid work, relevant benefits for their stage of life, and, according to the Society for Human Resources Management (SHRM), 32% of workers want more frequent and transparent communication from their employers. There are generational differences in day-to-day work as well. Millennials and Gen Z, for instance, expect a more transparent and collaborative manager, whereas Baby Boomers like the structure of the traditional hierarchical management model. Another example: going into this pandemic, people believed — and continue to believe — that young people would be the most resilient and older groups would be the most fearful, but the opposite is true.

It's crucial to understand the generational differences as we think about employee engagement. As you consider which employee engagement ideas to add to your retention strategy, you'll need to learn how to customize each tactic for each generation represented in your workforce. And, across the board, if you're unsure about what your employees want, it's best to ask rather than assume.

Best ways to reduce employee turnover
Here are some employee retention ideas to help you keep your multigenerational workforce engaged and satisfied.

1. **Conduct regular employee surveys.** Don't guess or make assumptions about what your employees want. The most effective way to learn is to ask them. Survey employees about their current employee experience, as well as what they would like to see change. Ideally, these surveys would be anonymous so that employees feel free to be completely honest without fear of repercussions.

2. **Frequent informal check-ins between employees and their direct supervisors.** When employees feel that their managers care about them, they're more likely to stick around. Tailor the types of check-ins to each

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employee group and if you're not sure what they prefer, ask them. Even better, offer employees a menu of options — video meeting, phone/audio call, email or chat — so they can choose what works best for them from week to week.

3. **Offer formal mentoring and career path coaching to employees who want it.** According to [Indeed](#), Generation X workers value building new skills, while Baby Boomer employees may prefer to act as mentors and coaches to younger employees and pass on their wisdom to the next generation of leaders. Helping younger employees see a future within your organization, and showing them a clear path forward, can result in higher employee motivation and better retention.

4. **Revamp your employee recognition program.** It's no longer effective to wait for five or 10 years to recognize employees for their service, especially as many employees are leaving well before their fifth anniversary. Consider adding a one-year or three-year acknowledgment — or go all out and celebrate every single anniversary of an employee's hire date. Acknowledging "firsts" (first day, first training completed, first performance review, etc.) is another way to show employees they matter. It's also important to make these recognitions meaningful. Few employees want an engraved clock or a logo coffee mug to commemorate these milestones — most want the flexibility to choose a gift of their choice, such as name brand, popular merchandise or a gift card to spend when and where they choose. (Again, if you're not sure what your employees would appreciate, ask them!)

5. **Reward employees for career accomplishments and embodying organizational values.** Offering rewards and recognition can help employees feel valued – especially if they are praised for living the companies' values – and reinforce the organization's commitment to its mission, values, training, promotions, and team wins. The types of rewards you offer may differ among generations of workers and across individual personalities, and so might the way you disperse the rewards. Some people crave public attention and would like to be recognized in front of their peers, while others prefer to stay out of the spotlight. Managers should know employees well enough to make these judgments, but it never hurts to ask.

6. **Tailor your communication methods**. Whether this is for manager-to-employee communication or organization-wide messaging, you need a mix of verbal, written, and digital communication to effectively reach everyone in your multigenerational workforce. For example, Baby Boomers tend to prefer verbal updates so video and audio meetings might work best for them, while Gen X, Millennials, and Gen Z workers may prefer email or chat messages.

7. **Promote and foster community.** Organizations where employees feel a sense of inclusion and belonging have lower turnover, higher productivity, and higher rates of employee satisfaction. According to [Gallup research](#), highly engaged teams have 43% lower turnover, 18% higher productivity, and 66% higher employee wellbeing. Host virtual events that bring everyone together, and offer a mix of sessions that allow employees to learn something new, share ideas about a problem, play games (prizes are a bonus!), and network with employees from other departments.

8. **Prioritize employee mental health.** The topic of mental health became a national conversation amid the pandemic and continues to be an essential concern for employees as we move forward. Employees want to feel that their employer supports their mental health and well-being in authentic ways — beyond an annual Mental Health Awareness Week and an Employee Assistance program. Learn about the [new strategies you can use to support employee mental health](#), such as more frequent conversations that destigmatize mental health, more flexible time off, and leading by example.

Delivering an employee experience that matters

Creating a workplace, and a work culture, that helps employees feel valued and seen is a tall order. But in today's high-traffic talent market, employers need to make employee engagement a top priority in 2022. Employees want flexibility, and this means employers must be ready and willing to remain flexible and continue to adapt as our world, and the needs of workers of all ages, continue to evolve. 💜

Training & Education

Responding to Changing Demands by Upskilling and Reskilling Your Workforce

Nurturing the New Workplace Commodity — Culture

The "Great Resignation" Will Leave Gaps in Leadership Pipelines

For Employee Retention, People Management Makes the Difference

TRENDING

Responding to Changing Demands by Upskilling and Reskilling Your Workforce

Employers have indicated that the new graduates they're hiring today are not prepared with the right, and most up-to-date skills and competencies needed to perform successfully. According to the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE), there is a distinct gap between the employers who feel their recent hires have required proficiencies, and what the students themselves feel.

Three examples of that great divide

89% vs. 42%

While 89.4% of students consider themselves to be proficient in terms of professionalism/work ethic, only 42.5% of employers agree.

79% vs. 55%

While 79.9% of students consider themselves proficient when it comes to critical thinking and problem solving, only 55.8% of employers agree.

70% vs. 33%

While 70.5% of students feel they're proficient in leadership skills, only 33% of employers agree.

The only area, in fact, where students felt themselves to be less proficient than employers was in terms of digital technology — with 59.9% of students believing they were proficient compared to 65.8% of employers.

Without having a workforce equipped with the right skills, employers cannot grow, and are struggling to be agile as times change. A whopping 80% of CEOs

identified their employees' lack of essential skills as a threat to growth in PwC's 22nd Annual Global CEO Survey.

There may have been a time when employers could hire students fresh out of college with the requisite competencies to do their jobs effectively. But that time is long past. Today's rapidly changing environment — in terms of technology, global markets, demographics, customer demands, and the impacts of the pandemic — means employers must take it upon themselves to upskill and reskill their workforce.

Upskilling vs. reskilling

According to the Cambridge dictionary:

- Upskilling is the process of learning new skills or of teaching workers new skills.
- Reskilling is the process of learning new skills required to do a different job, or training employees to do a different job.

Employers are finding themselves increasingly faced with the need to do both.

Reskilling gives your employees the chance to learn new skills they can use to move into different, lateral roles within the company. Reskilling helps employees become more valuable and provides employers with a more flexible workforce.

A form of reskilling called upskilling provides a higher level of education and training so employees can gain advanced skills to further their careers while still employed. Upskilling gives motivated employees more avenues for growth and change and allows employers a measure of predictability in succession planning.

Both are important for employers and employees. Employers need employees to have the skills and competencies to do their work today, and to be prepared to do different, more advanced work in the future. Employees also benefit from gaining new skills and competencies that make them more valuable to their current, and potentially future, employers. Upskilling and reskilling can be very important employee engagement strategies to improve the employee experience.

Responding to Changing Demands, cont.

The COVID-19 effect
While change was already prompting an increased need for upskilling and reskilling prior to the pandemic, the pandemic's impact has been significant across all industries and geographies globally.

In fact, 51% of learning and development professionals are now prioritizing learning more than they were pre-COVID. It's clear that 2022 will be the year of learning. Employers are focused on:
- Making training and development available for all employees
- Encouraging career development
- Using a multigenerational approach for training styles — online vs. face-to-face, and hybrid
- Rewarding and recognizing training and development accomplishments

COVID-19 has not only caused many organizations to do their work in different ways — e.g., remote selling, telemedicine, hybrid education delivery, etc. — it has also dramatically impacted the employee pipeline. The "Great Resignation" is also having an impact as employees who have gained a new level of flexibility and work-life balance during the pandemic are deciding not to return to their former employers — or, in some cases, to any employers at all.

There are a variety of factors that can lead to turnover — from lack of community, to a toxic work environment, insufficient pay, burnout, and lack of challenge or growth opportunities. That's where upskilling and reskilling can come into play.

Big benefits of upskilling and reskilling
The big benefits of upskilling and reskilling for employers are twofold:
- Employers need to ensure that employees have the skills they need to meet demands today and in the future.
- Employers also know that employees value talent development; those known for providing these opportunities are likely to be the employers candidates flock to when looking for jobs.

By creating a culture of talent mobility and investing in training and development, savvy organizations are showing they're willing to invest in and value their employees which will help them to attract and retain top talent. They will also be poised to address the loss of human capital (the "Great Resignation") that is putting added pressure and workload on others.

A focus on soft skills
It's not just hard skills and competencies that employees need today and will continue to need in the future. In fact, soft skills — personal attributes that enable people to interact effectively and harmoniously with others — are prevalent when employers are asked about the gaps they have in their workforce. For instance:

- The soft skills required of managers and supervisors now required to lead employees in remote or hybrid environments.
- The soft skills required to build and maintain strong diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) cultures to attract and retain today's increasingly diverse candidates.

Soft skills are needed by employees at all levels in the organization and can have a positive impact on building a strong, collaborative, team culture.

Focused feedback
It's important for any reskilling or upskilling efforts to place strong emphasis at providing employees with focused feedback to help them understand what they're doing well, and where they may have opportunities for improvement. Feedback can, and should, come from a variety of sources — not just employees' immediate supervisors or managers. Having an employee recognition platform that is accessible to all employees can be foundational in building a strong climate of reinforcement and support; peer-to-peer feedback is as important as feedback from managers. 💙

TRENDING

Nurturing the New Workplace Commodity — Culture

In an environment where employees have the upper hand and skilled workers are hard to find, employers need to be fully cognizant of what matters most to employees. What matters most these days is a strong culture that is supportive of flexibility and work-life balance. The pandemic has provided an experience for employees that while initially disruptive, has provided many with flexibility they haven't previously had. This includes the opportunity to work from home and a growing appreciation for time spent with family and friends.

Even before the pandemic, culture mattered. According to a piece published by the Society for Human Resources Management (SHRM) in September 2019: "One in five Americans have left a job in the past five years due to bad company culture." The cost of that turnover, they said, was estimated at $223 billion.

Employers can't afford that kind of turnover and managers know it. Business leaders are understandably concerned about cultivating community and inspiring loyalty, especially after all of the upheaval and change that has occurred in 2021.

The critical importance of company culture

Company culture represents the attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors exhibited in your organization — it's everything that makes up the DNA of your company. According to SHRM's 2021 The Culture Effect report, "94% of people managers agree a positive workplace culture creates a resilient team of employees." Unfortunately, they also report that 62% of HR professionals agree that it's been difficult to maintain workplace culture during the pandemic. The work environment they're trying to manage is suddenly hybrid, with employees located in a variety of settings without the cohesiveness that a shared workspace can provide. So now more than ever, they're searching for actionable information on how to improve their team culture.

Here, we look at five drivers of a strong culture:
RELATIONSHIPS

It's easy to get caught up in our own separate ecosystems, especially when working from home. But, when that happens, it creates disconnects between people and their colleagues and they lose sight of their shared purpose.

Managers and HR professionals can play an important role in helping employees maintain existing relationships and form new ones as new colleagues are brought on board. Establishing a shared purpose and shared experiences is critical to creating the relationships that form a strong culture.

PEER SUPPORT

Strong relationships lead to peer support. These relationships are especially important as employees in all types of roles, and at all levels of the organization, struggle to remain productive, engaged, and energized in a world that has suddenly changed.

Encouraging peer support goes beyond the manager/employee relationship, although that is of course important. But peer to peer support is also important

Nurturing the New Workplace Commodity, cont.

and largely overlooked. Teaching employees how to work together better — and providing them with the tools and resources to do so — can help build a strong culture. An employee recognition platform can provide a go-to resource to make recognizing others and supporting their work seamless, and help keep the need to do so top of mind.

COMMUNICATION

Communication is foundational to a strong corporate culture. That was true pre-pandemic; it's even more true now. According to SHRM, of the Americans who say their workplace culture improved during the pandemic, 59% point to communication as the driver of this improvement. But changing corporate culture isn't easy.

> Managers need to be acutely aware of the need for employees to feel connected and informed, and to have access to the information and answers they need, when they need them.

Technology platforms, like Inspirus® Connects, allow employees to communicate more freely and frequently, and are a pathway for delivering company information.

DIVERSITY

Today's employees — especially Millennials and Gen Z — value diversity and thrive in a diverse team culture. They value working for organizations that are diverse and have an inclusive culture. That diversity, of course, takes a variety of forms, from gender, race and ethnicity — to other ways employees may be different from each other — family status, socio-economic background or geography (e.g., rural or urban).

Including diversity, equity, and inclusion in your business strategy, as well as in your leadership team, is key to attracting and retaining the talent that creates a strong team culture.

TECHNOLOGY

Especially in an increasingly remote or hybrid work environment, technology can help keep employees connected and provide the means for them to interact with, encourage, support, and recognize each other. While employees need opportunities to connect in-person through face-to-face contact — beyond the ubiquitous Zoom environment — technology will continue to play an important role in helping to bring them together, especially when they are dispersed across a wide range of locations.

When culture is strong, it can make a big difference. In fact, SHRM reports that "75% of working Americans claim their organizational values helped guide them through the pandemic." In addition, they report: "Working Americans who rated their culture as "good" or "very good" were more likely to indicate their organizational values helped guide them through the pandemic (88%), as compared to workers who rated their culture as 'average' (59%) and the 29% who rated their culture as 'poor' or 'very poor.' That's important and the kind of experience that keeps employees engaged and loyal." 💙

Strategy   Leadership   Workforce
Segmentation   **Training &
Education**   Technology   Data &
Reporting   Communication   Engagement &
Measurement   Budget &
Finance

FORECAST

The "Great Resignation" Will Leave Gaps in Leadership Pipelines

The results are in. Development opportunities matter to today's employees. Companies that recognize this and offer opportunities for employees to develop both personal and professional skills will be the companies that attract and retain them most effectively. That matters in an environment where conversations about the "Great Resignation" are ongoing and predicted to continue.

And yet, the Society for Human Resources Management (SHRM) reports more than one-quarter (26%) of people managers say their organizations don't provide them with leadership training. Interestingly, 26% of workers say they're planning to leave their employers after the pandemic. Coincidence? Maybe. Maybe not.

Employees value leadership development
Employees appreciate the opportunity for advancement, and that keeps productivity high and employee satisfaction levels even higher. New talent also will be attracted to organizations that invest in leadership development because it demonstrates it values its employees, provides opportunities for growth, and focuses on creating a motivating employee experience.

Amid this environment, employers are facing growing leadership pipeline gaps which are predicted to continue. Baby boomers are finally exiting the workplace in droves as has been predicted for several years now.

Mid-level managers also are jumping ship — not because of retirements, but because of low engagement and a desire for more flexibility and work-life balance — needs that have grown during the pandemic.

"The need for leadership development has never been more urgent," say Mihnea Moldoveanu and Das Narayandas in an article for Harvard Business Review. But, they say, the leadership development industry "is in a state of upheaval." While

organizations are literally spending billions of dollars on this type of training, many are failing to see desired results. The problem, say these authors, is that "traditional programs no longer adequately prepare executives for the challenge they face today and those they will face tomorrow." Success in filling leadership gaps will require a different approach moving forward.

There are three gaps driving this problem, according to Moldoveanu and Narayandas:

- While organizations are interested in driving their own strategic objectives and results, individuals are interested in their own career trajectories.
- The skills that most executive development programs build aren't the skills that organizations most require, such as the soft skill of the ability to communicate effectively.
- A skills transfer gap. Learners aren't applying what they've learned in the classroom back on the job.

The "Great Resignation" Will Leave Gaps, cont.

What organizations have been doing to fill their leadership pipelines hasn't been working. And now, faced with a potential exodus of core talent and existing leaders, they must consider a different approach. Those that can do this effectively will position themselves to be organizations that can successfully attract top talent and keep the leadership pipeline filled.

What to look for in potential leaders

With employees indicating they place a high value on leadership development, and employers facing a leadership gap, part of the solution to close this gap seems obvious — train future leaders for promotion from within. Be the organization that grooms its employees to take over the leadership reins. Give employees the opportunity to take on new challenges, and welcome the innovation that empowers change.

Not all employees, of course, will have leadership potential. And not all will be interested in moving into leadership roles or have the potential to nurture a strong team culture. Those that have both the potential and the interest, though, are likely to share some key traits according to Korn Ferry. They point to these four key skills:

- **Adaptability** — the ability to adjust quickly to the changing landscape
- **Curiosity** — the ability to approach problems in new ways
- **Detail-oriented** — the ability to understand what needs to be done and do it with accuracy
- **Tolerance of ambiguity** — being comfortable with uncertainty and able to make decisions even when information is incomplete

The Center for Creative Leadership has identified nine weak or missing leadership competencies that organizations should be aware of — and be prepared to address. Their list can provide useful insights into the type of training and preparation employees need to move into leadership positions effectively:

- Managing change
- Inspiring commitment
- Leading employees
- Taking initiative
- Building collaborative relationships
- Having a strategic perspective

- Knowing strategic planning
- Embracing participative management
- Being a quick learner

Today's leaders, above all, must be flexible to change and able to overcome adversity. We've certainly learned that over the past several months. The companies — and leaders — that have excelled during the pandemic have these competencies. These will be the competencies to look for as you consider which of your current employees are poised to move into leadership roles.

Ongoing recognition and reinforcement

One of the big benefits of grooming existing employees to step into leadership roles is that they are already familiar with the company's culture and acclimated to its processes and procedures. Organizations have the opportunity to provide existing employees with leadership experiences, observe their strengths and opportunities for improvement, and coach them into becoming the type of leader the company values.

In addition, organizations will need to keep diversity, equity, and inclusion top-of-mind when identifying potential leaders — make sure your leadership pipeline is an inclusive pipeline.

Along the way it's important to provide ongoing employee recognition and reinforcement. Employee appreciation drives employee engagement. For instance, recognition for training completed, the awarding of certificates for achievements, peer-to-peer recognition, etc. Providing this type of recognition motivates the employees being recognized and inspires others to also take on more challenges and prepare for advancement into leadership roles.

Employees also need to receive employee recognition regularly — their growth and development is a process, not an event. Technology can help with this, providing an opportunity for both managers and others to recognize employees for their contributions.

Companies don't have to be subject to the risk of leadership attrition related to the "Great Resignation". They can take steps now to create a culture of continuous learning with an eye toward developing tomorrow's leaders. ♥

FORECAST

For Employee Retention, People Management Makes the Difference

Amid what is being called the "turnover tsunami" or the "Great Resignation," employers, HR professionals, and managers will continue to be concerned about both recruiting and retaining employees.

It's widely reported that people don't leave companies — they leave managers. In fact,

53% of Americans who left a job due to workplace culture indicated that they did so because of their (poor) relationship with their managers.

Leaders recognize this critical connection — 97% of executives agree that their actions have a direct impact on workplace and team culture and, ultimately, employee engagement.

People managers represent a critical connection required to keep employees productive and loyal. Workplaces need to continually take steps to maintain a strong workplace culture to keep employees on board. Failing to understand what employees are running from when they leave to join other organizations, and what it would take to keep them on board, can put companies at risk.

The power of people management
In an interesting report, "'Great Attrition' or 'Great Attraction'? The Choice is Yours," McKinsey points to some important disconnects between how employers and employees view the drivers that are causing them to quit — sometimes for other jobs, sometimes to stop working entirely. "Employees were far more likely

to prioritize relationship factors, whereas employers were more likely to focus on transactional ones," they report.

The attrition trend, says McKinsey, "not only is poised to continue but could get much worse." So, what will companies, their HR leaders, and managers face moving forward, and how can they put strategies in place to potentially stem the tide of exiting employees? It's really all about people management.

Managers are often on the lookout for employee engagement ideas and employee motivation strategies. Here are some important factors that are critical for effective people management.

Measure employee performance by results
Results will continue to matter as employers work to keep employees motivated and inspired. Ensuring that employees understand what's expected of them, and rewarding them when they achieve those goals, can go a long way toward helping employees feel valued — and boost that sense of belonging that is so important to them.

Provide clear, consistent communication
Effective communication will never go out of style. Focusing on communication that is transparent helps employees stay up-to-date on the company, its priorities, and how their work contributed to the organization's success. Employees want to be held accountable, but they also want to clearly understand what the expectations are and why.

As we pointed out in our 2021 Trends Report, we are seeing more executives these days communicating with their workforce on a more emotional level. That's a best practice that we hope will continue post-pandemic.

For Employee Retention, People Management, cont.

Provide growth opportunities
Today's employees value the opportunity to learn and grow. In fact, opportunities for personal and professional development are highly valued by employees according to a Mercer study of more than five million employees in more than 140 companies around the world. Providing opportunities for learning and development, especially in a hybrid work environment, will go a long way toward helping employees feel valued.

Support career growth through mentorship opportunities
Mentors can play an important role in career development, yet according to a survey done by Olivet Nazarene University and reported by the Society for Human Resources Management (SHRM), "more than 4 in 10 U.S. workers (44%) reported that they have never had a mentor." That's a startling statistic that should make companies sit up and take notice. Mentorship provides big benefits for both employees and employers. Grooming the leadership pipeline will continue to be prominent for companies of all kinds even after the pandemic has subsided.

Offer a mechanism to give and receive feedback
Employees don't just value feedback and positive reinforcement from their managers — they also value it from their peers. Providing a mechanism for employees to easily give and receive feedback, and communicating about how and why it's important to do so, can go a long way to laying the foundation for retention. Platforms like Inspirus® Connects can be a great way to show employee appreciation seamlessly while keeping the need for feedback top of mind.

Recognize creativity and innovation in problem-solving and processes
Rewards and recognition aren't only for salespeople — all employees need recognition for their efforts. When employees exhibit creativity and innovation, or contribute in some meaningful way, recognizing them not only impacts the employee who has put forth this extra effort, but sends a strong signal to the rest of the workforce about what is valued.

Celebrate accomplishments and employee service milestones
Honoring employees with meaningful service and retirement awards will also continue to be valued moving forward. Again, this provides recognition for the employees being celebrated, as well as for others who see that the company values longevity and loyalty. Employee rewards and recognition, when managed strategically, will continue to help drive performance and productivity.

Demonstrate emotional intelligence to enhance collaboration
Managers should also be alert to signs of burnout, which has been more prevalent during the pandemic — a situation that will likely linger. Burnout and stress may be even more prevalent among workers who have been working from home for some time, even as they're called back into the on-site work environment.

Managing people isn't easy, but it can be very rewarding. Here's a link to a SHRM piece on the "12 Skills All People Managers Need to Have." Managers need to continually work on their skills to ensure they are cultivating a team culture that will contribute to employee engagement and longevity. 💚

Technology

Adapting to Technology Makes a Hybrid Workforce Sustainable

Supporting All Workers – Including Remote and Offline – Using Technology

Technology Will Drive Game-changing Innovation

Investing in HR Tech Will Advance Talent Management and Automation

TRENDING

Adapting to Technology Makes a Hybrid Workforce Sustainable

The importance of HR technology — and the need to embrace it — became amplified amid the COVID-19 pandemic. HR professionals had to adapt quickly, learning to leverage technology to better serve remote workers and support virtual teams while achieving business goals. Early in the pandemic, the conversation revolved around figuring out how to stay afloat as we waited to return to 'normal.' What we know now is that leaders must define their new normal and utilize technology to drive results. (For more about this, see our Leadership forecast "The New Normal: Engagement, Empathy & Embracing Hybrid-Work" on page 15.)

New research shows that developing a robust and useful HR tech stack continues to challenge many organizations. It also shows that successfully meeting that challenge may pay dividends in many ways, from higher productivity to better employee engagement. Organizations had to respond swiftly at the beginning of the pandemic, but now that we've seen how successful remote and hybrid work teams can be, it's time to look ahead and re-imagine what work could look like in the future.

Sustainable remote work relies on digital collaboration

In our new normal, remote work is in high demand — FlexJobs' 10th Annual Survey (conducted between July and August 2021) revealed that

97% of respondents want some kind of remote work option, with 58% wanting to be fully remote and 39% preferring a hybrid work environment.

This alone solidifies the need to invest in technology that supports employees, wherever they happen to work.

According to Deloitte's 2021 Global Human Capital Report, executives identified the introduction of digital collaboration tools as the top factor contributing to the sustainability of remote work. And in the future of work, collaboration isn't just about working together on shared projects. It's also about creating community. Introducing digital platforms, like Inspirus® Connects, that connect all workers — on-site, remote, and even offline or deskless workers — helps create networks of support and fosters community.

Investing in HR technology that helps bring your employee engagement strategies to life can also help you improve team culture and create an environment where employees can do their best work. Integrating an employee recognition platform, for example, gives employees a simple way to recognize others and be recognized for their own accomplishments. A pre-pandemic survey found that lack of recognition was contributing to 44% of employees changing jobs. With all the other factors motivating employees to quit amid the "Great Resignation," organizations can't afford to sleep on this opportunity to boost engagement.

Collaboration tools enable streamlined efficiency

Further research explains why collaboration tools matter so much for a remote or hybrid workforce. The iCIMS 2021 Workforce Report reveals that technology that supports and facilitates collaboration between remote and virtual teams — particularly those that streamline processes and integrate hiring into the employee workflow — have a positive impact on efficiency. A majority (86%) of HR leaders report that their organization added new collaboration tools for HR to support work during the pandemic.

But these new, collaborative tools aren't just for maintaining the status quo, they are helping organizations grow. The iCIMS research found that companies hiring for *many* new roles in 2021 (53%) were more likely to have implemented new collaboration tools for HR than organizations hiring for fewer new roles (30%).

Adapting to Technology Makes a Hybrid, cont.

Collaboration tools with the biggest ROI for HR teams are those that offer flexible solutions and integrate seamlessly with existing systems. In order to be truly useful, technology tools need to help employees do their jobs better. For recruiters and hiring managers, this means streamlining the process of scheduling meetings, conducting candidate interviews, and providing quick feedback all within the same workflow — which ultimately reduces time to hire, and improves the candidate experience, as well as the employee experience. For all employees, you need technology that helps build cross-functional relationships and sets a collaborative stage where innovation can blossom.

Technology supports employee well-being

Deloitte's research also revealed a growing focus on employee well-being, with 80% of survey respondents identifying it as important or very important to their organization's success. "Organizations took quick action to redirect resources towards making work safe and keeping workers healthy: moving workers into remote work arrangements, implementing testing and contact tracing strategies for on-site workers, and establishing new programs for emergency medical leave, childcare and eldercare support, and physical, mental, and financial health," Deloitte reports.

> Collaboration tools that foster inclusion and belonging in your organization help employees feel connected — with one another and with the company's mission and values.

Using technology to facilitate a sense of shared purpose can combat loneliness, increase employee engagement, and result in happier, more productive employees. Prioritizing employee well-being, like the rapid adoption of virtual technology, began as emergency measures — but the longer we observe these shifts, the more benefits we've seen. And that strongly suggests we should embrace these priorities for the long term.

Happy employees, sustainable business

None of us knows what twists and turns lie ahead but we can draw from the multitude of lessons we've learned from the pandemic, and use those insights to prepare us for whatever is to come. Without a doubt, remote and hybrid work will continue to be a reality for the foreseeable future — as the employee surveys suggest, most people do not want to go back to the old ways of working. Investing in tech tools to help your employees feel supported, connected, and valued is essential for organizations that want to remain relevant and continue to innovate and compete in today's business world. Those who don't prioritize these tools are sure to be left behind. ❤

TRENDING

Supporting All Workers – Including Remote and Offline – Using Technology

Without a doubt, the way organizations interact with workers is changing. The pandemic accelerated a shift to remote and hybrid work, challenging business leaders to find new ways to communicate and engage with their employees on a daily basis.

The number of people working from home — many for the first time — skyrocketed amid the pandemic. According to Pew Research, a majority of employed adults who say that the responsibilities of their job can be mostly done from home (55%) say they are currently working from home all of the time and another 28% of employees are working from home some or most of the time. Pivoting to remote work helped countless organizations in many industries continue operating throughout the pandemic, with little or no service interruption. Unfortunately, there are some downsides to the rise of remote work. An Igloo survey reports over 70% of remote workers feel alienated from their company, suggesting that there is an opportunity for organizations to serve remote workers better.

Offline or deskless workers are another segment of the workforce that deserves more attention. According to Forbes, "Globally, just a fifth of workers do their jobs from behind a desk — and that leaves 2.7 billion people who are part of the deskless workforce, with jobs that involve walking around and interacting directly with people, machines and infrastructure." This could mean warehouse workers, truck drivers, or retail customer service reps. What's more, "just 1% of business software spending currently focuses on deskless technologies," creating a huge opportunity for business leaders to invest more in supporting these types of workers and to adapt to a changing corporate culture that truly puts people first.

Whether your workforce is 100% remote, operating on a hybrid work schedule, composed primarily of deskless employees — or, most likely, a mix — leveraging technology will help all workers feel supported and keep them engaged with their work, their coworkers, and your organizational goals.

The goal of employee engagement tools

Leveraging technology to support every employee makes it easier for organizations to meet these new challenges. Employee engagement tools can be used to:

- Distribute company information, such as business development announcements, HR updates, information on training programs, and more
- Foster community by providing a vehicle for employees to provide feedback and access resources
- Encourage connections, both within teams and throughout the organization, by enabling remote collaboration among dispersed teams, facilitating networking events, and supporting mentoring programs
- Solicit employee feedback and actually listen to it by putting their insights into action (See Data & Reporting forecast "Employee Listening Will Turn Intent Into Action" on page 45)

Supporting All Workers – Including Remote and Offline, cont.

- Acknowledge contributions with tools that empower employees to recognize and be recognized themselves
- Celebrate accomplishments of employees and teams, as well as employment milestones, promotions, and other important events
- Reward achievements, such as hitting productivity or performance goals and completing projects

Incorporating technology that allows you to easily engage with your employees, and helps them interact with one another, helps build a dynamic work culture where employees feel a greater sense of inclusion and belonging.

Tech tools for supporting all workers

There are countless examples of technology tools that organizations can use to support workers, regardless of where or how they work. Here are just a few ways technology can help your teams feel connected.

- For deskless workers, provide a kiosk or shared computer station in a community area with the sole function of accessing your organization's tech platform, including the company intranet and connected tools
- For all workers, create a mobile-friendly version of your organization's tech platform to use whenever they choose
- Use video meetings or Facetime if face-to face interaction with managers isn't practical
- Text messaging (when opted in) for those without internet access
- Digital displays in community areas with looping messages (like in doctors' offices and retail settings)

Leveraging offline materials

Tech tools will go a long way in helping support your employees, but offline approaches still matter too. Mixing in some non-tech ideas will help increase impressions, and offer employees flexible ways to interact. You could take advantage of printed materials for communal workspaces — like posters and banners — or publish booklets and mail them to employees at home (whether they work remotely or not).

Providing the same information through multiple channels means your employees are more likely to absorb your messaging.

Technology enables employee engagement

Finding ways to support all workers is key to a vibrant team culture and high levels of employee engagement. As the makeup of your workforce shifts, it's important to keep in touch with the needs of different types of employees and create strategies that leave no one behind. While some technology tools will help you stay connected with all your employees, others may specifically target certain segments of your employee population who might be overlooked or excluded by other approaches. Continue using technology to meet employees where they are, and offer the support they need to be successful in their roles, and you'll be well on your way to success. ❤

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FORECAST

Technology Will Drive Game-changing Innovation

The pandemic dramatically accelerated digital transformation for most companies, harnessing everything from cloud computing to software-driven automation and artificial intelligence. The demand for rapid response compressed massive changes that usually take years into months or even weeks. According to a McKinsey Global Survey of executives in 2020, COVID-19 accelerated digitization of customer and supply-chain interactions and of their internal operations by three to four years, while IBM found that 96% of UK business leaders estimate the pandemic sped up digital transformation by 5.3 years.

While the COVID-19 pandemic spurred this rapid acceleration, we may see the momentum of these changes continue well after the healthcare crisis and its economic impacts subside. Organizations that are prepared to adopt new technology faster and more effectively will come out ahead of the game in efficiency and productivity. Business agility has taken center stage and along with it, companies are prioritizing the ability to predict opportunities early and innovate solutions that have a growing demand in the marketplace. Many of these innovations will leave a lasting impact on the way we work and live.

While we do not endorse the following products and services, we found their innovation interesting, and wanted to share them.

Forethought

Founded in 2017 by Deon Nicholas (CEO) and Sami Ghoche, Forethought is an enterprise search company that created a question-answering retrieval AI agent called Agatha. It embeds into existing employee workflows, helping them work more efficiently instead of replacing them, to improve customer service. Agatha uses machine learning and natural language processing that continues to improve over time.

One of the crucial considerations in adopting AI tools is determining which tasks should be handled by a tech tool and which should continue to be the responsibility of a human being. In short, organizations must figure out how to integrate AI as a new part of their teams, rather than just a tool to perform a function. "While some tasks will be automated in the future with AI, some things will also work better with a compassionate human completing the task," said Nicholas. Tools like Agatha, which help employees do their jobs better, are a perfect example of how integrating AI can help businesses get ahead, and we expect to see more new tech on the market in the coming years that supports employees in their roles and consequently boosts employee engagement.
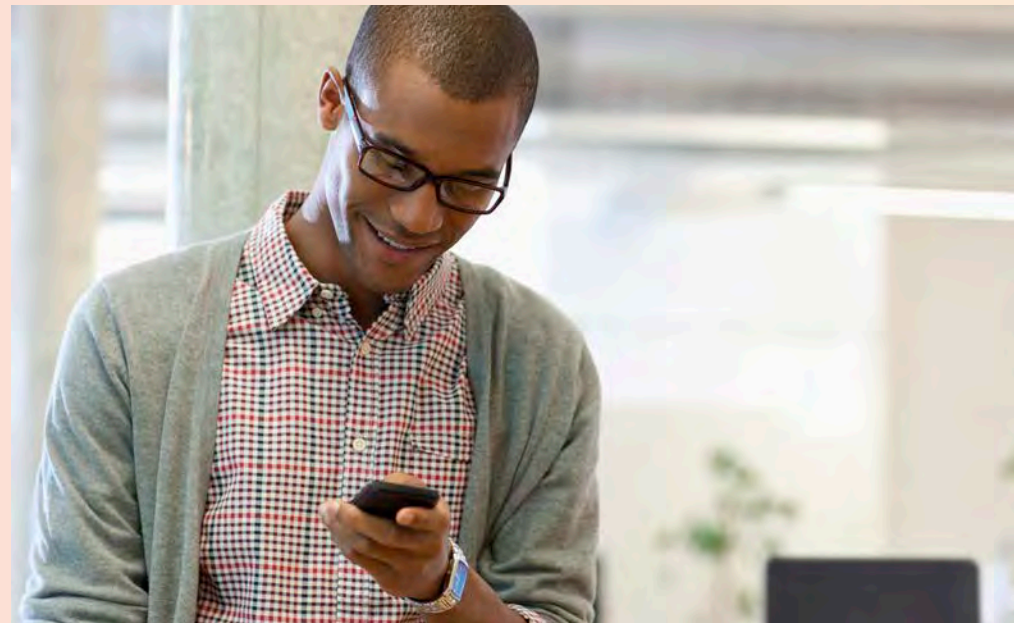
Technology Will Drive Game-Changing Innovation, cont.

Sentropy

Another relatively new player, Sentropy was founded by John Redgrave (CEO), Taylor Rhyne, Michele Banko, and Ethan Breder in 2018 and operated in stealth until 2020. Sentropy is an AI solution focused on detecting and preventing online abuse and malicious behavior within online communities — something social media companies seem unable to conquer. Sentropy's machine learning models are constantly evolving to detect ever-changing abusive language and the context in which it's delivered. The enterprise service, launched as Sentropy Protect in February 2020, is a free consumer product designed to help individuals monitor and control abusive content in their personal social media feeds.

According to Pew Research, 31% of Americans have experienced online abuse on social media platforms. Sentropy serves a need that 79% of survey respondents say social media companies aren't doing well enough, reporting that those platforms are doing a fair or poor job at addressing online harassment or bullying on their platforms. Where social media companies have let users down, the opportunity for third-party solutions to leverage AI to improve people's experiences is massive.

Every company is becoming a technology company

Until now, we've typically looked to the tech and finance sectors to be at the forefront of innovation and more likely to invest heavily in advanced technologies. On the heels of the pandemic, the mix will likely change over time as more and more companies realize that innovation is the key to success in all industries.

Savvy leaders who want to remain competitive and build business agility will look for ways to leverage technology to improve productivity and the employee experience.

One way to do this in your organization is give employees more personal recognition for their accomplishments.

More than one-third (37%) of employees say that more personal recognition would encourage them to produce better work more often.

To encourage this kind of employee engagement, employers must learn how to leverage technology and make the most of an employee recognition platform. Doing this effectively relies on choosing the best tool to help you build community and promote employee recognition.

Innovating solutions for the future

Using technology to solve today's problems and make life (and work) easier and more enjoyable in the future will be crucial for organizations that want to attract top talent, develop and retain star employees, and compete effectively in their industry. Investing in AI and machine learning tools that improve results over time is a smart move for organizations that want to foster sustainability and remain flexible to the changing demands of customers, employees, and the market at large. ♥

Strategy   Leadership   Workforce
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FORECAST

Investing in HR Tech Will Advance Talent Management and Automation

In an era dominated by remote and hybrid work, high talent mobility, and shifting employee expectations, employers are increasingly turning to HR technology to solve today's business challenges. In fact, nearly half of all employers (48%) are expected to make tech investments to improve the employee experience. And according to a research summary by Zippia, 53% of HR departments are expected to invest in process automation.

A PwC global survey of 600 HR and HR information technology leaders revealed the top three goals for these new technologies:

- attracting new talent
- developing employees' peak potential
- improving the work experience through automation

We expect HR technology spending to rise further in 2022 as employers continue to diversify the tools they use to support a unique multigenerational workforce.

Leveraging HR technology to deliver an ideal employee experience across roles, generations, and time zones is a hefty challenge — and one that today's HR leaders should be primed to tackle.

Look for flexible tech that fulfills your specific needs today, and tomorrow
Business leaders want to feel confident that they'll get a good ROI from HR technology spending, and the best way to ensure that is to implement tech solutions that speak to your biggest people goals — and that are scalable so they

can grow with you. As part of your broader business agility strategy, it's especially important to adopt flexible tools that allow you to adapt and evolve as economic conditions and talent market dynamics change.

One of the most meaningful investments you can make is in systems that further weed out disparate tech — with the ultimate goal of streamlining into a single platform. This may mean looking for new tools that offer better integrations with your current tools, and vendors who are committed to innovation — especially those who can share a development roadmap with you so you can envision a long-term relationship with their products and services.

Cybersecurity continues to be a hot topic, especially with the rise of remote work, and employees deserve to know their personal data is secure. From an HR perspective — working closely with IT and training teams — this means fostering a culture of cybersecurity, in which every employee understands the key risks and how to mitigate them. From general cybersecurity awareness training delivered remotely to tech tools that manage system access and password reminders, HR's role in cybersecurity is crucial.

Tools that automate administrative tasks and free up employees' time and energy often have a high ROI. By automating simple tasks, your employees can focus more on critical tasks — brainstorming and innovating new ideas, complex problem solving, building relationships with customers, and so forth.

Consider incorporating AI
Artificial intelligence and machine learning tools offer a big boost in process automation, and can become a valuable asset to your team. In recruiting, AI tools can help screen resumes and applications for minimum requirements, which saves your human team countless hours of work and reduces the influence of

Investing in HR Tech Will Advance Talent Management, cont.

unconscious bias by applying a universal set of standards to all applicants. Effectively, AI tools have the power to make your recruiting process faster, more efficient, and more fair.

An AI-based chatbot is another time-saving tool that elevates the candidate experience at the same time. They can be used in recruiting to engage with job seekers before, during, or after an application to help candidates get answers to basic questions, direct them to FAQ resources, or even to ask screening questions before connecting them with a live recruiter. These chatbots can also be used for employee engagement, with applications in onboarding support, benefits, payroll, and for general HR inquiries — like a virtual HR assistant, available 24/7.

AI for HR has gained traction in recent years and it has plenty of room to grow with only 17% of organizations leveraging AI-based processes in their HR practice today. This figure is expected to grow to 30% by next year, according to Gartner. And this is just the beginning.

Getting change management right

Along with choosing the right types of HR tech to invest in, you want to take measures to ensure your employees will embrace these new tools and the many benefits they offer. So it's crucial to create a change management plan alongside your tech implementation plan. 82% of business leaders PwC surveyed say they struggle with adoption challenges, and traditional training methods may not be enough. Incentives like employee rewards and employee recognition will combat this.

An effective employee recognition communication plan will have clearly established goals, pre-launch communication to build enthusiasm, and a plan for responding to questions and concerns. Get some tips for a top-notch employee recognition communication plan in this article.

HR technology can also help execute on other employee engagement ideas — a key consideration amid the "Great Resignation". This could mean looking for tools that have integrated employee surveys and other feedback mechanisms, that support collaboration and networking, that facilitate mentoring programs,

and that make it easier for employees to access mental health and wellness benefits. Specifically, decision makers should look for technology tools that build community and elevate team culture by allowing employees to interact, celebrate accomplishments, share and receive recognition, collaborate with each other, and discover more about their company and initiatives.

HR technology drives business growth

Investing in HR tech isn't a move that only benefits your HR team. HR tech makes work better for everyone in your organization by streamlining everyday processes, freeing up time for critical tasks, and keeping everyone's personal information secure. When employees feel supported in these ways, they're more likely to be more productive, more engaged, and bring more creative ideas to their role. By leveraging AI and process automation tools, your organization will create an environment where employees can reach their highest potential. ♥

Data & Reporting

[Using Data to Tell a Story](#)

[Harnessing Data to Improve and Elevate the Employee Experience](#)

[Employee Listening Will Turn Intent Into Action](#)

TRENDING

Using Data to Tell a Story

People analytics was among the top human resources trends for 2021 and adoption continues to grow. Even so, more than half (55%) of talent professionals say they still struggle to put people analytics into practice, according to a LinkedIn survey. Organizations that use an employee engagement technology platform have a plethora of data available at their fingertips, which is half the battle. It's up to business leaders, and often HR leaders specifically, to give that data meaning and put it to work for the benefits of the organization (and your employees).

Without stories to contextualize what data actually represents, we're left with numbers that may seem meaningless and aren't likely to motivate leaders to make changes that improve employee engagement. Collecting the right kind of data is the first step to telling stories effectively, and the next is understanding how to connect the numbers to the real-life circumstances you're measuring so you can get support for the programs and solutions you need to make progress.

Types of stories data can tell

Reports from your employee engagement platform can tell you all kinds of stories if you know what to look for. Learning how to use storytelling to share data with other leaders within your organization, including your C-suite, can help equip decision makers with the resources they need to guide your organization forward in meaningful ways.

Adoption: Data from employee engagement platforms can tell you who is using different features, when they started using them, and how and when they use them. This information can inform decisions about expanding certain features, or even adding or eliminating features to align more closely with employee needs.

Usage: You can also learn who is using the platform the most, how frequently they use it, and what they use it for. These insights can reveal gaps in utilization and help you create strategies to boost adoption among different segments of your workforce.

Opportunities: Employee engagement platform reports can reveal opportunities for improvement, particularly through the diversity, equity, and inclusion lens. Organizations that measure diversity on a departmental level can compare their data with national averages and local populations to determine how they're really doing, and set benchmarks for progress.

Benefits of leveraging data

The reasons organizations need to invest in people analytics — and learn how to make the most of data — are plentiful.

- Data reveals patterns and illuminates insights we wouldn't see otherwise. Collecting, comparing, and critically assessing data can help us develop a kind of x-ray vision into the reality of the employee experience, and how the organization can influence it.
- Data influences people and garners buy-in. A story well-illustrated with strong data helps you build a case and win support for your program, while inspiring enthusiasm for change.
- Data punctuates key observations. Reporting can back up trends you've

Using Data to Tell a Story, cont.

identified, help you investigate causes, and measure the impact of new processes or procedures.

- Data helps us make better decisions. Business leaders should refrain from relying on subjective assessments and instead use data to inform decisions about strategy, new initiatives, and other efforts to move the needle on employee engagement, such as enhancing your employee recognition program.

But data alone is boring. Data can't be an effective tool for change without being accompanied by impactful, relatable stories.

How storytelling brings data to life

Data is just a collection of numbers until you turn it into a story that is actionable. A great story needs data to support it, to give it detail, to bring it to life.

Storytelling infused with data isn't just about garnering support for key initiatives. It's about fostering a work culture that relies on data-informed decision-making and measurable results. Storytelling can help encourage curiosity about potential solutions to tough challenges, inspire more creative problem-solving, and motivate people to become more engaged.

Part of the reason this approach is more effective, compared with standalone data, is emotion. Storytelling taps into human emotion, puts faces on business problems, and helps decision makers connect with empathy and compassion, two of the qualities McKinsey argues are "critical for business leaders to care for people in crisis and set the stage for business recovery." The COVID-19 pandemic brought the importance of these qualities to light, and left an indelible mark on the relationship employees have with their employers.

Today's data tells tomorrow's story

Leave the guesswork out of business decisions and leverage what you already have at your fingertips.

This approach will give you a real-time opportunity to adjust and improve your rewards and recognition program to drive business results and improve workforce management. People analytics help you dive into the obstacles you currently face and reveal problems before they become unmanageable — and data can often point to possible solutions as well. Learning to use the data you currently have in your employee engagement platform helps you better serve and support your employees, make key strategic decisions about the future of your business, and help you shape your path forward. ❤

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TRENDING

Harnessing Data to Improve and Elevate the Employee Experience

Organizations have the opportunity — or dare we say an obligation — to shape the way people work and live, from productivity to wellbeing and everything in between. This is how we must define employee experience going forward. We spend a third of our lives at work and the pandemic has increased that amount for many people, with 68% of remote professionals now working on the weekend and 45% reporting regularly working more than eight hours a day, according to a survey by global staffing firm Robert Half.

Employees have long been lectured about maintaining work-life balance and finding creative ways to fit life into the space around work, but that's finally shifting. Work-life balance, or work-life integration as some are more accurately describing it, has become a component of team culture. Business leaders are embracing the need to focus on the WHOLE life of an employee and not just their work-life, and the business case for fostering employees' sense of belonging has been proven many times over.

Harvard Business Review reports a high sense of belonging in the workplace increases employee performance 56%, reduces turnover risk 50%, and decreases sick days 75%.

Why employers must prioritize the employee experience
This year has seen record high quit numbers month after month, and the "Great Resignation" is likely to continue — or even worsen — as studies report up to 55% of workers plan to quit their jobs within the next year. The reasons people are changing jobs vary widely but many have to do with a poor employee experience

and simply being unhappy at work — being micromanaged, disrespected, underpaid, and so on.

Technology, and the circumstances that stemmed from the pandemic, have given organizations a peek into the personal lives of their employees. Now, business leaders have more intel than ever on each employee, which they can leverage to inform employee engagement strategies and improve employee experience. From social media posts and "listening," to surveys, to engagement platform usage data,

employers are beginning to connect all the dots to shape what employees want from their employee journey.

Employee experience repeatedly appears on lists of 2022 HR trends. Organizations that fail to prioritize and improve the employee experience will struggle to retain the employees they have now, and will continue to face challenges in hiring to fill open positions. Developers of HR technology are already on board with the notion of centering the employee experience and creating solutions that help integrate work, life, and organizational goals. "The number one issue in HR is engaging, supporting, and caring for people," said Josh Bersin, global research analyst. "And the new dimensions of remote work, hybrid work, and contingent work are on everyone's plate." Organizational leaders need to commit to this mindset in order to remain competitive — not just in the labor market, but within their industry as well.

How data can enhance the employee experience
Using data to understand, and then improve, the employee experience extends to the entire employee journey. Some forward-thinking organizations are tying

Harnessing Data to Improve and Elevate, cont.

employee data to organizational values, and leveraging that data to gain insights into how to motivate employees into replicating behaviors that align with the organization's values. Making data-informed decisions about how best to support employees at work and at home, while also fostering a more engaged and productive work culture, means organizations can enjoy many different benefits stemming from a single effort.

The first step in using data to elevate the employee experience involves looking for opportunities to effect change. Map out the employee journey to identify stages, then use data to confirm touchpoints and ways to enhance the employee experience.

Next, create an inclusive, personalized onboarding experience that starts building trust from Day One. A well-crafted onboarding program sets expectations for new hires and helps people feel supported in their new role, as well as helps them feel included and accepted in your organization. Implementing a comprehensive onboarding program, and making sure new hires go through it sooner than later, also means you'll be able to collect more data to help you down the road. (Bonus: Good onboarding leads to better employee retention.)

The next step in bringing your employee engagement ideas to life is about putting your money where your mouth is. Delivering a custom, branded rewards and recognition program that speaks to your employees' personal values, can motivate and inspire them. How you recognize employees can vary, depending on what behaviors you're acknowledging and the employees' preferences. But if you solicit employee feedback, you can craft meaningful, relevant programs that show employees how much they value and appreciate not only their work, but everything they bring to the organization as a human being.

It's not enough just to have a rewards and recognition program — you need to make sure employees are not only aware of it but engaged in it, that it's baked into your team culture and is part of the everyday employee experience. Higher utilization means you can capture a lot more data, making your reports a true reflection of the employee experience, and not just a sampling. Craft personalized and relevant messages that you can reuse throughout your program, and don't overlook training for managers on how to deliver these messages to employees and keep the lines of communication open.

Data is driving the future of employee experience

Data is at the heart of every facet of business, and the insights data reveals about the employee experience offer business leaders a unique opportunity to learn and grow. Leveraging data can uncover potential, help leaders better support employees, and lead to higher productivity, better employee engagement and retention, and enhance overall employee wellbeing. With quit rates still rising, leaders can't afford to wait a minute longer to invest in the employee experience. ♥

FORECAST

Employee Listening Will Turn Intent Into Action

Employee listening was the #1 tech driver of employee engagement during the pandemic, according to research by Josh Bersin, published in the Definitive Guide to Employee Experience. Based on this finding — along with the uptick in focus on employee experience stemming from the "Great Resignation" — we anticipate the use of employee listening will explode in 2022.

Many organizations have historically used employee engagement platforms as a top-down tool to communicate messages and information to employees, and leaders commonly overlook the feedback that flows in the opposite direction. Indeed, your employee engagement platform can become a powerful tool for tuning in and listening to employee sentiment — if you proactively tap into it.

We know the power of listening already. Social listening has helped organizations zero in on customer concerns for years, and we predict this same approach will expand internally in the months to come. Listening can take many forms and happens on many levels, from individual to team to organization, and, across the board, the impact of listening is huge.

> When we do not listen to our employees, we lack understanding and perspective, and then employees disengage. When we actively listen, we show employees that we value their perspectives and experiences

which creates a foundation for action, spurs creativity, and guides innovation.

Large multinational organizations already use employee listening to glean insights

that help them better serve their workforce. These examples set the stage for what's to come, and will continue to shape employee expectations of the role business leaders play in cultivating a positive employee experience.

How Microsoft and IBM use employee listening

Practices that are successful at large organizations often influence what other businesses do, not just because they're trying to emulate the giants but because those large companies act as powerful case studies for what really works. At Microsoft and IBM, employee listening is an integral component of growth, and both organizations use strategic, consistent methods to gather insights on the employee experience. Companies of all sizes can benefit from adopting similar strategies.

At Microsoft, employee listening focuses on different subsets of employees every day, in rotation, so that every employee has a chance to share their point of view several times a year. Through regular pulse surveys, Microsoft collects quantitative data through closed questions and qualitative data through open-ended questions. These insights equip leaders to invest time, attention, and resources into the biggest concerns of their workforce. "We want our leaders to come into the room with the intention to get it right, not to be right, and therefore to listen and learn from others," said Kate Johnson, Microsoft U.S. president, as quoted in the Bersin report above.

Employee listening at IBM also blends quantitative data from surveys and polls (including Net Promoter Scores) with qualitative feedback, which IBM culls from employee opinions obtained through internal technology platforms and blog post comments. IBM leaders take employee listening a step further and demonstrate transparency with regular "Ask Me Anything" sessions with senior leaders. Topics

Employee Listening Will Turn Intent Into Action, cont.

broached in these conversations help IBM leadership identify key projects and set priorities with consideration for employees' perspectives.

How employee listening can work for you

With organizations surveying and gathering feedback like never before, they are well-positioned to use the data "heard" to understand what their teams need and improve the employee experience. What you learn through employee listening tools can help you come up with more creative employee engagement ideas, and even give you insights on what kinds of rewards and recognition will mean the most to your employees.

With record high voluntary quits happening month after month, the stakes are high for organizations to figure out how to improve team culture. Because employee listening is primarily about ensuring that you're aware of what's actually going on with your employees, it's one of the best strategies you can employ for doing just that. As an added bonus, showing employees that their thoughts and opinions matter to you and other leaders in your organization also builds trust, another key

component that may reduce employee turnover.

Like most things in workforce management, employee listening isn't 'set it and forget it.' To get the most out of the practice, you'll want to keep tabs on how sentiment shifts over time. For more information on how to measure program impact through engagement sentiment, explore our Engagement & Measurement forecast "Measuring Program Impact Through Engagement Sentiment" on page 63.

Your employee engagement platform and other internal tools will continue to provide tons of valuable data about what happens in your organization. But to get to the heart of what really matters to your employees, you'll need to find out directly from them. Whether that's through overt forms of employee listening, like regular employee feedback surveys, or through methods that involve harvesting employee opinions from existing sources, there's no doubt that employee listening is becoming a necessary tool for effective leadership and better outcomes for organizations and employees alike. ❤

Communication

Communicating Safety and Flexibility as Employees Return to Work

Incorporating Wellness Initiatives Across the Board

Business Transformation Will Escalate Change Management

Strategy   Leadership   Workforce
Segmentation   Training &
Education   Technology   Data &
Reporting   **Communication**   Engagement &
Measurement   Budget &
Finance

TRENDING

Communicating Safety and Flexibility as Employees Return to Work

Some people are excited about the prospect of returning to their physical workplaces. Others aren't. Most have concerns and a myriad of questions about what return-to-work will look like, how their employers plan to help them stay healthy, and what steps they will take related to vaccine expectations, responding to COVID-19 cases, testing requirements, and more.

Mental health concerns, and related concerns about substance abuse — particularly opiates — were already widespread before the pandemic. Now, those concerns have escalated. Work stress and fatigue, worry about the pandemic, and even worry about the environment are causing many employees to be mentally exhausted.

NPR reports that many people are dealing with something called "eco grief," a type of mental exhaustion that stems from accepting the harsh realities of climate change and feeling overwhelmed or hopeless. Layer in "disaster fatigue," another type of emotional tiredness that comes from constantly hearing about bad news, disasters and other crises and it is no wonder people are drained and scared.

> McKinsey indicates that employees feel that the prospect of returning to on-site work is impacting their mental health.

Those with children in their households were feeling this impact to a greater degree (44%) than those without (27%).

Employers are paying heed and making plans to address employee safety and flexibility concerns. Doing so is top-of-their-list when planning ahead to 2022. Here are some of the trends that are emerging.

Changing communication to reflect COVID-19 strategy

The virus and its continued risks are still top-of-mind for many people, including your employees. Ensuring that messaging around your COVID-19 strategy is built into your communication plans for 2022 will help address employees' concerns.

Not all organizations will face the same concerns; even within organizations not all employees will have the same concerns. Having conversations with, and even surveying employees to determine their fears and questions they have, can provide a good starting point for changing your communication to reflect COVID-19 strategy and employee health and wellness needs.

A survey can also be used to monitor perceptions and close gaps between what employees need and what you're providing.

What employees need and what employers are providing are disconnected

On a global scale, we know that employees are anxious. In September, LHH and The Adecco Group released a report, Resetting Normal: Defining The New Era of

Communicating Safety and Flexibility, cont.

Work 2021, based on global research. The survey of 14,800 workers in 25 countries indicates clearly that both employees and managers have concerns about the return to work:

- 67% of non-managerial employees say their leaders don't meet their expectation of checking on their mental wellbeing.
- Burnout is a significant area of concern for almost 40% of employees. More than half of young leaders also are struggling with burnout.
- Workers expect their organizations and leaders to address and support their wellbeing.

The issues at your organization may be similar. Assessing employee and manager sentiment is an important way to determine where you need to focus and where you need to take steps to close gaps between what employees want and what you're currently providing.

Communicating with employees about these gaps and the steps being taken to close them can help to alleviate concerns and boost engagement.

Acknowledging challenges of work-life blend
It was a trend we identified last year and it's still trending — the importance of work-life blend. Last year, we reframed work-life balance to work-life blend, with the recognition that these two areas of employees' lives are integrally entwined.

Since the pandemic, many employees have found themselves working from home alongside partners, children, and others. It's no longer possible — if it ever was — to draw a sharp line between work life and home life, especially when work is taking place from home!

> Employers need to acknowledge the challenges of work-life blend and make sure that their supervisors and managers are prepared and have access to resources that help employees find the right blend for them.

Communicating about these challenges and reassuring employees that the company and its leadership and management teams are committed to helping them find the balance and flexibility they need, can minimize concerns and help position the company as an employer of choice.

Addressing physical safety
Physical safety needs to be top-of-mind as vaccine debates and COVID-19 cases continue to emerge. Companies will need to continue to communicate with employees about the steps being taken to ensure their safety — from policies addressing what employees should do if they find they have contracted or have been exposed to the virus, to visible efforts like frequent cleaning, the use of air purifiers, physical distancing as appropriate, and more.

A 2020 Business Wire study revealed that 84% of employees were concerned about returning to their workplaces. Nearly all (92%) of the security and risk management professionals responding to the survey indicated that physical security is a greater concern now than before the pandemic.

Some companies are taking steps to address physical safety concerns. Chief among these concerns is the need to touch various surfaces. According to Business Wire, 96% of employees are still required to touch surfaces to enter their workplaces. "These include: door handles (82%), access control systems like keypads (46%), elevator buttons (43%), and sign-in devices or kiosks (31%)."

Using hybrid models to offer safety and flexibility
Despite the fact that some organizations have taken a hard line approach to requiring employees to return to physical settings, most indicate that they will be using hybrid work models to offer the safety and flexibility employees are demanding.

PwC surveyed 133 executives and 1200 employees in late 2020. Based on their research, they indicated that hybrid workplaces are likely to become the norm. "By design or default, most US companies are heading toward a hybrid office workweek," they say.

Remaining flexible to address both employee and company needs will be important. It is unlikely that many companies will be able to move back to a 100% on-site work model.

Communicating Safety and Flexibility, cont.

TRENDING

When communicating around all of these issues related to safety and flexibility, employers can follow these tips from Forbes contributor Amy Blaschka. She recommends that communications be clear and concise, designed with mindfulness related to the target audience, that leaders pay attention to their word choices and be intentional, and that they are proactive in sharing information and receiving feedback.

Strong communication can create a strong community.

Promoting Community

At a time when the workforce is physically dispersed and often disconnected from colleagues, customers and others, it's critical to take steps to promote community to help employees feel engaged and supported as they return to work. Technology can be a great aid here and an opportunity for employees, managers, and senior leaders to come together and gain access to information, while allowing for ongoing interactions and feedback.

Today's workers are more likely to expect and seek help for anxiety, stress, and depression. Employers are increasingly taking action. Community can bring us together. 💜

TRENDING

Incorporating Wellness Initiatives Across the Board

There is growing recognition of the important role that organizations can play in supporting employee wellness. It's a trend that has been heightened by the pandemic, and one that we see extending into 2022.

Wellness matters

Research shows that improving workers' wellness benefits and implementing wellness initiatives not only helps workers, but also improves business outcomes such as productivity, innovation, customer satisfaction, employee turnover, and engagement.

Employers knew this, of course, even before the pandemic. Research conducted in 2019 by the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill's Gillings School of Global Public Health, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and RTI International, indicated that "nearly half of all workplaces in the nation offer some level of health promotion or wellness programs."

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and rising turnover rates, employers are ramping up these efforts. And they're taking a broader approach, based on the recognition that there are many facets of our lives that impact wellness — from financial wellness, to physical wellness, to mental health, and even to social wellness.

The key takeaway is: when employees aren't feeling "well" — regardless of what aspect of their lives is contributing to that feeling — they are not likely to be focused and productive. And they're more likely to perform poorly, take time off, be sick, and even leave their organizations — or the work world entirely.

Here we take a look at some best practice initiatives and activities that companies can consider as they seek to positively impact the wellness of their staff.

A focus on financial wellness

Many employees have been hit hard by financial challenges during the pandemic. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), "nationwide, 52% of establishments (4.4 million) told employees not to work (with or without pay)" for at least some period of time. Industries that experienced the largest decrease in demand: air transportation (76%), accommodations and food services (71%), and mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction (70%). Even those who were able to continue working have been hit in other ways. Employee financial concerns range

Incorporating Wellness Initiatives Across the Board, cont.

from planning a retirement, paying for tuition and student loans, ensuring they have appropriate emergency funds on hand, paying for healthcare costs, etc.

Employers are providing assistance in a number of ways — from continuing to pay employees even while furloughed, to providing access to financial planners and other educational resources, to offering various benefit options like elder care insurance or tuition forgiveness.

The Society for Human Resources Management (SHRM) points to some specific examples of how employers' efforts here can pay big dividends. For instance, PayPal's financial wellness program has helped it to cut turnover — and boost employees' average net disposable incomes. Employers that are part of The Worker Financial Wellness Initiative say their participation has helped them to boost productivity, innovation, engagement, and customer satisfaction — and, like PayPal, also reduce turnover.

Physical wellness initiatives
Physical wellness initiatives have been offered by employers for many years. These benefits range from on-site workout facilities and exercise classes, to smoking cessation and weight loss incentives based on achieving certain milestones, to providing access to and even subsidizing participation in gyms and other classes offered in the community.

For many companies, though, as they sent employees home, they recognized that those employees no longer had ready access to those on-site facilities — and, for some time, all exercise facilities were just closed. They came up with some creative options to helping employees to take care of their physical health — everything from sending out healthy reminders and prompts to get people moving, to holding Zoom-based exercise classes, to providing employees with other online resources.

Mental health and wellness
Employee mental health has been significantly impacted in a variety of ways during the pandemic — from pandemic-related stress, to uncertainty about their job futures, to the stresses of working from home, issues related to family wellness, children learning from home, etc., etc., etc., it's fair to say that most employees — and their managers and supervisors — are facing a lot of pressure.

McKinsey's annual employer research reveals that employers are well aware of

these impacts and the value of helping employees address mental health issues. In fact, 9 out of 10 of the respondents to this survey indicated that COVID-19 is having a negative impact on employee behavioral health and productivity. A majority of employers have extended, or plan to extend, their behavioral health benefits — they're especially interested in utilizing telehealth and digital tools, which makes sense in a remote or hybrid environment.

One core and comforting message for employees in these uncertain times is that they are not alone. Mental health issues are prevalent in every pocket of the population. When employees can open up conversations about coping with their managers, supervisors and amongst themselves — from peer-to-peer — it can lead to a stronger sense of community, another important aspect of wellness.

Social wellness — creating community
Another critical aspect of overall wellness — and one that has become all too apparent during the pandemic — is social wellness. Many people have felt a strong sense of social isolation during the pandemic. While we continue to hear reports about employees who don't want to come back to the physical work environment, many do. Often this is related to their need to interact, collaborate, and socialize with their colleagues.

Companies recognize that relationships with family, friends and coworkers are very important for employees. It's also important that those relationships be strong. If they're not, these negative relationships can contribute to mental health issues.

A good way to combat workplace loneliness is to provide a way for your employees to communicate and interact with each other. This can be done on a very basic level through Slack channels, for instance, but can also be more successful by leveraging the technology of employee engagement platforms that incorporate a social component and peer-to-peer recognition.

Employee wellness contributes to a positive team culture and has many positive benefits for organizations — and, of course, for employees and their families. Savvy organizations are finding new ways to provide employees with the resources and support they need by offering an array of benefit options designed to meet the full spectrum of physical, mental, and financial wellness needs. ♥

FORECAST

Business Transformation Will Escalate Change Management

We live and work in a chaotic world these days, and organizations are feeling the pinch. Organizations, of course, are made up of people — people who have been dealing with massive change for several years in the form of new technology, an increasingly global market environment, changing societal norms, political unrest, and more. Layer on top of that the emergence of a world-wide pandemic and the old adage "change is a constant" has become abundantly clear and overwhelmingly true.

Amid this environment, companies and their leaders have had to tackle change management on a variety of fronts — not an easy thing to do. Companies are being forced to transform, and leadership will need to address these changes to enable their workforce to quickly (and efficiently) adjust and perform optimally.

To borrow from the title of Marshall Goldsmith's popular 2007 book: "What got you here won't get you there." Business transformation is critical to escalate change management.

There are three key areas of focus that companies must consider as they move forward with their business transformation initiatives: communication, digital policies, and automation.

Communication

Consider the communication challenges that most organizations face even in the best of times. We all know how complex communication with just one other person can be — multiply that interaction exponentially, as is the case with any organization, and the complexity becomes increasingly harder to manage. This is particularly true in a remote or hybrid work environment where many people are operating in different locations without the familiar access they've had to individuals and information and in an environment that is fraught with risk and uncertainty.

Leaders — from the top down of every organization — must be acutely focused on communicating strategically with employees at all levels, in all positions, and in all locations — including home locations. Communication must be ongoing, focused, and consistent. If communication voids exist, they will be filled — often with speculation, and misinformation. That, as many companies are finding, can lead to lack of engagement, lost productivity and turnover.

In fact, what has come to be referred to as the "Great Resignation" — the mass exodus of employees from their workplaces — is considered by many to be driven by poor communication. As Rosalia Scampoli points out in an article for Ragan: "Without consistent, clear communication, the process of adapting to these changes only makes things more difficult and can result in employee frustration. Keeping in touch with employees on updates about company guidelines and taking the pulse of how employees are dealing with the new norm in the workplace is key to retaining employees."

Business Transformation Will Escalate Change Management, cont.

Communication is a critical part of the employee experience (EX). Business expert [Josh Bersin recently embarked on a research study](#) commissioned by Microsoft to look at the employee experience (EX) and to determine what leaders need to know about EX and how to effectively manage it in productive ways. The research revealed six key findings of practices common among organizations that have a superior EX. The first: a "focus on trust, transparency, inclusion, and care." A focus on those four aspects of communication can help to build and support a culture where employees feel valued, engaged, and empowered.

During challenging times, it's especially important that leaders communicate using change management strategies to help employees deal with ambiguity and uncertainty. Management will have very little chance to get it right -- if communications are inconsistent and fail to inform employees what is going on and what actions are being taken, they're at risk of leaving.

Develop a Digital Strategy

The pandemic has accelerated the speed of transformation when it comes to the adoption of digital technology. How many Zoom meetings do we have now versus two years ago? How many remote workers use online channels to communicate and collaborate? How often do we choose to use digital channels to reach our customers versus picking up the phone and talking?

But the uptick in the use of digital tools for interaction and communication can't, or shouldn't, simply take place organically.

> Employees need direction, support, guidance, and training to ensure that they're using digital tools appropriately and efficiently.

Organizations will need to develop — or update — their digital strategies to ensure employees are maximizing the value of digital technology and not falling prey to its potential risks.

While some companies embarked on this journey even before the pandemic and the rise in remote and hybrid work occurred, others are still stumbling through the process and attempting to figure out how to create a strategy that meets organizational, employee, customer, and other key stakeholder needs.

In 2019, [writing for the Boston Consulting Group](#), Dan Wald, Romain de Laubier, and Tauseff Charany outlined "five rules of digital strategy" that they recommended companies follow to create an effective digital strategy. In their experience, "successful digital transformation must rest on a foundation of smart digital strategy." The rules are interrelated and are as pertinent now as they were before the pandemic. They are:

- **Assess the strategic impact of digital** New technologies impact businesses in different ways, so think about what implementing digital technologies can do for your business, how much they will cost, and assess their associated risks.
- **Set your digital ambition high** Consider if the use of new digital technologies will strengthen existing advantages, or introduce you to knew ones — or both. Make the most of every opportunity!

FORECAST

Business Transformation Will Escalate Change Management, cont.

- **Place big bets** Focusing on the top three areas where digital technologies will bring the greatest value and you'll likely see optimal results. Prioritizing will bring clarity and demonstrate progress sooner.
- **Build new strategic muscles** Once you dive into digital and recognize that it complements traditional methods of communication, you'll be confident to explore it in even more ways. A digital culture will attract talent, particularly Millennials, who are drawn to opportunities for autonomy and creativity.
- **Manage transformation actively** Developing a digital strategy is not a "set it and forget it" act, but needs continuous monitoring and refreshment to keep it relevant and successful.

Along the way, gathering feedback from a wide range of perspectives can help to identify what's working well, what isn't, and what new opportunities may exist.

Digital connections will continue to be a critical aspect of organizational performance. Doing so strategically can help companies be efficient, effective, and successful both in terms of sales and employee engagement.

Automation

The pandemic has forced businesses to automate more functions, and we anticipate this to be ongoing in 2022 and beyond.

Initially, much of this automation was centered around streamlining operations for a digital environment and delivering contactless service during the pandemic. As they are beginning to experience the power of automation to increase productivity and service, and drive down costs, companies will be looking beyond the initial use cases towards new opportunities.

One area of operations that holds great promise for automation is HR, which has long been mired in manual, repetitive tasks that require a lot of staff time and has prevented many HR professionals from serving in more strategic roles.

Now, though, HR and senior leaders are recognizing the opportunity to automate a wider range of HR practices. This will continue to happen in 2022 and beyond. This shift towards digital operations took both an internal and external role within many businesses in 2020 and 2021 as they struggled to streamline operations and deliver contactless service.

While many organizations have already begun to see the power of automation in helping them keep their businesses running, the pandemic has forced a growing number of companies to change their perspective and now they are beginning to understand the power that this technology offers. One such example is the use of technology to automate, augment, and enhance employee engagement. The Inspirus® Connects technology platform, puts rewards and recognition in the hands of employees themselves. It offers a central location for employees to interact, collaborate, celebrate each other, learn new things, and stay up to date on company news and initiatives, maximizing their engagement.

We anticipate that business transformation will continue to evolve in 2022 and beyond, and continue to thrust organizations into change management challenges. ♥

Engagement & Measurement

TRENDING

Bridging the Gap Between What Employees Want and What Employers Need

It's common for there to be a disconnect in organizations between employee needs and business mandates.

> Employees want to be in jobs that are fulfilling and to feel satisfied and appreciated for their work.
>
> Employers want a strong bottom line and measurable business success.

Those two often very different perspectives can lead to very real gaps in many business areas.

When the gaps can't be bridged, employees leave. The employee exodus trend was in the news for much of 2021 — more of the same may lie ahead for 2022. Employers need to make sure that they're laying a solid foundation to keep employees engaged by meeting their needs in ways that also further business needs.

It can be done. But first, employers need to understand what many employees are running from — and what they're running toward.

What employees are running from
Mental health will continue to be a significant concern and area of focus in 2022 as the pandemic continues and employees grow increasingly burdened with both work and family needs. According to McKinsey, mental health needs and substance abuse have been major areas of concern for employers during the pandemic. They point to some significant disconnects or gaps between employers and employees when it comes to successfully addressing employee mental health needs.

- While 65% of employers say that "employee mental health is supported well or very well," only 51% of employees agree.
- The situation is even more dire on the front lines where 71% of employers say they're doing well supporting employee mental health and only 27% of frontline workers feel the same.
- While 84% of employees with substance use disorders say that they are challenged to access care, only 20% of employers are reporting providing this access as a priority.
- Finally, although more than one-fifth (23%) of employers say they've implemented anti-stigma awareness campaigns over the past year, 79% of employees feel such a campaign would be valuable to them.

McKinsey has also drilled down into the drivers of positive employee belonging — the things that need to be in place to keep employees on board — to keep them from running. They are:
- Being valued by their managers
- Being valued by their organizations
- Feeling a sense of belonging
- Having caring and trusting teammates
- The potential for advancement
- Flexible work schedules

Lack of these important factors are what's most likely to drive employees away.

As McKinsey frames it: great attrition or great attraction? How can employers move forward into 2022 with the confidence that they have a solid foundation for attracting, retaining, and engaging employees?

What employees are gravitating towards
What are employees gravitating towards? Well, it's not hard to realize that they're drawn to the polar opposite of what they're running from:

TRENDING

- Not feeling valued by their managers or organizations
- No sense of belonging or community
- Lack of caring and trusting teammates
- Little to no training
- No potential for advancement
- Rigid on-site mandates

These are the things that employers will need to avoid to help minimize the risk of turnover and the high costs that can be associated with losing any employee but, especially, with losing high potentials. What sorts of things should employers and their HR leaders and managers be putting in place moving forward? American Express shares some insights and ideas from Gretchen Rubin, a New York Times bestselling author of The Happiness Project.

7 things you can do to make your employees happy in 2022

Employers have plenty of opportunities to build a more supportive environment for employees — an environment that will make them happy and productive — and keep them from running! Rubin suggests seven.

1) **Make sure you're making time to recognize employee efforts.** Employees are feeling under- and unappreciated more now than ever. Be proactive in identifying opportunities to recognize their personal and service milestones and positive contributions. Even something as simple as saying "thank you" can be impactful.

2) **Help employees feel a sense of belonging.** We've seen that employees are disengaged and likely to flee when they don't feel they belong. Helping them see that they do belong can be boosted by paying attention to their social needs, and providing opportunities for them to connect with other employees — even in virtual environments.

3) **Express interest in your employees — both in their work and in their lives outside of the workplace.** Feeling that their managers care about them causes employees to be more engaged.

4) **Make time for fun.** This can be another important way to help build engagement and loyalty to form a sense of belonging.

5) **Give them a break!** Employees need an opportunity to disengage from time to time — to have the flexibility to focus on personal priorities in addition to work.

6) **Encourage healthy behaviors.** Employees who get plenty of sleep and exercise are better focused, more creative and have more energy.

7) **Don't try to constantly "keep score"** — sending the message that "because I did this, you need to do that."

Your next steps: assess where you're at, identify reasons for change to help close gaps, and develop action plans with realistic goals for moving forward. Keep in mind that

contrary to what companies often believe, it's not the transactional factors (like pay) that cause employees to leave organizations, it's *relational* factors, like a sense of belonging that matter most.

Focus on creating a climate that supports employee belonging and meets their needs to keep them on board in 2022. ♥

TRENDING

Taking Care of Those Who Care for Others

When you first think about "taking care of those who care for others," healthcare workers might immediately come to mind. But that's not who we're talking about here. In fact, most of our employees are in some way involved in taking care of others — whether their partners, their children, their aging parents, their pets, or others. The challenges of providing that care have been especially trying over the last several months of the pandemic — and are likely to continue as we move into 2022.

These challenges are taking a toll. Your managers may be experiencing pressures, and related risks, of being caregivers both for those at home and those they're responsible for in the workplace.

The risk off failing to care

It's been said that "managers are the glue of your organization." They typically serve as the vital link connecting frontline employees to leadership — they're responsible for translating strategy into execution. With the added pandemic pressures to run leaner and meaner, chances are your managers will need additional attention, support and, yes, recognition as we move forward. Their needs should be top of mind as you begin to consider your plans for 2022.

Failure to take care of your managers and help them protect their wellbeing can have significant impacts. In fact, according to research by Citrix, input from 1000 workers who left their jobs to move on to other opportunities over the past 12 months indicates that burnout was a primary driver — 35% pointed to burnout as the reason they sought employment elsewhere.

Here we take a look at some specific things you can do to ensure that your managers are getting the support they need.

7 ways to care for and support your managers

There are a number of ways that organizations can help lay a foundation to ensure

that managers feel cared for and supported by senior leaders and HR. Here we take a look at seven things you should have on your radar for 2022.

1) **Provide clear expectations and goals**

Managers need to understand clearly what's expected of them. How will their success be judged? What measurable deliverables will they be held accountable to? Specificity is important here. "Keeping employees engaged" is important, of course, but not a clear expectation that will help managers understand the effort they need to put forth. Instead, a metric like "increase employee engagement scores by 20% during 2022" is measurable and, if also realistic, can help them better manage their responsibilities.

2) **Gather feedback — and really listen**

Organizations devote a lot of time and effort toward gathering feedback from employees. That's important, of course, but the same — if not more — time and attention needs to be directed toward gathering feedback from management

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staff. What resources and support do they need to help alleviate stress and demands? How would they most prefer to be supported?

3) Recognize their contributions

Especially during the pandemic, when many managers may have been "out of sight and out of mind," their contributions may have been overlooked. Take steps to ensure that this doesn't occur moving forward.

> It's important to recognize managers' contributions and to applaud the hard work they do on a daily basis.

Employee engagement tools like Inspirus® Connects can help streamline this process and boost the odds that it will be top-of-mind, not just for senior leaders — but for other managers and employees to consistently provide recognition as well. Peer-to-peer recognition can be the most powerful type of recognition.

4) Provide training opportunities

Training can be doubly valuable for managers — it can provide them with insights to help make managing others easier, and it can help them further develop their leadership skills. Development opportunities are highly valued by

employees these days, and that includes management staff.

5) Give them the tools and resources they need to do their jobs well

Managing employees across both on-site and remote settings can be especially challenging. Providing managers with tools to help them streamline and stay on top of those interactions can help. Tools with automated features can help managers manage their time, and provide useful reminders and notifications to ensure they don't overlook special dates or opportunities to recognize their team members.

6) Take an interest in their careers

We alluded to this earlier, but it's worth mentioning again. Professional development matters!

> Make sure that you're taking an interest in your managers' career aspirations, having conversations to help you understand their personal goals and objectives,

and paving the way for professional development that can help them move into higher-level roles in your organization. This kind of development can help stem the outflow of talent that so many employers are experiencing these days.

7) Help them find top talent to fill open roles

The better the knowledge, skills and aptitudes of managers' team members, the less pressure will be on them. Make sure that your organization is committed to finding top talent and is laying the foundation for a strong culture that attracts that kind of talent. Building bench strength at all levels of the organization can help battle burnout and turnover — and ensure a strong pipeline for future leadership opportunities.

There are a number of things that organizations can begin putting in place now to ensure that 2022 is a year of engagement and productivity at all levels of the organization. A good place to start is with taking care of those who care for others — your managers. 💙

TRENDING

Shifting to Managing the Employee *Life* Experience

Discussions about the employee experience have been going on for some time — long before the pandemic. But, prior to the pandemic, conversations related to the employee experience tended to refer to the employee experience in the workplace. For many employees these days that has changed dramatically.

Whether they asked for it or not, the global pandemic has given managers insight into all areas of their employees' personal lives — from home schooling challenges, to caring for aging parents, to mental health concerns and more. That visibility has brought to light the need to fully support employees' needs not just in the traditional work environment, but across all of their personal and professional experiences. After all, employees are impacted not only by what goes on in the workplace. That has become abundantly clear during the pandemic and it's a situation that is likely to continue.

Challenges at home clearly impact work performance.

Broader support leads to better outcomes

Gartner's 2020 ReimagineHR Employee Survey found that 20% of employees who were supported by their employers in their life experiences reported better mental and physical health. The remaining 80%? We surmise that these employees were negatively impacted, with results reflected in their job performance, engagement levels, communications with coworkers, and physical capabilities for functioning effectively on a daily basis.

Gartner predicts that, based on this research, "employers will shift from managing the employee experience to managing the life experience of their employees." Employers will quickly come to realize that employees' whole lives impact them not only at home, but at work as well. These impacts can be positive — or negative.

Gartner analysts predict that, moving forward:

- **Flexibility will fuel performance.** While a few employers have taken a hardline stance and insisted that employees return to the office, most are recognizing the need for flexibility both to ensure engagement and high performance, and to stem the tide of turnover.
- **Organizations will recognize the need for a shared purpose.** Brian Kropp, chief of research in the Gartner HR practice says: "Organizations that get involved in the societal and cultural debates of today find they have a more engaged workforce and a better reputation that enables them to source the best quality talent from the labor market."
- **Employers will work to build deeper connections.** Gartner's research reveals that: "Employers who support their employees more holistically realize a 21% increase in high performers."

Shifting to Managing the Employee *Life* Experience, cont.

TRENDING

It's a trend that we have also noted. In our 2021 Trends Report we cited the shifting of work-life balance into work-life blend — an employee perspective. With that transition now firmly in place, the employer side of the issue is coming to fruition — prompting a shift from managing the employee experience to managing the employee life experience.

Over the past 18 months, employers, managers, and employees have become more integrally involved in each other's lives outside of the workplace. They now have a lot more insight into personal information about their coworkers, driven by actually viewing their home settings during Zoom calls, as well as through personal conversations taking place. Employees at all levels shared their challenges and concerns during these calls, eagerly seeking connections that were abruptly halted as the pandemic emerged.

As we reported in 2021: "Working remotely may result in increased productivity, but employees having their place of work and their place of rest become one in the same can make it difficult to "turn off" and afford themselves the opportunity to recharge, even after they step away from the computer.

Now, as we move into 2022, these insights will certainly have an impact on the relationships, communication, and collaboration between employees both in the workplace and in remote settings. Here, we look at some ways to support employees in life — not just in work as we move forward.

Supporting employees in life and work

Moving forward, it will be important for employers, their HR leaders, and managers to adopt ways of supporting employees' whole selves, creating employee engagement strategies to support their needs. This can be done by:
- Allowing flexibility with schedules whenever possible.

The pandemic and remote work has taught us that where, and when, employees get their work done often doesn't matter.

Loyal employees know what needs to get done, and they will get it done, even if it means logging in during the evening after attending to personal demands.

- Expanding benefit offerings to include wellness perks. Wellness was, of course, a priority for many companies even before the pandemic, but it's likely to be even a greater focus moving forward. And for good reason — healthy employees are more likely to be engaged and productive employees.
- Connecting frequently through check-ins, especially with employees who may be working remotely. These check-ins can be used both to gather and share information, and to get a sense of what type of support employees may need.
- Practicing compassion that goes beyond simply asking: "How are you?," to listening carefully to the responses you receive and taking action to make adjustments to address employee work-life balance and personal needs.
- Prioritizing their workloads to help employees focus on their most important tasks.
- Nurturing a healthy work-life balance by modeling healthy behaviors yourself.
- Encouraging community with your workforce so employees with similar challenges in, for example, family or health, etc., can support and find comfort in one another. This can be done in both physical and virtual settings.
- Reminding employees to take advantage of all the benefits that are available to them — from gym membership reimbursement, to financial wellness counselling, and other offerings.
- Recognizing employees' life moments, big and small, including birthdays, anniversaries, service milestones, career achievements, etc. Don't let any moment pass without acknowledging it — and don't overlook the power of peer-to-peer recognition. Offer a seamless, easy way for employees to recognize each other.

Employee recognition platforms and employee recognition programs can go a long way toward addressing employee needs in all aspects of their lives. It all begins, of course, with the acknowledgment that employees are now, more than ever, bringing their whole selves to work. Managers, HR professionals, and others need to ensure that they're taking steps to support employees across the "employee life experience." 💙

FORECAST

Measuring Program Impact Through Engagement Sentiment

Employers have been conducting employee satisfaction, employee engagement, and pulse surveys for years, gathering information on employee sentiment and team culture. HR is sitting on a goldmine of information that they've collected from a myriad of sources including employee survey feedback and chatter on employee engagement technology platforms.

Sentiment analysis brings together all of these comments, opinions, and feedback to gain insight into how the organization runs and how employees feel about the organization — and the work that they do. Unfortunately, these insights reveal that employees are not as engaged as their employers hoped they would be.

In fact, a 2020 ADP research study shows that a mere 14% of employees surveyed indicated they were engaged. This lack of engagement can lead to a poor team culture and employee turnover which can be quite costly. Employers need to better understand and leverage the data they have to reduce employee turnover.

Moving forward into 2022, it's clear that employers have a lot of room for improvement. Many, unfortunately, are lagging behind in terms of allocating budget to help alleviate the problem. While they freely and generously allocate funds for customer data, they don't apply the same mindset — or sense of importance — to their internal programs.

That, fortunately, is starting to change and we predict it will continue to trend upward as more and more organizations achieve success by mining their employee engagement data effectively.

Letting AI lead the way

Traditionally, employers have measured employee engagement and satisfaction through employee surveys, pulse polls, focus groups, feedback from supervisors and managers, and other qualitative sources of information that were useful, if not highly predictive.

Today, through the emergence of increasingly more powerful technology, in addition to using employee engagement platforms to help identify employee engagement strategies and improve team culture,

many companies are turning to employee sentiment analysis software, powered by artificial intelligence (AI), to collect employee sentiment data.

Yes, there are still some pitfalls to be alert to when using this software — it struggles with things like sarcasm, industry jargon, and cultural slang, for instance. But the

Measuring Program Impact Through Engagement Sentiment, cont.

more it's used, the more it learns — and the smarter it gets. That sounds promising for the future of more effectively and more precisely measuring employee sentiment.

The technology still has a long way to go, but it does hold promise. HR Technologist has outlined seven tools employers may want to consider adding to their employee engagement arsenals.

- Intellica.ai — using "natural language processing, data visualization, predictive analytics, conversational artificial intelligence (AI), and recommendation engines," this tool offers the flexibility to add custom applications to its core architecture.
- Jive Interactive Intranet includes an advanced analytics module to track workplace trends including project progress, the things employees are talking about — and sentiment analysis.
- KeenCorp offers two dashboards for sentiment analysis: MoodMetrix to map sentiment trends, and Attitude Heatmap to help prioritize actions.
- Lattice also offers two tools focused on performance management and employee engagement. It's AI-powered sentiment analysis tool continuously scans qualitative, open-ended comments, scoring them on a scale of 1-10.
- MeaningCloud offers a free API that can be integrated into other applications, including your own internally developed HR systems. It uses "multilingual sentiment analysis to understand positive, neutral, or negative sentiment."
- Repustate is a sentiment analysis tool that is used in both customer and employee settings. It's an advanced tool with powerful features and can be customized to your own lexicon and work requirements.
- UltiPro Perception can be embedded into employee engagement surveys to aid organizations in gaining greater insights into employee sentiment and motivations.

These aren't the only tools, of course, but they should provide some good insights into what's available and how you might augment your capabilities to take a deeper dive into employee sentiment.

Data drives better decisions

Gathering the right data can help organizations better understand both the positive and negative drivers that affect employee behaviors and decisions.

That can aid in reducing employee turnover, something that most employers are closely focused on in an environment where employees have many opportunities and choices. Armed with this data employers can take steps to strengthen their cultures, and focus on offering employees the climate, tools, and support that will drive both engagement and performance.

As employee turnover rates continue to increase, annual performance reviews and surveys may not supply enough information for companies to get an accurate reading of employee engagement within their organization. Technology platforms like Inspirus® Connects, though, provide one avenue to "listen" and collect feedback as employees are using it to reward and recognize others — truly a win-win solution. Organizations that employ sentiment analysis can turn intel from their tech platform and engagement sentiment mechanisms into actionable insights, driving engagement levels.

They can stem the tide of employees who are running away, and increase the potential that new employees will be running toward them as job opportunities emerge. 💙

Budget & Finance

The Great Resignation Continues its Corporate Wrath

The Business Impact of Parity in Employee Rewards & Recognition

Aligning HR with Shifting Business Goals

TRENDING

The "Great Resignation" Continues its Corporate Wrath

"How we spent our time before the pandemic may not be how we want to spend our time after."

That quote from Anthony Klotz, management professor at Texas A&M's Mays Business School, goes for both employees and employers. Klotz coined the phrase the "Great Resignation" in reference to the millions of Americans who quit their jobs during the pandemic. And employees are still leaving at record levels.

In 2017, the annual overall turnover rate in the U.S. was at 26.3%. In 2020, that number jumped to 57.3%.

Just in July 2021, four million Americans quit their jobs, leaving a record 10.9 million job openings available. We already know why this is happening: see our Workforce Segmentation trend "Employees are Prioritizing their Values and Evaluating their Career Choices" on page 20. What we need to discuss now is the impact the "Great Resignation" is having on the bottom line.

The cost of replacing an individual employee can range from one-half to two times the employee's annual salary, and that's a conservative estimate. For example, if a 100-person organization provides an average salary of $50,000, it could have turnover and replacement costs of approximately $660,000 to $2.6 million per year. When you do the math, it's not pretty.

This is why employee retention is so high on the priority list for most HR leaders going into 2022. And our advice to companies currently struggling with this goes back to the quote from Klotz. How you spent your time before the pandemic may not be how you want to spend your time (and corporate investment dollars) now. It's time to think differently.

But what exactly can organizations and HR departments in particular do to combat the "Great Resignation" and retain their workforce? We've come up with seven best practices that will help improve morale and reduce employee turnover, and in turn, protect the bottom line.

1. Hire smartly
Hiring the right people is ground zero for decreasing turnover rates. It's important to recruit candidates that are a good fit not only for the job description itself, but also to fit the company and team culture. You're not just hiring warm bodies to meet a quota. You're bringing a new family member into the fold.

2. Focus on diversity
Diversity should play an important role in the recruiting, hiring, and promotion process in your organization. It is a proven fact that companies with more diversity end up being more successful. Plus, more people — especially Millennials and

The "Great Resignation" Continues its Corporate Wrath, cont.

Gen-X'ers — want to work in a diverse environment. It's up to the leadership of every organization to create a dynamic and inclusive culture so that a multigenerational workforce feels welcomed and valued.

3. Encourage honest feedback

Many people leave their jobs because they don't feel their voices are being heard. A recent Healthy Organization Research report found that only 13% of companies actually survey their workforce to understand their needs, and only 18% attempt to actively manage and optimize workloads in order to remove stress. It is important to survey your workforce and provide clear communication paths where employees can give and receive feedback without fear of being punished or ostracized. And,

> ### when employees do provide honest feedback, listen to them and take action.

4. Recognize and reward employees

Another main reason people are leaving their jobs in droves is because they don't feel recognized for their hard work, especially during the pandemic. Recognition breeds loyalty, so you should consider having a robust employee appreciation program in place that makes it easy to reward your staff for outstanding performance.

> ### When employees feel appreciated, they feel better about themselves, their job, and the company they work for. And productivity soars.

When you take into account the fact that the employees who are most likely to quit are the highest performers, the stakes become even higher.

5. Encourage growth and career pathing

The best way to encourage growth and career pathing within your ranks is through training and mentorship. That starts the moment a new employee is hired. HR should coordinate with the employee and their manager to develop a growth plan and refresh it on a regular basis, perhaps through the annual review process. This plan should include any type of education or training needed for the job, along with an employee motivation and mentorship program that encourages growth throughout the entire employment lifecycle.

6. Promote from within

The fastest and easiest way to lose loyal workers is to hire outside the company as opposed to promoting from within. Doing this signals to current employees that you don't value the contributions they've made to your company in the past and causes them to look elsewhere for advancement. When you promote from within, you already have a candidate that understands the company culture and that is already part of that culture. Promoting from within is cost-effective and it leads to happier, more-productive, and more loyal employees. It's a win-win.

7. Get to the root cause of attrition

The best way to reduce employee turnover in your organization is to get to the root cause. Talk to your employees and really listen to their issues. Find out why they're unhappy. A lot of people left their jobs during the past two years due to burnout. Your job is to prevent your staff from getting to that point. Understand the employee experience by practicing empathy and understanding. Be willing to make adjustments. If employees want more flexibility in their current situation, try to accommodate them. If you take the hard line of "this is how it's always been done," you'll lose your workforce to other companies that will be happy to accommodate them.

The "Great Resignation" shows no sign of slowing down anytime soon, which means your organization is at a high risk of losing employees. The time to act is now. Hire the right people, embrace diversity and flexibility, recognize and reward your employees, and promote from within. Otherwise, your bottom line will bottom out. ❤

TRENDING

The Business Impact of Parity in Employee Rewards & Recognition

The new hybrid workforce is here to stay, and it's arrival has created some new challenges for HR departments when it comes to having a fair and equitable rewards and recognition program. But, fairness and equity — the latter of which is occasionally, and erroneously, interchanged with the word "parity" — holds different meanings in different organizations. In general terms, parity means equality and comparability in amount, status or value; equity is about fairness and impartiality.

Why parity matters in employee recognition and rewards

Diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) are driving forces in today's culture. Employees and consumers alike expect a company to treat all of their employees fairly, regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation, or career level. A company's reputation matters, especially to younger consumers. Almost 70% of young buyers will choose not to do business with a company they feel doesn't treat its employees with parity and equity.

Ideally, people should be hired and promoted based on their job performance and not favoritism or ingrained biases; rewards and recognition should be based on employee performance, not location. When companies put these practices into place, they are ultimately more successful.

"Companies making rewards and recognition fair and equitable are more than four times more likely to have outstanding business outcomes, more than five times more likely to accomplish outstanding people outcomes, and more than six times more likely to innovate and adapt well to change."

That's according to Josh Bursin in The Definitive Guide: Employee Experience. Bursin goes on to explain that appreciation, recognition, and rewards contribute to a positive work environment and help make up what Bursin calls "the irresistible organization," meaning the type of company employees are leaving their old jobs for and flocking to for new opportunities. If you don't want to lose your workforce,

you need to become one of these irresistible organizations.

Negative business outcomes of not practicing parity in rewards

When businesses ignore parity in their rewards and recognition programs, it affects corporate morale, and in turn, the bottom line. A Gallup poll in 2021 found that workplace discrimination of any type affected an employee's ability to do their best work, which meant productivity suffered.

The poll went on to point out that employees who felt discriminated against were at a higher risk of leaving a company. With companies scrambling to retain and attract talent right now, and the high costs to recruit and train, organizations need to take advantage of every opportunity to retain employees.

Another negative outcome for businesses that are not focused on equity is bad reviews from employees on sites such as GlassDoor and Indeed. Candidates look to these sites before applying for jobs, and if they feel a company has a culture of not treating employees fairly, they'll move on to another job posting.

The Business Impact of Parity in Employee Rewards & Recognition, cont.

TRENDING

Lower productivity, increased turnover, the high cost of recruiting and training employees, and the negative feedback affecting a company's reputation and ability to hire in the future are all preventable outcomes if a strong focus is placed on parity and equity from the top down.

The benefits of employee-driven rewards programs

The easiest way to ensure parity and equity in your rewards and recognition program is to automate it through the use of employee rewards and recognition programs that eliminate human biases and favoritism.

> The days of the one-size-fits-all employee service milestones and a 'gold watch at retirement age' are over. Modern programs are based on different types of employee recognition

and let staff choose their own rewards through an equitable and fair system, be it points or performance levels. Providing employees with the ability to pick a reward from an online rewards mall or merchandise catalog gives them options and increases motivation, depending on the types of rewards offered.

Using technology to help foster DEI and to automate recognition and rewards is not only culture-changing, it positively affects the bottom line.

The parity in rewards and recognition trend is just one of many equity-focused trends that HR departments will be focused on in the new year and the near future. The pandemic opened everyone's eyes to the many injustices in the world, and people are now demanding something different. If you want to keep your workforce and your bottom line intact, you'll need to be a leader in this area. ♥

FORECAST

Aligning HR with Shifting Business Goals

For the past two years, HR budgets have been dwindling as a result of businesses shifting their priorities. Corporate investment is now focused on adapting, surviving and even thriving in this "new normal" post-pandemic world.

With hybrid work arrangements becoming mainstream, companies battling it out for the best talent, and diversity, equity and inclusion expectations on the rise,

business goals in the coming year will be all about transformation.

In order to ensure funds get earmarked for employee engagement initiatives, HR will need to align itself with these new paradigms.

Top HR priorities for the coming year
According to Gartner's annual HR Trends Report, critical skill building remains the top priority for human resources in 2022. However, the survey reflected an increase in focus on the importance of leadership, equity and inclusion, and change management for human resources departments across the board. Many of these goals are similar to those we highlighted in 2021, specifically the importance of change management as well as diversity and inclusion.

Here are the top 5 priorities for 2022, according to over 500 surveyed HR leaders, along with tips on how human resource professionals can line up with corporate business goals in order to achieve harmonious synergy.

1. Building critical skills and competencies
For the fourth straight year, building critical skills and competencies topped the list of priorities for HR departments. The challenges of the pandemic didn't quell the need for a more highly skilled workforce. If anything, it increased awareness.

The report found an annual 6.3% increase in the total number of skills needed for one job, as well as an increased requirement for new skills. In 2022, 29% of the skills listed in a typical 2018 job posting will be obsolete.

In order to align this need for increased skills and competencies with corporate business goals, HR leaders will need to stress the importance of training programs and how they directly affect the bottom line. When companies invest in their employees' education and growth, those employees are more likely to feel a sense of gratitude and loyalty. This helps to reduce turnover rates and leads to a more stable and productive workforce. As we all know, it costs a lot more to recruit and hire a new employee than to retain an old one. Investing in any type of training that helps employees become better at their jobs and feel better about themselves leads to more efficiency and happier employees.

2. Change management and organizational design
The pandemic changed everything about how we work and how we think about work. Almost half of the HR leaders surveyed mentioned change management and organizational design as a top priority in planning for 2022.

Massive changes are highly stressful for most employees, and just when they got used to working and being productive from home, many companies started requiring them to come back into the office. This requirement, along with overall dissatisfaction, workplace stress, and a desire to change jobs in general, led to the "great resignation."

Your staff needs to feel understood and valued. In an effort to help them deal with ever increasing changes, companies will have to focus on communication, engagement, and employee appreciation through employee recognition programs and rewards. That is, if they want to keep their workforce motivated,

Aligning HR with Shifting Business Goals, cont.

inspired (or keep them period.) All of these initiatives begin and end with HR.

3. Current and future leadership bench

Another blow both the pandemic and the resulting "great resignation" dealt to companies and HR departments was an overall thinning of the leadership pipeline. With many of the most talented employees leaving organizations for better opportunities or because they couldn't keep their remote work arrangements, companies are struggling to promote from within.

Changing the focus from employee promotion to employee development will be key. Identifying future leaders and providing them with the training and development they need to move into leadership roles will not only enhance your management pipeline, it will also reduce your attrition rates, as workers will stay with an organization if they see a clear progression plan.

Aligning this priority with overall business goals will be simply a matter of prioritizing internal talent development and promotion. With 63% of employees saying a lack of career development opportunities is reason enough to leave their current employer, alignment in this area is a win-win for both employers and employees.

4. Future of work

The future of work is remote. It's hybrid. It's letting employees continue to do their jobs in the manner that works best for them. In the Gartner report, 95% of those polled agreed that some of their staff will continue to work remotely and that HR will need to fully support this new arrangement. If you don't, you'll be at risk of losing four out of every ten of your employees.

During the pandemic, employees proved they could be productive working from home. They also enjoyed the new work-life balance this arrangement provided. Therefore, it makes no sense to risk losing experienced staff by instituting a harsh "return to the office or else" policy just so managers can keep an eye on them. In fact, the survey results stated that 39% of workers could leave if this type of policy were forced upon them.

Human resources will need to align this need for a future-focused workforce

by demonstrating how hybrid work drives business transformation. It allows companies to hire the best talent regardless of where they live in the world. It also reduces the high costs of office space, as many companies are downsizing their office footprint and opting for flexible workspaces for those employees that like to come into a physical office. If companies insist on going back to the dinosaurian ways things have always been, they'll suffer the same fate. Extinction.

5. Diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI)

In addition to the changes brought upon the workplace by the pandemic, there were also cultural events and movements that forced the topic of gender and racial equality to the forefront of everyone's consciousness. An inclusive culture will no longer be a nice-to-have for companies going forward. Not having one will be a deal-breaker.

Changing corporate culture through DEI efforts will continue to be a major focus for both HR departments and executive leadership. This is one priority for 2022 that aligns perfectly for both, as employees who may want to work for an organization and the consumers that do business with that organization will continue to expect, even demand, diversity, equity and inclusion. Also, it's been proven that companies with higher levels of diversity experience more overall success and have 19% higher revenues than those without.

In 2022, there will need to be a seismic shift in the way companies recruit, hire, mentor, and especially promote employees through the lens of equity. The boardroom has to be a more equitable representation of what the country actually looks like now. Pay equity will continue to be a hot topic as well. Employees will be paid based solely on job responsibility, and not gender, ethnicity, or previous salary. Equity is equity, across the board.

Aligning HR priorities with ever-changing business goals in 2022 really boils down to focusing on the employees and their needs. Make the employee the center of your HR universe and do everything you can to understand them, train them, support them, and allow them to work in ways that work best for them. That's the new normal of a post-pandemic workforce. And companies that get that will be the ones that thrive in the new year and for years to come. ♥

About Inspirus

Employees play a large part in defining a company's culture — their everyday experiences create the foundational structure that drives an organization to be strong, high-performing, and ultimately successful. Through our technology and integrated solutions, we elevate the employee experience and optimize organizational culture by providing a holistic approach throughout the entire employee journey. Inspirus aims to bring joy to work, one experience at a time.

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