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FUTURE OF TALENT MANAGEMENT

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Raconteur reports

Competition heats up in HR tech market

Holistic solutions from the tech giants now have to compete with smaller, niche providers, with barriers to entry in the HR software market lower than ever

Virginia Matthews

W ith the fast-growing appetite for cloud-based human capital management software showing little sign of being satisfied, vendor numbers are mushrooming.

Yet at the heart of a market likely to be worth some $22.5 billion (£17.4 billion) within three years, according to global market research firm AMR, lies a classic David-and-Goliath struggle.

For while established technology giants such as Sage, Oracle and ADP promise welcome economies of scale in placing everything from diversity and inclusion analytics to payroll in the hands of one provider, the young bloods boast thrilling disruption and innovation.

Deciding whether to go holistic or niche can be difficult, says David D'Souza, membership director of the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, particularly for the many HRs who cite spreadsheets as their current technology of choice.

"There are a few end-to-end solutions providers to choose from and most are very well known, but if you use one for logistical reasons, you may find it that much harder to buy into the brand new systems coming on stream," he says.

"It's true that the 'tech-stack' approach means you must engage with a myriad number of smaller vendors with all this entails, but it's an approach that could well allow you to be more fleet of foot."

Yet both strategies have their merits, he believes, particularly now that the barriers to entry into this highly fragmented industry are now lower than ever.

"Nobody should be left behind in the current data revolution, whatever their budget or level of technical expertise," says Mr D'Souza.

For long-time payroll processor ADP, the firm's iCHM2 product, branded as a "complete human capital management system in the cloud", clearly demonstrates the superiority of holistic solutions in both raising engagement levels and pegging costs.

Don McGuire, the firm's president, believes that too many human capital management purchasing decisions are based on "neat functionality and cool widgets" when a more joined-up approach is what's required. ADP's iCHM2, in contrast, can "break down processing silos to give forward-thinking organisations a way to deliver a more seamless, relevant and useful employee experience", he says.

At the opposite end of the HR technology market lies Breathe HR, whose hunting ground is growing businesses that need to be "actively supported by, not buried in tech", in the view of founder and chief executive Jonathan Richards.

While he believes the enterprise end of the market offers "high-ticket consultancy for very large and sophisticated users", his own firm's unique selling point is to provide the jargon-free, user-friendly approach that he says so many smaller businesses crave.
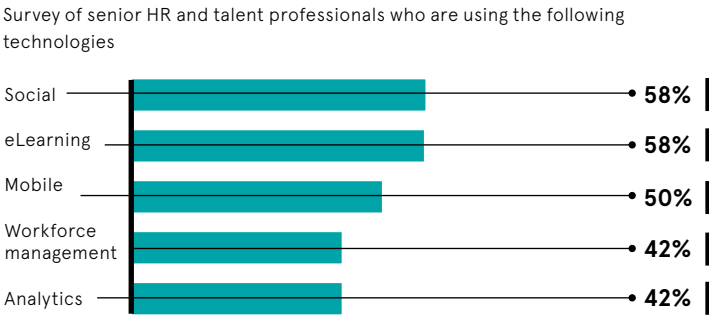
"You can subscribe to our product on a Monday and by Friday all the data will be in and all the employees will have logged in. We offer value for money, quick returns and lots of help and that's why no-nonsense niche players like Breathe are becoming so popular," he says.

While many purchasers may hope that the current shakedown in HR tech leads to greater choice of all-singing, all-dancing products from big-name vendors, this is unlikely, says David Hargrave, director of Willis Towers Watson.

"What I do see, however, is more of a platform-based market, which allows you access to a competitive marketplace for each different tool on that platform as soon as you subscribe. If you want to use the salary survey tool, for example, you will be able to choose between a number of different suppliers depending on things like the size of the headcount and, of course, how much you are prepared to pay."

While Mr D'Souza notes the current impact of "literally thousands of new players offering their own 'lite' versions of the big, all-encompassing platforms", he too identifies a gradual move towards "ecosystem" products, akin to Apple's App Store.

Although there are clear dangers to being locked into a single-vendor arrangement at a time when innovation is driving the market, the prospect of a multitude of small suppliers potentially replicating both in-house information systems and each other is, for many, equally nightmarish.

Yet there may be hints that smart niche firms are already beginning to play the big boys at their own game.

"What's most exciting at the moment is how smaller, best-of-breed providers are talking to each other to deliver a more seamless service," says Mr Richards. "By collaborating with two other players, one an engagement tool provider and the other a scheduling service, say, there is an opportunity for an operation such as Breathe to literally become the central hub and employee data holder around which other services revolve."

This sort of collaboration does much to counter the fear that juggling too many suppliers inevitably causes breakages, says Kate Cooper, head of research, policy and standards at the Institute of Leadership & Management.

"The notion of small, specialist tech firms banding together to rival the big platforms is a very good example of how people can make tech work for themselves, rather than the other way around," she says.

HRs, who are constantly being told to be agile, responsive and flexible, should view technology not as a threat, but as a way to ensure they continue to lead the way with all people matters.

"Whether it's long-term policy decisions or day-by-day changes to job descriptions, reliance on a single procurement provider makes it more difficult to stay ahead of trends," she says.

"Even though there may be headaches inherent in going ad hoc, I advise companies to take advantage of the disruptors and tap firmly into their research and development. There are many tech opportunities out there right now and nobody can afford to miss them." ●

Mike Kononov/Unsplash

TOP HR TECHNOLOGIES CURRENTLY IN USE

Survey of senior HR and talent professionals who are using the following technologies

Technology	Percentage
Social	58%
eLearning	58%
Mobile	50%
Workforce management	42%
Analytics	42%

HR Exchange Network 2018

ultramansk/Shutterstock

TALENT ACQUISITION

Relying on AI to find you the perfect candidate

Sophisticated artificial intelligence and machine-learning tools are helping businesses remove bias and improve talent acquisition, but are there limitations to its success?

Peter Crush

You are head of talent acquisition. You're about to make contact with what recruiters call a cold prospect, someone not actively looking for a job. You know this because their CV isn't on any job boards. Neither have they registered with LinkedIn's Open Candidate tool, which basically says "call me". And yet far from this being the shot in the dark it used to be, you're calling safe in the knowledge that the recipient will be seven times more likely to be interested in what you say.

Why? Because artificial intelligence (AI), specifically a tool from San Francisco-based Entelo, has told you so. It doesn't just find skilled people, it predicts whether they're considering new pastures, by looking at what they're saying and doing on social media, including whether they've changed their profiles.

The firm is just one of a new breed of technology providers that could finally be helping employers win the famous war for talent. Thanks to AI, employers are being promised phenomenally better hiring. Either for current roles – tech firm HireVue assesses video interviews with in-built emotion recognition technology and pairs it with AI and validated psychometric game-based assessments to assess more accurately for critical thinking and team work – or anticipating who has most potential.

For instance, at recruitment management software provider TribePad, its algorithms are now capable of finding patterns in the career histories of people with similar skillsets to predict job advancement.

Chief executive Dean Sadler says: "Recruiters can predict the careers of candidates two years from now, by looking at the advancement of people who had the skillset they need now, back then. It's all about the pursuit of perfection. Firms today can no longer survive hiring the 'good enough'. It's all about hiring the 'best'."

An enticing benefit of AI is that talent is looked at completely ration-

ally. Razvan Creanga, co-founder of startup Hackajob, which specialises in helping employers find technology talent, says its AI strips out influencing factors, such as the university people went to and even who their previous employer was, to analyse four million-plus datapoints to focus purely on skills and competencies. He says: "We're finding people employers would simply have ignored like the Uber driver we found who had amazing problem-solving skills."

Not only can AI unearth ignored or "invisible" talent, it promises being able to match for real "fit"; qualifications-based selections say little about team working, for example. However, it's also argued machine-learning merely models historical profiling of what "good" in a company already looks like, perpetuating hiring bias, particularly gender bias. But even here technologists are fighting back.

At neuroscience and AI firm pymetrics, director Tom Viggers says: "We proactively de-bias our algorithms to protect against adverse impact based on gender and ethnicity. So important is this, we actually open source our de-biasing methodology." He adds that because new joiners feed into the selection algorithm, this enables their tool to remain predictive over time.

"With an insurance firm we work with, our 'highly recommended' matches are so accurate that staff it hires make 33 per cent higher sales and are 30 per cent less likely to leave after one year."

But the future of technology in talent acquisition will only be as good as its actual uptake and here the jury is most definitely out.

"A lot of the time new technology has 'go-faster' stripes that doesn't integrate well with HR departments or the market is running ahead with solutions the profession hasn't caught up with," says Stephen Reilly, group talent acquisition consultant at engineering firm Mott MacDonald.

Daniel Harris, its head of talent acquisition, adds: "We need to be planning talent one, two, three years down the line, but what we need to ensure is new technology fulfils a specific business need, for instance we've spent a lot of time learning how to optimise jobs on our website on Google For Jobs. This has been a real priority and we've achieved 57 per cent conversion to our site from searches with Google."

Such is the preponderance of new tech solutions there is a burgeon-

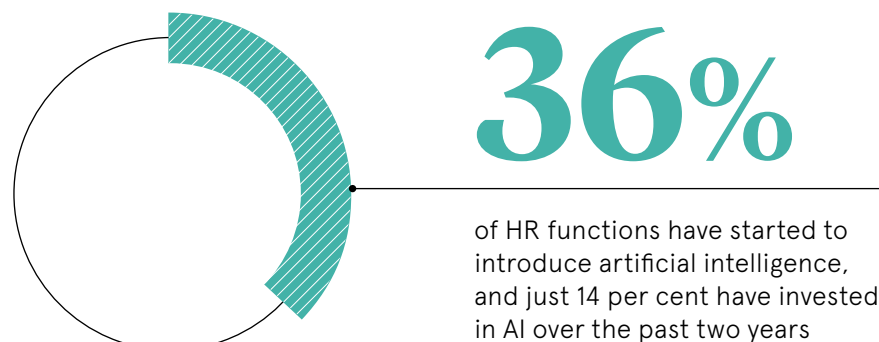ing mini-industry purely around testing it and consulting which might better suit firms.

Faye Walshe, director of innovation at recruitment consultancy Robert Walters, and her team test everything from chatbox technology to technology that heat-maps where specific skills could lie. She says: "We're reviewing a tool called Textio that analyses how jobs ads are written to see if they appeal more to men or women; SEEK is a tool in Australia where, as people update their CVs, the data also updates to different employers' talent pipeline databases; Arya is AI technology we've been testing for the past two years."

But she argues the big message is that tech won't solve everything. "Tests with an investment bank in the UK and US found Arya could read a job spec and search for people, but while it found better people in the north-east of England than our own recruitment teams found, it didn't work so well in New York. You still can't assume technology will understand more than a human."

Ellie Brown, HR and tech lead at online marketplace Oodle, says: "There's tonnes of technology out there, but the business context must always determine which is opted for."

Accenture, for example, has just announced using virtual reality technology for its graduate recruitment. One test sees candidates "enter" an Egyptian tomb, testing problem-solving skills to crack a hieroglyphics code. The aim is to eliminate gender bias.

Ms Brown concludes: "While there's no denying tech is getting evermore clever, what I and the rest of the talent profession still have to accept is letting tech totally decide for me. Humans are still very good at spotting potential, eye to eye." ●

> ❝ It's all about the pursuit of perfection. Firms today can no longer survive hiring the 'good enough'. It's all about hiring the 'best'

36%

of HR functions have started to introduce artificial intelligence, and just 14 per cent have invested in AI over the past two years

KPMG 2019

Commercial feature

Transforming to thrive: A case for agile in talent acquisition

Agile recruitment teams need technology that empowers them to think, experiment, and trial recruiting programs so they can approach hiring in a new, meaningful way

Dimitri Boylan, chief executive, Avature

With Parliament yet to approve a Brexit deal, uncertainty continues to plague the UK and European Union labour markets. Businesses are being forced to prepare simultaneously for wildly different scenarios.

Though this is an extreme example, the truth is that disruption in the labour market has become the new norm. While Brexit is currently in the spotlight, in due course attention will turn to the next challenge. Under these conditions, businesses know

650+
global customers

110
of the Fortune 500 companies

18
of the FTSE 100 Index

3/4
of the top largest EU companies

that the future is binary: either you are a disruptor or you are being disrupted. To be a disruptor, you need talented people and for that you need talent acquisition teams agile enough to prosper in turmoil.

"The reality is that agility is a capability, one that enables you to harness the power of disruption and convert it into opportunity rather than a crisis," explains Dimitri Boylan, chief executive of Avature, a leader in enterprise software as a service for talent acquisition and talent management. "Agility is already a core capability of tech-enabled businesses from Amazon to Uber that have successfully disrupted their markets."

Like most organisations, the chances are that your business is going through some form of digital transformation. As technology becomes more integral to how you compete in the market, you are slowly converting into a tech company. This transition has important implications for recruiting teams who will soon find themselves in a new, even more competitive market for talent.

Recruitment and retention of high-impact transformational talent is probably the easiest place for human resources to orchestrate its own transformation, but to succeed they will have to embrace agility and face the chaos and disruption in the labour markets differently.

Technology companies have taken recruiting very seriously for a long time, but many did so by taking recruiting out of HR altogether. And while that worked, it prevented leading-edge recruiting practices from influencing talent management and prevented companies from addressing talent issues in a holistic way.

> ## If your technology is a digital straitjacket, then you don't have a good shot at doing anything agile

So how does HR develop a total talent management philosophy that embraces agile practices and transforms itself into a strategic weapon for the organisation?

The first hurdle to overcome is your organisation's psychology; there can't be resistance to doing things differently. The quickest way to kill an idea is to demand return-on-investment analysis before it has been implemented. But this is a common occurrence when leadership is presented with an innovative and untested approach; they instinctively put the brakes on.

"To embrace agile in a company, the organisation has to actively promote the practice and be open to the trial-error-learn-adjust approach. If you demand perfection, nobody will make a move. It's a trial-and-error process with the data from failure used to optimise future actions," says Mr Boylan.

You won't always be able to guarantee a positive outcome, but you must be prepared to do things quickly and differently. As with marketing and sales, there is a bonus for being the one that gets there first. Operating ahead of the curve is a strategic advantage in recruiting.

As well as adopting the right mindset, the most agile companies give their people time to think and experiment. If you don't create an organisation that can innovate, you cannot expect to achieve agility; they go hand in hand.

Technology is the key enabler of agility. If you don't have a platform that allows you to execute all of the different programs you are working on in a reasonable amount of time, and at a relatively low cost, they will fail. But many recruiting teams are prevented from selecting fit-for-purpose technology and are forced to operate on core HR technology that doesn't meet their complex needs.

"If your technology is a digital straitjacket, then you don't have a good shot at doing anything agile. Technology has to serve a new purpose in the organisation; it's a weapon, and it needs to be wielded by HR and marketing departments to achieve their goals," says Mr Boylan.

Typically, HR software reflects its accounting software origins and deals with people as if they were numerical assets in a payroll ledger rather than human beings who need to be engaged with and motivated to join or stay at the company. Agile recruiting teams prefer to have candidate-centric platforms at their fingertips that empower them to approach hiring in a new, meaningful way.

Finally, it's important to realise that agility is not one dimensional. "Our most progressive customers fully understand their marketing department's obsession with segmentation and personalisation. They would never take a one-size-fits-all approach and neither should recruitment. By focusing on creating a market-by-market strategy that takes into account individual market nuances, recruitment can provide a true competitive advantage," says Mr Boylan.

There's no doubt that these are complicated organisational challenges that require attention and resources. But victory in a turbulent labour market belongs to agile recruiting teams.

"In the face of institutional resistance, taking a programmatic approach to innovation, where the company generates a variety of programmes in different markets and at different scales to find what works, can be a great way to calm the butterflies that leadership might have. Change doesn't have to be huge and transformational. When it is introduced on a small, but continuous scale, the end result tends to have a bigger impact," says Mr Boylan.

"If you can't deploy agile recruitment methods, there's no way you can compete for top talent. Your inability to attract the illusive in-demand workforce will put the brakes on any fundamental company-wide digital transformation that you have in mind. Meanwhile you will lose key talent. Good recruiters will move on to companies where they can practise their craft freely and the forward-thinking managers will settle into their disrupter of choice."

To find out more about how Avature can help your business please visit www.avature.net

Avature

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MILLENNIALS

Addressing the problems of millennial management

As the millennial workforce grows and individuals rise through the leadership ranks, understanding how these employees want to be managed, and how they manage others, remains a struggle for companies confined to traditional ways of working

Anna Codrea-Rado

When Sarah joined a London-based startup, there was no management. "I wasn't so much managed, but more left to my own devices with occasional pep talks and moments of mentorship with the CEO," says the 27 year old, who asked not to be identified. "At times this was confusing, aggravating and very emotional; however, I also thrived off it having just left the corporate world."

Like many of her millennial peers, who are typically defined as the children of baby boomers, over the course of her career, Sarah has witnessed the swinging pendulum of two distinct management styles. Where traditional hierarchical management structures have been too stifling, the flat organisation favoured by younger companies are a professional wilderness.

Given that by 2020 millennials will make up more than a third of the global workforce, according to Manpower Group, how this generation wants to be managed, and subsequently manages others, is becoming an increasingly pressing issue in the modern workplace.

"I don't think I'm well managed," says a 27 year old who works in publishing. "Higher management have no trust in the employees and micro-manage everything. As a manager myself, I look to foster trust within my team, as I believe they can work independently, but it is hard when I am being undermined by my own managers."

This experience is common among millennials, who say there is a disconnect between their expectations and the management they are delivered. According to Manpower Group's report on millennial careers, half of millennials would consider leaving their current job due to a lack of appreciation.

"There's an idea that millennials want some specific kind of management because they're really entitled," according to a 34-year-old manager who works for a non-profit organisation. "I don't think that's true. I've managed younger people who want fast progression and seem to feel that they deserve to be promoted every year, but I've also managed people the same age who work incredibly hard and don't think they are ready for the next step.

"The common thing I find is that people really just want to be listened to by their manager."

As the number of millennials rising up the leadership ranks increases, experts agree that organisations will need to adapt to the priorities of this new cohort of managers. "Millennial leaders can challenge a company's values for the better, with their principles focusing more on engagement and transparency," says John Williams, global marketing director at City & Guilds Group.

"Shunning traditional forms of training, previously designed for senior managers, does not mean these new leaders are ineffective, but rather that they are focusing on instilling leadership skills at every level of the organisation."

It is typically startups and younger companies that favour this ad-hoc approach to management over a formal review process. "We have no HR and you don't have a lot of the fail-safes that you do in other companies," Sarah says. "You really have to push for what you want all the time and you need a lot of your own drive."

Some worry, however, that this complete rejection of structure is also not the answer. "The cavalier attitude I see towards management in startups is often disguised as a rebellion against corporate culture," says Tiffany Philippou, a brand consultant who has worked with startups for over a decade.

"By ignoring management structures completely, we are letting a whole generation down by not providing them with the clarity they need in what is already a chaotic and stressful working environment.

"When we leave employees to work everything out for themselves and prove their value to survive, we create a sink-or-swim culture where no one but the sharks win."

While startups may have moved away from management training, many traditional industries still prize it. "There's an extensive internal management training offer and my company has also bought in a leadership course for senior staff," the non-profit employee says. "It's easy to dismiss it as snake-handling corporate voodoo, but it can be really useful, such as the 'difficult conversation training' to handle underperformance."

1/3

of the global workforce will be millennials by 2020

Manpower Group/UN 2016

According to City & Guilds Group, there are already clear indications of the kind of working culture millennial leaders will foster. "Our research shows that 66 per cent of workers want to have a greater say in the running of their workplace," says Mr Williams. The research highlights the need for organisations to be more collaborative, and foster an environment of transparency between management and employees.
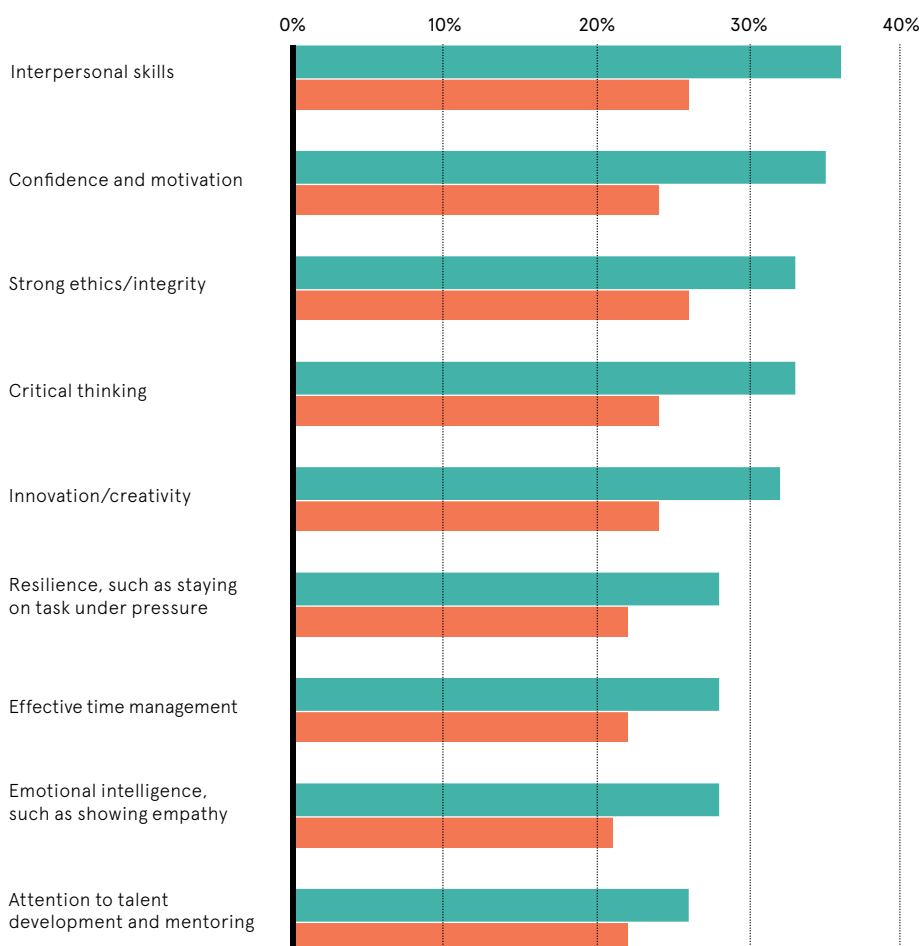
"Rather than decisions being made at the top, millennial management is encouraging employees, at any level, to generate workplace ideas," he says. "This creates a more aligned approach between employees and businesses from the start."

For Sarah, it is this collaborative approach to management that appeals to her the most. "My ambition as a woman is celebrated in a startup, rather than questioned," she says. "I am listened to. At 27, I don't want to be micro-managed, I want to be mentored and inspired." ●

MILLENNIALS SEE EMPLOYERS FALLING SHORT

Percentage of global millennials who see the following skills as essential, and those who say their organisation offers a lot of support in these areas

● Essential   ● Support

	0%	10%	20%	30%	40%
Interpersonal skills					
Confidence and motivation					
Strong ethics/integrity					
Critical thinking					
Innovation/creativity					
Resilience, such as staying on task under pressure					
Effective time management					
Emotional intelligence, such as showing empathy					
Attention to talent development and mentoring					

Deloitte 2018

'Organisations must carefully choose how they respond to the change that is already happening and to the change yet to come'

The UNLEASH community has taken the global lead in showcasing case studies, research and insights on the driving forces needed for human change such as workforce technology, happiness, health and financial wellbeing, productivity, and robust artificial intelligence (AI).

Managing a company's talent pool should not be about recreating the wheel and relying on tools that have only been used in the past, but instead companies should learn from one another and adjust talent plans based on economic changes and globalisation, and plan for future generations.

A great concept is how Finland is putting the wellbeing of their citizens at the heart of policy. The Finns have long been motivated to improve the wellbeing of their citizens and, according to the United Nations, they are the happiest nation on the planet. European Union member, Finland meticulously researches their five million citizens to understand how to improve their health, employment, wellbeing, education and much more.

The Scandinavian nation now has a social welfare system, and is a champion of financial and social equality, making it easy to forget that once Finland was one of the poorest European countries. In perhaps the greatest case the world has seen of the progressive use of citizen data, the Finns have created and enabled a sense of security for their people: the idea that if something is needed, they are going to get it. Finland is a great example for all organisations, companies and countries alike, that really care for the wellbeing of their people.

We are living in a globalised economy, where processes have been centralising for efficiency and the epicentre for modern human resources planning and strategy. Global political turmoil suggests globalisation is no longer a given, aiding nationalism and even leading to the prospect of reverse globalisation.

Recent evidence for this can ironically be observed through Brexit, with jobs heading home to Japan from major UK manufacturers such as Nissan, Honda and Toyota. This has huge implications for talent mobility, relationships, employee privacy, diversity and inclusion, and further disruptions at an unprecedented scale.

We now live in a land of centres inspired by HR's finest influencers, HR departments and workplaces that compliment a century trying to turn employees into machines, splitting roles into primary tasks and optimising people in the hope it would unleash them.

Additionally, the talent and knowledge economy has entered the productivity, performance and networked age where people, trusted communities, wellbeing, learning and global networks are the magic ingredients needed for sustainable growth.

Education systems are on their knees, resulting in an explosive growth in micro-learning over the past 12 months. The growing number of unaccredited tech education startups providing one-year programmes are enjoying 98 per cent success rates in graduate job placement. Compare this with traditional tertiary education for certain functions: they are more expensive, it takes a longer time to complete them and they require students to learn skills and take courses that will not be necessary at the workplaces of tomorrow.

It is easy to see why work has been completely reinvented in the last four to five years and it is all because of the pace of digital and exponential technology.

To reinvent work and help communities thrive, we must evolve how we recruit and manage talent to bring to the surface the real potential of the networked business.

While change is inevitable, organisations must now carefully choose how they respond to the change that is already happening and to the change yet to come. Thanks to AI, the robots have arrived. We need to retrain ourselves in being human and embracing our creative curiosity, so we are less like programmed algorithms and instead continue to put our people, and humanity, first. ●

Marc Coleman
Chief executive and founder
UNLEASH Group

Facts beat quotas as AI revolutionises diversity hiring

Assessments driven by artificial intelligence (AI) remove the bias from hiring to build truly inclusive workforces

The rapidly advancing nature of machine intelligence has fuelled a much-needed change in the narrative around diversity hiring and positioned objectivity, rather than quotas, at the heart of solutions for inclusivity. Companies are realising that measuring behavioural competencies, without bias, produces greater outcomes.

The long-held approach to early-stage talent acquisition in large US consulting and financial services companies epitomised the flawed approach to inclusive hiring that existed for too long. Employers would tie up with a small network of preferred universities to utilise the social demographic data they collect relating to their students and acquire talent from under-represented groups to meet their diversity quotas.
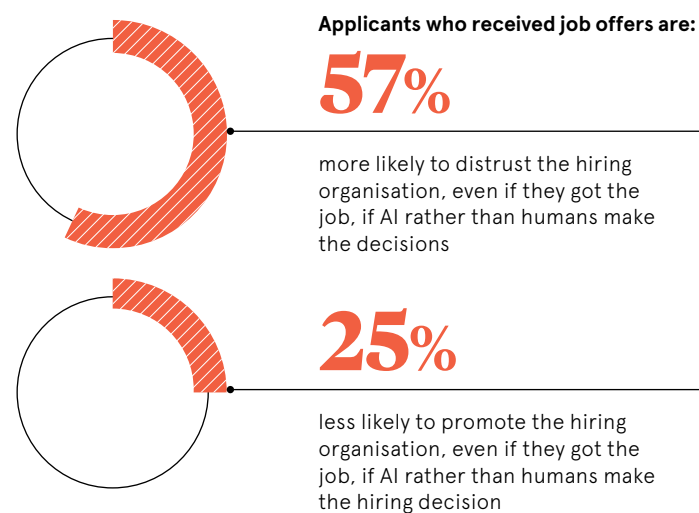
"They were fishing in a pool of 1 per cent and ignoring the other 99 per cent of talent in a country that's made up of every colour, creed and gender under the sun," says Andreas Lohff, chief executive at Aon's Assessment Solutions. "While good intentioned, it's a very mechanical process and not a good way to achieve the outcome. It fails to provide opportunity for the many talented people who don't happen to be in these institutions."

Even if companies were able to hit recruitment quotas through this approach to talent acquisition, it's clear that only hiring from elite universities does very little to achieve genuine diversity in a workforce. Technologies such as AI and machine-learning, however, are now spearheading a path to removing human bias.

A new wave of intelligent online assessments, driven by predictive analytics, can understand whether a person has the necessary skills and

APPLICANT REACTIONS TO AI DECISION-MAKERS

Applicants who received job offers are:

57%

more likely to distrust the hiring organisation, even if they got the job, if AI rather than humans make the decisions

25%

less likely to promote the hiring organisation, even if they got the job, if AI rather than humans make the hiring decision

qualities to be successful in a job role, such as a management consultant or investment banker. They are giving access to demographics of people who previously were never given a chance in the whole economy.

"The systems are really good at not having any adverse impact on under-represented groups or women," says Mr Lohff. "AI-driven online assessments organise everything for attracting and loading the application pool with the right mix of diverse talent. They're boosting the yields companies get from a wider talent pool, are much more inclusive and are really good for their brand because there is proven value in building workforces that reflect the demographics of your customers."

Aon's Assessment Solutions is a leader in automatically scored, on-demand solutions that incorporate video into interviews and are designed responsively for the mobile-first millennial generation. Having conducted an automated interview on their smartphone in their own time, applicants are assessed and measured by algorithms against various behavioural characteristics linked to the specific role.

AI is able to replicate the typical elements of a job interview, but without the subconscious human desire to make decisions based on personal bias rather than objective facts. In a case study with a large airline, Aon's intelligent algorithms chose the same candidate to progress as an expert interviewer on 95 per cent of occasions during the AI training phase. However, the AI scoring does not get bored or tired, or base decisions on implicit biases.

While the benefits of using AI to streamline hiring processes and enhance diversity are clear, organisations must overcome scepticism among the general public. In an online experiment by Aon, applicants were 57 per cent more likely to distrust the hiring organisation if AI rather than humans made the decisions, even if they got the job.

This distrust is exacerbated when the AI is not able to explain its decisions, as has been the case with the hundreds of recruitment technologies with "black box" algorithms. Not being able to justify why a candidate has failed to progress in a job interview can also leave employers vulnerable to legal challenges. Organisations can overcome the scepticism by adding personal channels that allow applicants to interact with real people, while Aon's technology arms AI with the power to provide reasons.

"The black box has died," says Mr Lohff. "With really clear data that can correlate what is gathered and show what has been measured, our AI can not only understand which people will provide the best business outcomes, but will also provide proper feedback and justify why decisions have been made in a way that's acceptable for candidates."

For more information please visit assessment.aon.com/ai-in-assessment

> A new wave of intelligent online assessments, driven by predictive analytics, can understand whether a person has the necessary skills and qualities to be successful in a job role
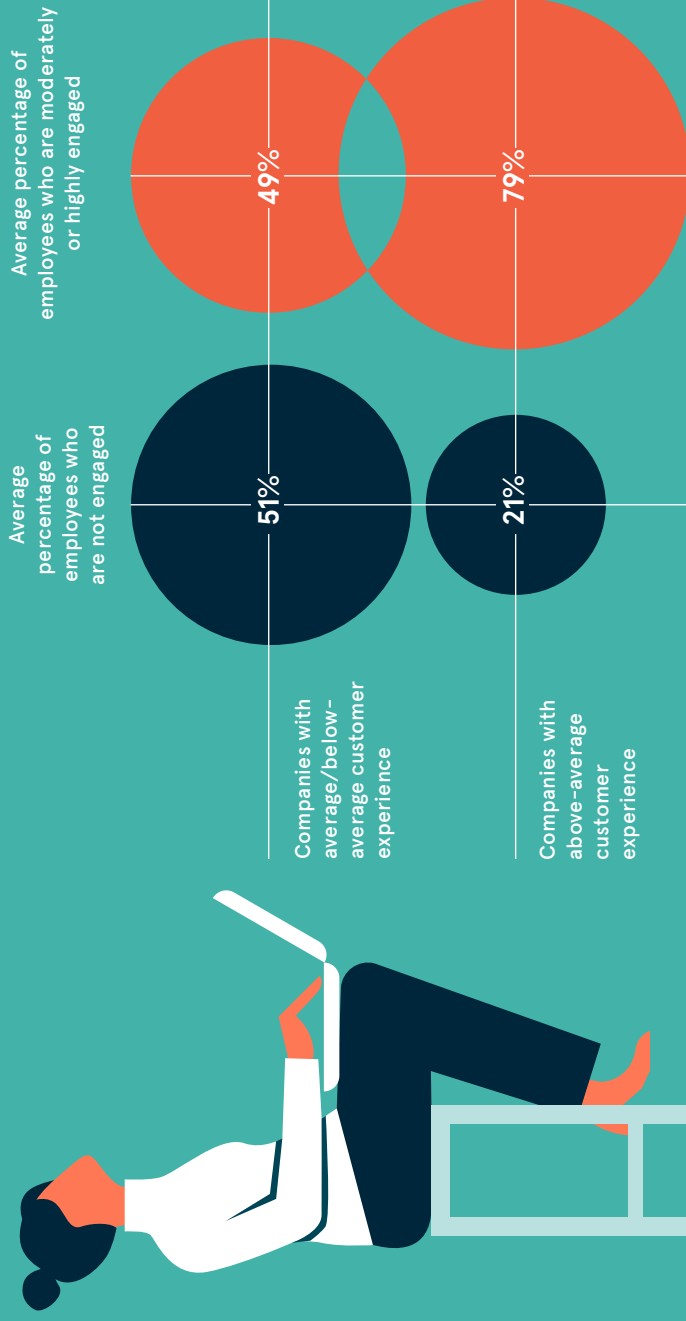
7 REASONS WHY BUSINESSES NEED TO PRIORITISE EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

Just 15 per cent of the global workforce is said to be engaged in their jobs, according to Gallup, with a staggering 67 per cent not engaged and 18 per cent actively disengaged. These alarming statistics show that a lot needs to be done to improve the lives of workers worldwide, and tipping the scales could be a major boost to company performance and competitive advantage

01 ENGAGED EMPLOYEES = CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

In a study of more than 5,000 employees in the United States, Temkin Group examined the level of employee engagement in companies based on how their customer experience compared with their competitors

Average percentage of employees who are moderately or highly engaged

49%

79%

Average percentage of employees who are not engaged

51%

21%

Companies with average/below-average customer experience

Companies with above-average customer experience

Temkin Group 2018

02 LOSING STAFF CAN BE COSTLY

Disengaged staff tend to be the ones that are keeping their eyes on job boards or actively looking for new roles, and employee turnover can cost a company severely. This estimate takes into account several factors, such as productivity loss, advertising and recruitment costs, onboarding, handovers, training and the time it takes new staff to get up to speed in their new role

£11,000

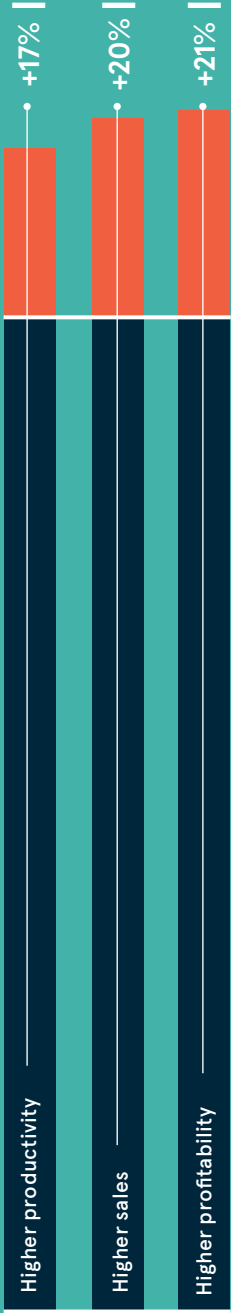cost of replacing one employee, based on the average UK salary

Accounts & Legal 2018

03 FLEXI-WORKING IS MORE THAN JUST A PERK

Flexible and agile working policies have become a common element of many corporate wellness and engagement programmes, but they are more than just a nice-to-have

67%

04 BOTTOM-LINE IMPACT

Higher employee engagement levels are shown to result in a range of positive business outcomes. According to management consultancy Gallup, when compared with businesses in the bottom quartile for employee engagement, those in the top quartile realised improvements in the following areas:

would consider leaving their job if their work arrangements became less flexible

Staples 2019

Higher productivity +17%

Higher sales +20%

Higher profitability +21%

Gallup 2018

05

WORKPLACE STRESS IS BAD FOR BUSINESS

Percentage of employees that did the following because of too much stress at work*

Searched for a new job — 56%

I've stopped caring/ checked out — 46%

Taken unplanned time off — 39%

Quit a job — 25%

Threatened to quit — 16%

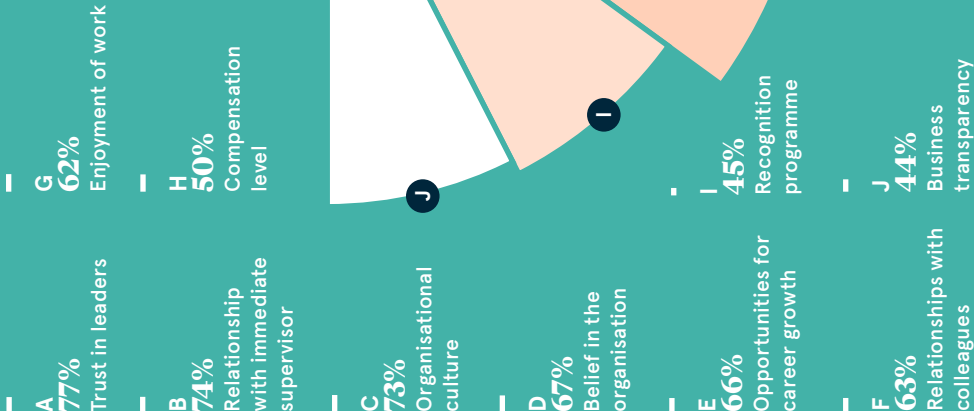*Respondents were asked about the result of stress at any point during their career   Wrike 2018

06

ENGAGEMENT FACTORS ARE VARIED

Engagement is more than just the happiness of your employees; it's linked to a multitude of factors that business leaders must be aware of
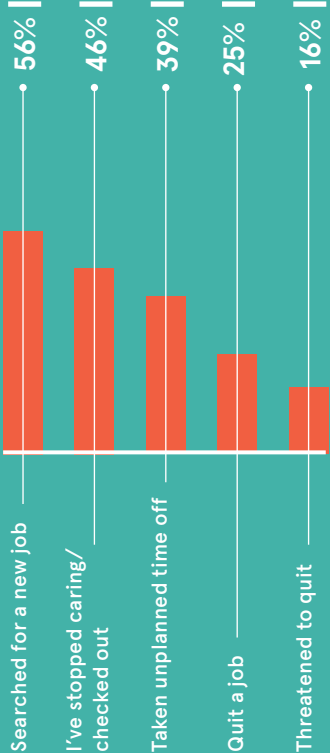
A
77%
Trust in leaders

B
74%
Relationship with immediate supervisor

C
73%
Organisational culture

D
67%
Belief in the organisation

E
66%
Opportunities for career growth

F
63%
Relationships with colleagues

G
62%
Enjoyment of work

H
50%
Compensation level

I
45%
Recognition programme

J
44%
Business transparency

HR.com 2018

07

NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF DISENGAGEMENT

When compared with businesses in the top quartile for employee engagement, those in the bottom quartile realised issues in the following areas:

59%
higher turnover (low-turnover organisations)

41%
higher absenteeism

24%
higher turnover (high-turnover organisations)
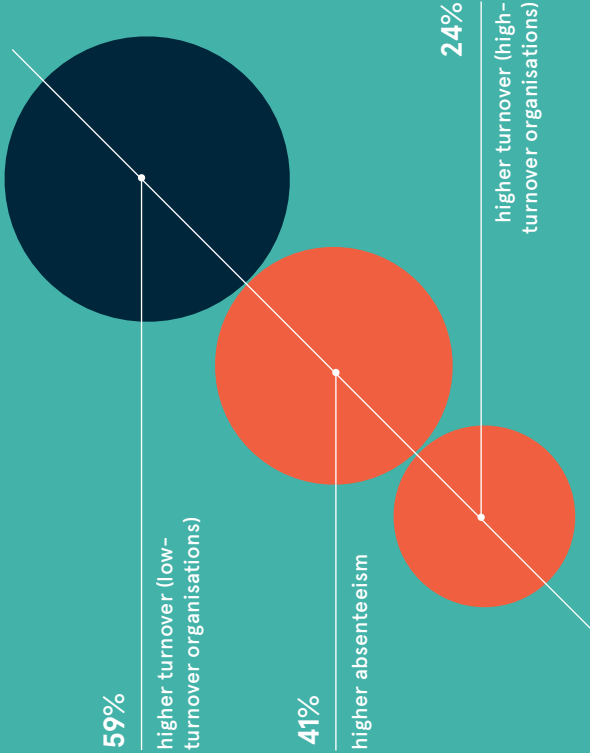
Gallup 2018

LEADERSHIP

Five ways to be a better leader in 2019

As workforces and their needs evolve, managers must adapt to ensure they have the right leadership characteristics to maximise productivity and performance. Five experts in people management have shared their views on what it takes to be a better leader in a modern-day business

Cath Everett

Richard Jaimes/Unsplash

1

Emotional intelligence

Intelligent use of emotions is pivotal. It boils down to how you motivate people, so if you want yourself and your team to perform effectively, both you and they need to be in a positive emotional state. This means managing your own emotions in the moment.

As a leader, a lot of it is about influence. So think about what will galvanise and get the best out of others. Sometimes this means putting a bit of pressure on so your team pulls out the stops for a while and at others it means creating a positive, energised but calm environment.

To do this requires self-awareness and awareness of others at an emotional level. Leaders who are in touch with themselves recognise their blind spots, but they are also aware of what others' strengths are and bring them on board. So they understand other people.

While in the past leaders were promoted on the back of their knowledge and competencies, it is becoming much more important to influence others and manage them to do their job well.

Jo Maddocks
Chief psychologist, JCA Global

Humility

A humble leader enables a culture of continual improvement. They understand that it is OK not to know everything, and the importance of continuing to develop and improve.

In days gone by, it was about being the all-knowing boss who was strong and formal, and took tough decisions, but that is starting to shift. Enabling others to teach you changes this dynamic as it allows you to learn and build more open relationships with people.

Another thing about this approach is that it allows risk-taking to take place and encourages innovation, which in turn leads to improvements in productivity and performance. People these days are increasingly looking to leaders to give them good questions, rather than answers, and to steer them in the right direction, rather than tell them what to do.

So some key habits to develop include asking open questions, respecting individuals and including them in decision-making, watching and learning, and going to where the work is, which means walking the floor. That way you will start to understand your team as individuals and also appear more human.

Robert Ordever
Managing director, OC Tanner Europe

2

Anton Watman/Shutterstock

Communication skills

Leaders with poor communication skills leave employees floundering and teams in disarray. As a result, it is vital to explain your vision with both passion and clarity, making it plain where the organisation is going, why, and what is in it for the team. This is important because now more than ever people want to feel part of something bigger, while at the same time understanding where they fit in.

Although all of us assume we can communicate effectively, it is not always true and in reality there is no one-size-fits-all approach. In other words, it is about ensuring the language you use is suitable for your audience.

On the one hand, it should be simple and jargon-free, while on the other it should take people on a journey. Just as key on a personal level though is fitting in with different communication styles, so understanding who requires detail, who needs an overview and who should be given context.

But also be sure to remember that communication is a two-way thing. So ask for feedback and, if you can, act on it; if not, explain why.

Charlotte Dean
Managing director,
P3 People Management

3

rawpixel/Unsplash

4

LightField Studios/Shutterstock

Listening

The ability to listen to everyone's views is a hugely underrated skill for a leader. But it is important. If you want people to follow your leadership, you have to demonstrate that you understand them and have empathy, and listening is a big part of that.

If you fail to listen, it is often damaging for people's self-esteem and they may not fulfil their potential. Feeling listened to is vital for wellbeing and creates a happier, healthier work environment.

Another reason why listening is important is that the best ideas usually come from people other than the chief executive. Some of our most business-defining notions have come from our junior team, for example. So it is imperative that everyone has the opportunity to speak and feel heard.

As a leader, it is also important to listen first and do second. Ultimately, it is up to you to make the decision and not all ideas will be used. But there is still a lot to be gained from listening to a diverse set of opinions and showing people you are interested in their views.

Josh Krichefski
Chief executive, MediaCom UK

Resilience

Resilience is about an individual's ability to grow, adapt and perform, and it is becoming increasingly essential to help navigate these times of change and challenge. As a result, part of a leader's responsibility is to improve not only their own resilience, but also that of their people, which means developing five core elements.

The first is support, which involves building positive relationships to create a help network for when we experience stress. The second is confidence, which entails building belief in our ability to hit our goals by undertaking the right balance of "stretch" activities and being aware of critical self-talk that can hold us back.

Striving is about having the grit and determination to achieve our aims combined with an ability to shift direction if circumstances alter, while recovering is the ability to reset and start again if we fall back into negative patterns. Finally, adapting involves continuing to learn and evolve as situations change using a process of reflection.

While most leaders focus on a couple of areas, as change and challenge continue to mount, having access to wider resources will become increasingly crucial to ensure that they, and their team, can thrive.

Sam Gilpin
Managing director and head of Europe,
YSC Consulting ●

5

Hello I'm Nik/Unsplash

Commercial feature

Climbing the talent summit

Project Management Institute's **Murat Bicak** reflects on the World Economic Forum Meeting in Davos and project management's role in shaping the fourth industrial revolution

As a first-time attendee at the Davos summit, I couldn't help but be awestruck. It's not the fact that political and business leaders from all over the globe convene in a picture-perfect Swiss village that inspires awe; it's what draws them there. Davos represents an unparalleled opportunity to debate, discuss and hopefully advance the thinking on critical subjects that impact not only businesses, but society as a whole.

As senior vice president for strategy at Project Management Institute (PMI), I feel a strong connection to the topics that dominated discussions at Davos, where the theme was Globalisation 4.0, and to the role project management can play in addressing them.

I am proud that PMI's stakeholders and members are working to tackle challenges around such critical issues as water, energy, space exploration, medical technologies, drug discovery and genetic engineering, to name just a handful. Our constituents are inventing the next generation of mobility, of autonomous cars and artificial intelligence, all of which will bring dramatic transformation to our world.

Indeed, many of the conversations at Davos focused on the fourth industrial revolution and the implications of automation, artificial intelligence

and augmented intelligence for the future of work. In this context, I was positively surprised to see that the issue of diversity and inclusiveness took on such importance at Davos.

A high-performing team isn't one where everybody looks the same; in fact, just the opposite is true. Ideally, a high-performing team will have many different viewpoints and types of experiences represented. That means we need to be more inclusive at both the organisational level, as we hire talent, and at the project level, as we build teams.

I find this an interesting parallel to the position PMI has taken in the last 18 months about embracing different approaches to project management, using waterfall, agile, hybrid or any other approach, as appropriate. Given the speed with which transformation is occurring and its scope, success requires that organisations be both nimble and quick to adapt. Teams that are diverse and have learnt how to function optimally because of their diversity have that adaptability as part of their DNA.

Automation and artificial intelligence raise the questions of what will happen to not just the way we work, but whether people will in fact have jobs. Like the previous industrial revolutions, this one will enable us to be more productive and do things that

are grander in scheme. There is no denying that automation, artificial intelligence or any number of other technologies will take some tasks away from humans. And yes, in certain cases, there will be entire sets of jobs that will be made redundant.

But at the same time, this type of revolution creates a significant amount of new jobs. I believe that we will have more jobs than we can potentially fill. That's why the focus should be not on whether people will have jobs in the future, but whether they will have the skills needed for the jobs of the future.

The challenge and the obligation, whether for a government, a company or any organisation, is to ensure that we invest in our current talent base. And yes, that causes a dilemma and is the source of some anxiety because while people know

> ## "
> If there was an overarching theme to Davos, it was how critical the human element is to all our endeavours

that investment and upskilling are needed, they don't necessarily know what it should look like.

Where there was unanimity of thought on this subject at Davos was that every individual and organisation must invest in continual learning. And that's something PMI has been advocating for a long time. I am glad the idea is being universally embraced beyond our own profession.

Jack Ma, the co-founder and executive chairman of Alibaba, pointed out that one skill which will surely be needed in the future is creativity and he raised the issue of how we can teach children to be more creative so they will be equipped to do the things machines cannot do. And he is right, but I think creativity is not just something children need to learn. A challenge for all of us is how do we operate in a world where there is significant digital enablement and enhancement, and what is it that we need to do, or do better, so that we can actually achieve our goals and the necessary productivity gains?

People talk about "a digital skillset" being essential for both individual and organisational success, without recognising that creativity is as much part of the digital skillset as coding. We need to devote significant resources to teaching both students and workers how to be more creative. Organisational success will depend in no small part on innovation and innovation is directly correlated with creativity.

Finally, the last issue that drew considerable attention at Davos was trust. I would go so far as to say we are seeing a "trust gap". People have lost confidence in both the private and public sectors, partly because of the anxiety created by an increasingly digital world where human connection seems more fragile and remote, and less important. I believe that project management can go a long way to helping restore trust.

Trust is created by transparency. It is not a set of tools, but rather a comprehensive capability that must be built into governments and organisations. At its core, good project management is tantamount to transparency. We define the problem and seek the solution. We bring the right people to the table. We offer visibility into both the process and the results. We aim to have "one version of truth".

Where there is trust, individuals are able to be open and contribute based on their diversity and their background. In a project environment, trust and transparency go hand in hand. And when they are combined with creativity and other essential skills, teams and organisations are equipped for success.

If there was an overarching theme to Davos, it was how critical the human element is to all our endeavours. It is both motivation and the truly essential element for any kind of success. We must never lose sight of that, whether it is in terms of how we build our teams, how we ensure they have the skills needed and, finally, how they help to build and grow trust.

For more information please visit www.pmi.org/uk

PMI
Project Management Institute

MENTAL HEALTH

How traditional views of 'performance' are impacting employee mental health

Reprioritising the mental wellbeing of employees requires business leaders to take a closer look at workplace culture

Shuranjeet Singh Takhar

The importance of employees' mental health is finally being championed by MPs at Westminster. On January 17, the House of Commons facilitated a debate on first aid for mental health during which a cross-party group of MPs tabled a motion to supplement existing legislation to place mental and physical first aid on equal footing.

This motion received overwhelming support and, if subsequently successful, it would require all businesses to implement suitable infrastructure to support those experiencing mental health difficulties. Currently, the Health and Safety Executive's first aid guidance only encourages employees to think about mental health and wellbeing needs.

Poor mental health is said to cost the UK economy between £74 billion and £99 billion a year, according to the Department of Work and Pensions, with a direct cost to employers estimated at between £33 billion and £42 billion. It is therefore no surprise that numerous campaigns are raising the profile of mental health through a focus on awareness, education and support.

The importance of mental wellbeing for early-career employees is stark. Research from City Mental Health Alliance (CMHA) shows that 62 per cent of recent graduates are said to be worried about the potential impact of a new role on their mental health.

£74bn

minimum estimated cost to the UK economy from poor mental health

Department of Work and Pensions 2017

Such feelings are echoed by Kasia Jazeel, who recently joined PwC through a graduate scheme. She says: "It is important for young people to prioritise mental health during periods of change and stress that come with employment. It's easy to get caught up in the demands of a graduate job and neglect wellbeing."

Business culture carries the reputation of being highly pressured with long working hours. Pressing demands from clients filter down to staff whose capacities are pushed to their limits. Currently, those who can manage a monumental workload are judged as performing positively within their roles as employees. However, with a workforce increasingly mindful of wellbeing, traditional models of performance may require some revision.

Within graduate circles there exists a presumption that staying late and working yourself beyond your limits are indicators of a good employee, especially one who wishes to rise through the managerial ranks. However, Ms Jazeel outlines that firms should set targets in a range of areas beyond the immediate quantity of completed work tasks.

She says this would encourage employees to develop themselves "beyond their desks", ensuring they do not work so many hours than is "realistic and healthy".

Promoting a more holistic understanding of performance is a prerequisite to encouraging a healthier and more sustainable method of working. It is important to debase the concept from being solely measured against task completion and to encourage employees to ensure they look after themselves as well as their work.

However, a more rounded measure of performance cannot exist in isolation. Alongside this it is necessary for employers to develop and implement a sustained mental health policy, inclusive of awareness, education and support, for all staff. Graduates are said to be 83 per cent more likely to apply to a firm that is open about its commitment to mental health, a CMHA survey shows, demonstrating the increasing need for formalised and institutionalised approaches to wellbeing.
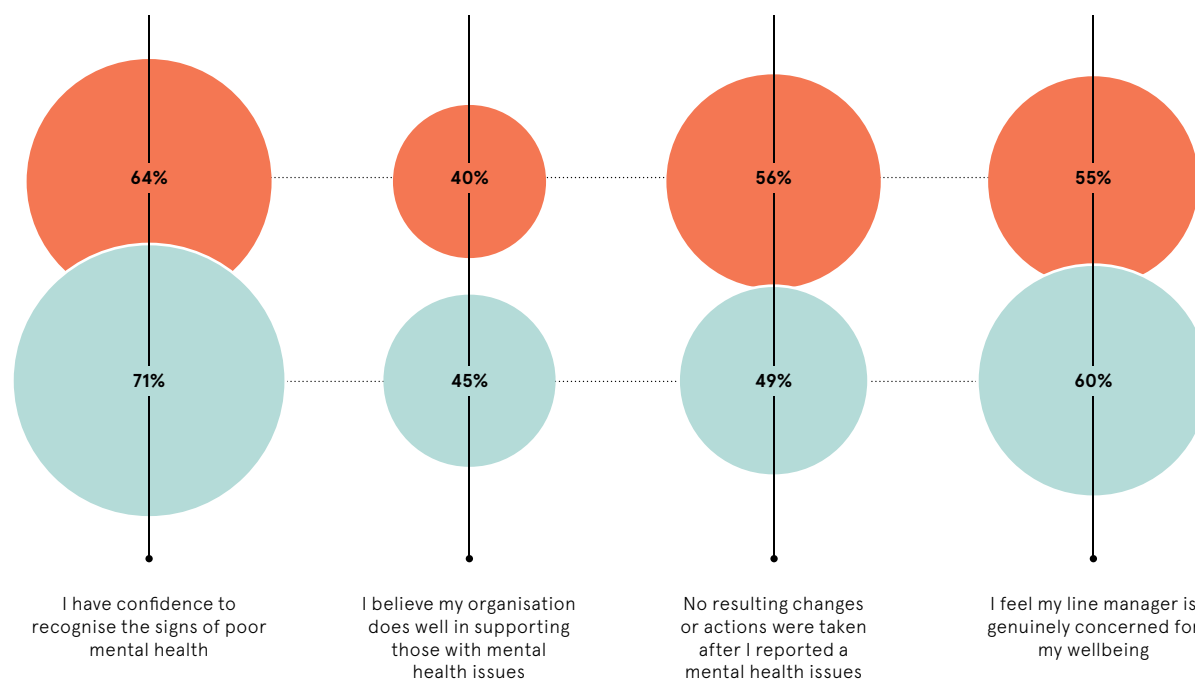
Evidently, there's an expectation of employers to be open about their mental health policies and support infrastructure, which may come as a surprise to corporations embodying a traditional business culture where promotion of positive mental wellbeing may not fall into their immediate strategic remit. With significant demands from a workforce increasingly conscious of mental health, businesses must make a choice: adapt to current wellbeing needs or be left behind.

Rather than viewing wellbeing strategies as impossibly daunting, it is integral to bringing current and future business leaders together to support one another in crafting and

POSITIVE IMPROVEMENTS ARE BEING MADE…SLOWLY

Employee opinions of mental wellbeing in UK workplaces

● 2016   ● 2018

	2016	2018
I have confidence to recognise the signs of poor mental health	64%	71%
I believe my organisation does well in supporting those with mental health issues	40%	45%
No resulting changes or actions were taken after I reported a mental health issues	56%	49%
I feel my line manager is genuinely concerned for my wellbeing	55%	60%

Business in the Community 2018

Communication is key

Anna Purchas, head of people at KPMG UK, explains how larger firms approach mental wellbeing among employees.

How did your organisation take practical steps to improving their approach to mental health?
For a long time we've offered a range of support, but what we are learning is that not everyone favours a formal approach, and it is essential people are able to speak to their managers and colleagues. Last year we launched new online training all for managers on how to support staff with wellbeing and mental health concerns. For some people a chat with a trusted colleague can make a huge difference. Our employee mental health

network is very active and helps lead the change on a peer-to-peer level. These kinds of public conversations are really important in encouraging people to open up about mental health or feel able to seek support if they need it.

What would you say to a business leader who is undecided about whether to invest in employees' mental health?
As leaders we have a responsibility not to shy away from difficult topics and the benefits of investing in employees' mental health are clear. A happier, healthier, more engaged workforce is a priority for most employers and there is plenty of help out there, including from the City Mental Health Alliance, to help you take this forward.

sustaining mentally healthy workplaces. Networks, such as Thriving from the Start, look to facilitate such discussions through connecting graduates, school-leavers and apprentices with business leaders.

By sharing their concerns, early-career employees can identify key themes across corporate sectors and, in addition, are then able to communicate with senior management. Such infrastructure supports employers and employees, ensuring a positive approach to mental health in which no one is left unsupported.

In the short term, businesses may fear that increasing discussions around mental health and wellbeing will lead to a dip

in productivity with less time spent working equated to less tasks being completed. However, employers should consider the medium and long-term benefits of time spent bettering the wellbeing of employees, who will be well placed to develop healthy working habits, so they can work mindfully over a longer period.

Avoiding risks such as burn-out, stretching capacities beyond their feasible limits or high turnover of staff, if firms look to change their culture around mental health and encourage staff to take time for themselves, we are likely to see benefits as employees work more efficiently when sat at their desks. This will, no doubt, help employers and employees to maintain their work-life balance in a more effective manner, the benefits of which will expand beyond the workplace to families, communities and wider society.

No matter the firm's reputation or size, conversations around mental wellness are key to bringing the best out of employees at all levels. Shaping a culture in which all employees can feel comfortable with seeking support, in whatever form it may be, is necessary and vital to ensure mentally healthy and open workplaces now and in the future. ●

> **There exists a presumption that staying late and working yourself beyond your limits are indicators of a good employee**

Silent revolution to liberate talent

Talent managers can unshackle the power of creativity through a sense of inclusion, purpose, fulfilment and autonomy in the workforce

There is an unspoken revolution underway in talent management. According to Simon Blockley, chief executive of Guidant Global, the specialist outsourcing arm of the Impellam Group: "The idea of achieving business growth by burning people out, and making them work harder and faster for less money, has proven to be unworkable.

"You can't just burn through people, churning out the same level of service at a lower cost. You have to realise the power of individuals, of people, of creativity. By putting people in a role, giving them the space to own and master that role, and recognising what they're contributing, companies will see improved results.

"We know all this because that's how our business is run. Both in terms of how we advise our clients and in how we recruit our team of experts; it's vital to create a sense of inclusion, purpose, fulfilment and autonomy, so the workforce can be the difference."

Guidant Global applies this notion to almost 100 enterprise-level, blue-chip clients across numerous areas of industry and in more than 80 countries.

For each market-leading, often household name, heritage brand, the company delivers a refreshing and innovative approach to talent attraction, engagement and management.

"We have the infrastructure, processes, standard operating procedures and expertise to deliver brilliant outsourced recruiting services," says Mr Blockley. "Our business is renowned for delivering a service that resonates on a client-centric basis, using their tone of voice, with an understanding of their sector and unique requirements."

The ability to ramp up a retail client's warehouse operations from 500 to 1,000 individuals within a short space of time, while simultaneously using digital marketing techniques to improve diversity levels within the client's

> **We champion a better, more forward-thinking way of working. We listen, challenge, partner and advise**

workforce is an apt example of what Guidant Global can achieve with its "what, how, why?" ethos.

As Mr Blockley explains, the "what" emanates from a desire to innovate where he perceives there is a tired outsourced recruitment market.

"The sector got too caught up in stats, facts and KPIs, and forgot it was dealing with people," he says. "We've brought that focus back by giving end-clients access to great people. This then leads into the 'how', which is by being an employer of choice ourselves.

"We have to practise what we preach and, if you look at our ratings and awards, we can evidence the fact that we do."

Adhering to Guidant Global's motto of "People Lead Growth", by enhancing its own recruitment strategy and enriching individuals accordingly, those people go on to deliver that same creative and quality service to end-clients, forming the ultimate, virtuous, people-centric model.

"The people leading our business, and therefore the market, tune into and understand what individual clients' resourcing challenges are, then

take solutions to a new level to solve their specific business problems," says Mr Blockley.

Finally, the "why" serves as an underpinning of both the "what" and "how". Mr Blockley elaborates: "The 'why' is because there's a better way.

"The service offering in our industry isn't great and what motivates Guidant is the commitment to setting a new bar in delivering proper recruitment outsourcing services that can solve business challenges and create competitive advantages."

The drive to find and enact a better way permeates through Guidant's entire continuous improvement philosophy, encouraging employees to find improved approaches and strategies, so they in turn can deliver a better service to clients, who at the end of the cycle can improve their levels of recruitment and talent management.

Mr Blockley concludes: "The whole 'better way' concept is what gets me out of bed in the morning. We want to prove that the recruitment outsourcing industry is amazing and can make a tangible difference.

"By setting this new bar and moving the industry away from its traditional, tactical, reactive approach, we can continue to facilitate clients' growth."

4/5
UK hiring managers are struggling to attract the talent their business needs to thrive

14%
annual growth in the recruitment sector

For more information please visit
www.guidantglobal.com

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Powered by
Impellam Group

DIVERSITY

Culture fit: the daily struggle of black tech workers in Silicon Valley

For an industry that prides itself on creativity, its workforce is homogenous. A former techie-turned-writer, **LeRon Barton**, shares his experience of working as a black employee in Silicon Valley and describes a technology sector that remains out of reach for many under-represented ethnicities

LeRon Barton

There are many adjectives to describe Silicon Valley, the technological hub of the San Francisco Bay Area: innovative, groundbreaking, futuristic, creative and white.

The area, which spans San Jose, Palo Alto, Mountain View, Cupertino and Santa Clara, is home to countless tech companies such as Apple, Yahoo!, eBay, Google and Facebook. With cutting-edge applications introduced every day, you would think their creators would be a diverse lot, reflecting the various backgrounds and ethnicities of the users. But sadly, this is not the case.

Publication of workforce demographics among the sector's giants paints a clear picture: Facebook has a workforce that is 4 per cent black and 5 per cent Latino; Apple counts 13 per cent of their employees as Latino and 9 per cent black; and Google has a reported 98,000 employees, while only a staggering 3 and 4 per cent are black and Latino respectively. These numbers are representative of a field that has had difficulty in hiring black and other non-white people. The question is why?

The battle for diversity in Silicon Valley dates back 20 years, when activist Reverend Jesse Jackson railed against the lack of inclusion in the tech industry in 1999. It's a fight he is still having to battle today. Over subsequent years, scathing public revelations from numerous former employees have called out tech companies for institutionalised discrimination of race and gender, and cultures that remain unwelcoming towards people who are not white.

When I first arrived in the Bay Area in 2012, I started work at Qualcomm as a wifi engineer and was amazed at how few black and Latino people were employed there. Honestly, I could count maybe five African-American and African immigrants I saw every day, and maybe two Latino or Hispanic people out of a multi-building campus. I was also taken aback at how segregated it was, and how different ethnicities and cultures didn't interact with each other. Up until that moment, I had never experienced anything quite like it.

Inclusiveness was not encouraged, yet "culture fit" – how you would get along in the current work environment – was bandied about. I would hear this term in conversations with recruiters, human resource managers, and during interviews with teams of engineers and project managers. Questions like, "How well do you work within a team structure?" or "What do you like to do on your days off?" As I fielded more questions from a primarily all-white team, they started to feel like, "How are you, as a black person, going to fit into this environment?"

Paul Clark, principal user experience designer at Dell, says: "When they say 'culture fit', for me that means they are looking for a particular person they can personally identify with."

He recalls a workplace interview when his taste in music was queried: "One guy asked me if I liked Radiohead? Personally I find them to be criminally overrated, so I said no. You could then see the guy's facial expression that he was no longer interested in me as a candidate. I think cultural fit is code for 'will you be my bro?'."

Referring to a previous job, when he was the only black person working at a startup in San Francisco, Paul says: "No one interacted with me. My boss would have her daily check-in, but other than that, nobody would talk to me. When my team would go on company outings, I would be off by myself."

He says that being isolated caused him to leave the company: "I hated going into the office; it was a soul-sucking experience. I would have to listen to some very positive music in the morning, because I knew that would be the high point of my day."

Tina, a former content designer for a Mountain View-based financial software company, tells of her difficulties in Silicon Valley as a non-white woman. "Many of these companies in the Valley say they care about people and want to hear your input, but if you weren't saying the things they wanted to hear, then they would put a lot of pressure on you and drive you out," she says.
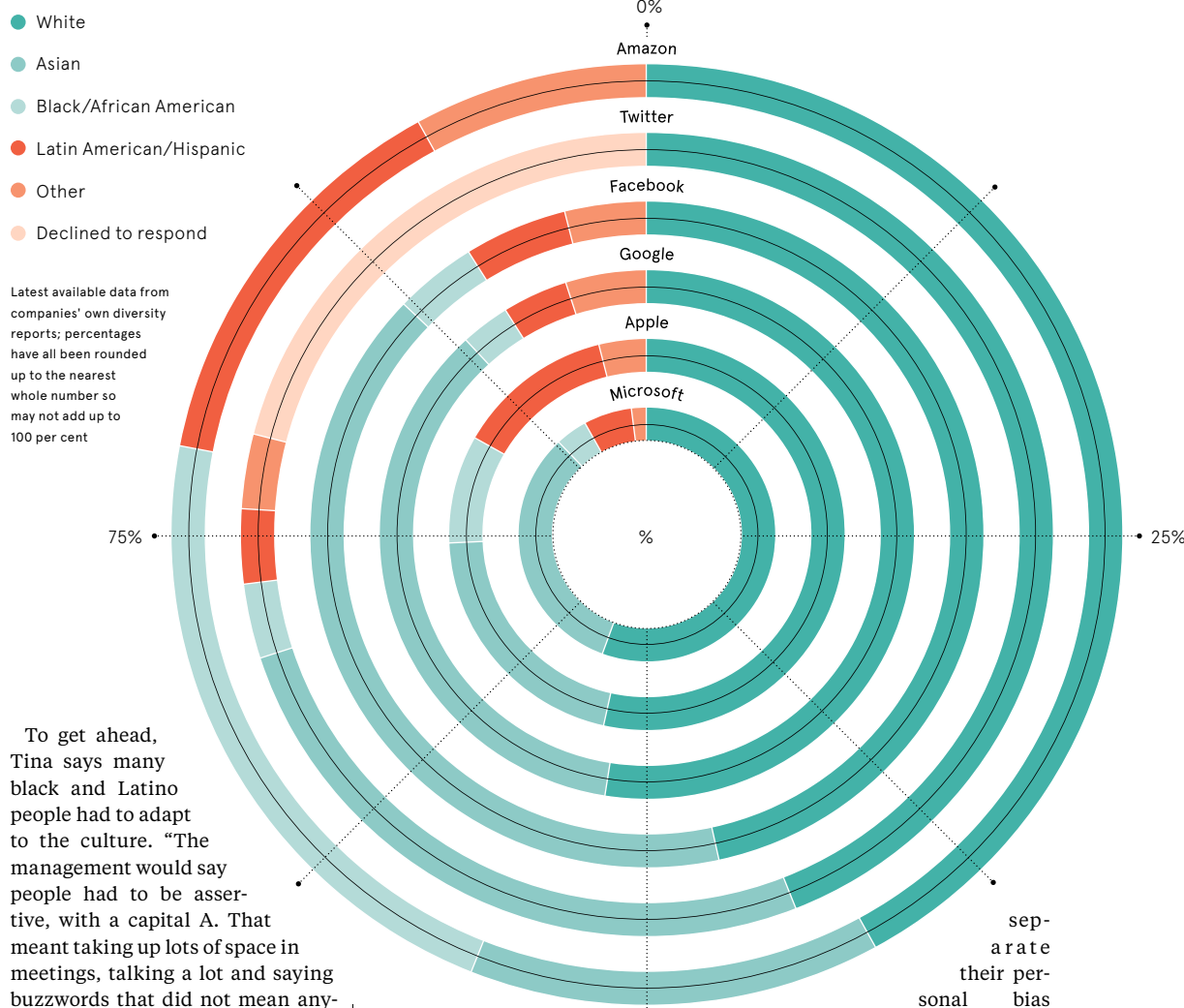
Now a content designer at a non-profit organisation in Oakland, Tina describes her former workplace where there was a lot of turnover among women and minorities. "I don't think that was by accident," she says.

Former wifi engineer LeRon Barton says the discrimination he faced has put him off from returning to Silicon Valley

SILICON VALLEY WORKERS STILL PREDOMINANTLY WHITE AND ASIAN

Race/ethnicity of technical, non–technical and leadership positions combined; United States only

- ● White
- ● Asian
- ● Black/African American
- ● Latin American/Hispanic
- ● Other
- ● Declined to respond

Latest available data from companies' own diversity reports; percentages have all been rounded up to the nearest whole number so may not add up to 100 per cent

0%
Amazon
Twitter
Facebook
Google
Apple
Microsoft
%
75%
25%
50%

To get ahead, Tina says many black and Latino people had to adapt to the culture. "The management would say people had to be assertive, with a capital A. That meant taking up lots of space in meetings, talking a lot and saying buzzwords that did not mean anything," she says. "Those people who didn't would not receive promotions and could possibly be terminated."

Tina recalls being frustrated with the HR department's inaction towards perceived discrimination when racism or bias was reported. She says: "HR said they would investigate it, but then they would come back and say they did not find anything or that they needed to hear more."

Things came to a head for her when she tried to help get a job for a Taiwanese intern who was being overlooked by senior management. "My co-workers and I went to management on the intern's behalf and told them that her being quiet in meetings could be attributed to culture. No one told her she was supposed to be speaking up in meetings like men do," Tina says. "Management just brushed it off and gave us all these reasons why she wasn't hired, but the thing was, they kept changing the reasons.

"I noticed when we would bring this to the attention of management, they would become visibly tense hearing these things. It challenged their own narrative of being very good people who would never have bias." Tina left shortly after.

In 2019, the question on many people's mind remains how do we make Silicon Valley culture more diverse? Inclusion and diversity professionals hold workshops addressing unconscious bias, panel discussions showcase women and black and Latino people discussing their experience in tech, and politicians such as US Representative Maxine Waters are attempting to "crack the matrix" of exclusivity in the Valley.

"The issue of diversity is a systemic one; it may not be intentional or malicious," claims Jenny Mith, senior manager of communications and corporate partnerships at Codesmith. "People hire others who are like them. When you interview someone who does not share your common interest or does not come from a similar background, you may ask yourself, is it a good cultural fit? More than likely, the person will not be hired. When you have that over 20, 30 years, this compounds and brings us to where we are."

Paul believes the key is in how companies recruit. "I would say diversify where they look. There are more colleges to recruit from than Stanford, Berkeley and MIT," he says. "When you hire people who are used to being around different types of people that will trickle down to how other people are hired. You cannot fix people being racist, but you can fix how people can deal with other races and separate their personal bias from work."

> **When they say 'culture fit', that means they are looking for a particular person they can personally identify with**

Regulating strict accountabilities and monetary incentives for minority referrals could also be the answer, according to Ms Mith. "Organisations need to assign a real value to diversity," she says. When in doubt, money may be the great problem solver.

As I look at my time in tech, I realise that the environments I have thrived in were inclusive, welcoming and open minded. Interacting with different people from all walks of life has been essential to my growth, not only as an engineer, project manager and a writer, but as a human being.

At this time I have no interest in pursuing opportunities in Silicon Valley. The possibilities of working at these world-renowned campuses intrigues me. Being involved with the creation of life-impacting applications and software sounds exciting, and why wouldn't it be? To be a part of a team within a company that changes the world is something so many of us in technology have always wanted to do. But to do this I would have to face daily discrimination, passive racism and micro-aggressions that would impact my mental health, and this is a choice I cannot make.

"Those who have been in the tech field for a while have learnt to deal with the implicit biases," says Ms Mith. And I agree. However, I deal with racism every day, and no amount of company perks, complimentary food at the cafeteria and free dry cleaning would convince me to endure it voluntarily. I would not be a culture fit. ●