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Reviewing your HR paradigms

Four key considerations in a turbulent working environment

February | 2023

The new world of work is presenting significant challenges to HR professionals who are scrambling to review existing paradigms of support. In 2023, many questions need to be asked to understand both the challenges and mitigations required to remain competitive in a world experiencing a convergence of pandemic and economic turbulence, as well as changing employee perceptions of work.

Drawing on the expertise of industry experts, here are four key areas to consider when designing your organisation's response to an unprecedented combination of internal and external variables.

How do I do more with less?

Budgets are under pressure as economies anticipate the spectre of recession. Some employers will seek to slow or halt recruitment, expecting employees to increase their quality and/or output. Some will eliminate staff development altogether. But there are other things you can do to achieve better outcomes with less.

One area to consider is organisational resilience. Building resilience involves developing the capacity to withstand and recover from disruptive events, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. According to Gartner, businesses can achieve this by implementing agile workforce planning, which involves creating flexible, adaptable work arrangements that can be adjusted to meet changing business needs. This can help businesses to pivot in response to changing market conditions, reduce costs, and maintain employee engagement.

You should also embrace digital transformation. This involves leveraging technology to improve the employee experience, enhance productivity, and drive innovation. Businesses can achieve this by adopting a digital-first mindset and investing in technologies, such as automation, artificial intelligence, and analytics. These technologies can help to streamline operations, reduce costs, and improve the employee experience.

Focussing on employee experience provides another opportunity to do more with less. This involves creating a positive, engaging work environment that motivates and inspires employees. Respected industry analyst David Green suggests offering flexible work arrangements, providing opportunities for development and growth, and fostering a culture of collaboration and teamwork. By prioritising

the employee experience, businesses can improve engagement, reduce turnover, and increase productivity.

According to Green, businesses can achieve this by using data to inform decisions about hiring, development, and retention. By analysing data on employee performance, engagement, and satisfaction, businesses can identify areas for improvement and make informed decisions about how to allocate resources.

Green advocates that employers should seek to provide opportunities for upskilling and reskilling, investing in training and development programs, and encouraging lifelong learning. By investing in employee development, organisations can improve engagement and productivity. This can help to attract and retain top talent, increase productivity, and reduce costs associated with turnover.

How can I ensure I secure the best available talent?

Turnover has been a hallmark of the post-pandemic workplace, so how can you ensure you are first to attract and engage the best available talent? How too can you manage if shedding staff is a necessary activity?

Recruiting in the new world of work can be challenging, but it's also an opportunity to rethink traditional approaches and leverage recent technologies and trends. Gartner's HR trends for 2023, David Green's 12 HR trends, and a recent report from LinkedIn provide insights into how HR teams can nail recruitment in the new world of work.

Embrace Flexible Work Arrangements. One of the key trends in the new world of work is the rise of flexible work arrangements. According to a recent survey by LinkedIn, 73% of job seekers say that flexible work arrangements are important to them, and 50% say they would consider leaving their current job for a role that offered more flexibility. Organisations that provide flexible work arrangements, such as remote work or flexible schedules, can attract top talent and improve retention figures.
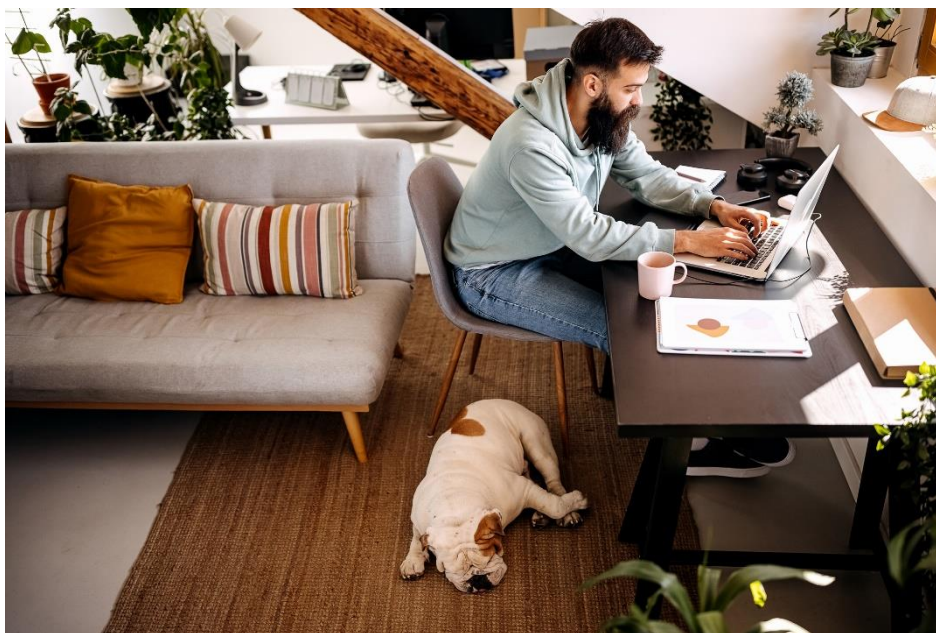
Leverage AI in Recruitment. AI is transforming the recruitment process by automating tedious tasks, improving candidate screening, and engaging the best candidates quickly. Gartner reports,

by 2023, 75% of all hiring will involve some form of HR automation, including AI-powered recruitment tools. HR teams can use AI to analyse resumes, assess candidate skills, and identify top talent.

Focus on Employer Branding. The importance of branding cannot be underestimated. A strong employer brand can help HR teams to attract top talent and differentiate themselves from competitors. According to Green, employer branding is not just about promoting the company's brand, but also about creating an authentic and compelling employer value proposition that resonates with job seekers**.** HR teams can leverage social media, employee testimonials, and employer review sites to build a strong employer brand.

Use Data Analytics to Optimise Recruitment Strategies. Data analytics can help HR teams to optimise their recruitment strategies by identifying which channels and tactics are most effective in attracting top talent. According to LinkedIn, data analytics can help HR teams to identify trends in candidate behaviour, such as which job boards or social media channels are most effective, enabling optimised recruitment budgets. HR teams can also use data analytics to measure the effectiveness of recruitment campaigns and to adjust strategies as required.

Prioritise Candidate Experience. When it comes to attracting and retaining top talent, nothing is more critical than the candidate experience. HR teams can improve candidate experience by providing a seamless and personalised recruitment process. According to LinkedIn, HR teams should focus on providing clear communication, timely feedback, and a positive candidate experience throughout the recruitment process. HR teams can also use chatbots and virtual assistants to provide candidates with real-time support and help.

Companies forced to downsize or shed staff face detrimental outcomes, such as low morale, reduced productivity, and increased turnover. HR needs to be ready to support the business in maintaining staff engagement for those that remain.

Gartner highlights that "employee experience will be at the centre of digital HR transformation," and "HR leaders will need to redesign HR processes and technologies for a hybrid workforce". The COVID-19 pandemic has forced companies to embrace hybrid work models, where employees work from the office, home, or both.

David Green highlights the importance of "developing new skills and capabilities to support a hybrid and distributed workforce," and "leveraging technology to enhance recruitment, employee engagement, and learning and development"**.** He advocates the use of technology to facilitate virtual onboarding, training, and development programs.

Video conferencing tools, e-learning platforms, and virtual reality can create a comprehensive onboarding experience. HR can also use technology to keep remote workers engaged and connected to the organisation. Social media tools, internal communication platforms, and virtual team-building exercises can help foster a sense of belonging and team cohesion.

A report by PwC notes that shedding staff can have a significant impact on employee morale, with the remaining employees feeling overworked and undervalued. HR leaders need to communicate transparently with the remaining employees, explaining the reasons for the staff shedding and how the company plans to move forward. They should also provide support and resources to employees affected by the staff shedding, such as counselling services, outplacement services, and financial planning advice.

Forbes magazine recommends companies invest in employee development and training to help the remaining workforce cope with the increased workload. HR leaders can identify skills gaps and provide training programs to help employees gain new skills or knowledge. This can also help to boost morale and engagement among employees who may be feeling demotivated after the staff shedding.

How do I onboard in a hybrid or remote environment?

Onboarding employees is a critical process that can set the tone for an employee's entire tenure at a company. With the rise of hybridised work models, where employees work both remotely and in-person, onboarding can be even more challenging. Here's how HR teams can effectively onboard employees in a hybridised work model.

HR teams must create a customised onboarding plan that includes both virtual and in-person elements. A successful hybrid onboarding plan should include virtual orientation, virtual training, virtual team building, and in-person socialisation. HR teams must ensure that every employee receives the same level of training and support, regardless of whether they are working remotely or in-person.

Virtual onboarding is a critical component of a hybridised onboarding plan. HR teams can leverage technology to deliver virtual orientation and training, provide virtual tours of the office, and facilitate virtual team building activities. HR teams can use video conferencing tools to conduct virtual orientation and training sessions and use virtual reality technology to provide immersive office tours. Online collaboration tools, such as Slack or Microsoft Teams, can be used to facilitate virtual team building.

Clear communication is essential in a hybridised work model. HR must ensure that new employees receive clear communication about company policies, expectations, and responsibilities. HR teams should provide new employees with a clear onboarding roadmap that outlines what to expect during their first weeks and months at the company. Remember, the first 90 days are crucial to retention and onboarding is not a 'set and forget' undertaking. HR teams must also ensure that new employees understand how to communicate with their colleagues and managers, both in-person and virtually.

Company culture and values are critical elements of a successful onboarding process. HR teams must ensure that new employees understand the company's culture and values and how they align with the employee's own values. HR teams should emphasise the company's culture and values during virtual orientation and team building activities, and provide in-person opportunities for new employees to meet their colleagues and experience the company's culture first-hand. Many organisations assign an onboarding 'buddy' who embodies the cultural values of the organisation.

How do I ensure new and existing staff have the best possible employee experience?

Employee attitudes toward work are changing. More and more, employees are 'quiet quitting' by only performing those tasks that are necessary to the role and no more. The impact of employee experience on positive levels of engagement and productivity cannot be understated. Organisations are recognising that employees have different needs, preferences, and work styles, and that a one-size-fits-all approach to the employee experience is no longer sufficient.

Gartner advises, "hyper-personalisation can be a competitive differentiator in the labour market, as it can help organisations attract, retain, and engage employees." By tailoring the employee experience to the individual employee, organisations can create a more engaging and fulfilling work environment.

Work-life balance is another critical trend identified by Gartner. In the new working reality, employees are increasingly looking for work arrangements that allow them to balance their work and personal lives. This trend is driven by several factors, including demographic changes (e.g., the rise of the gig economy), technological advancements (e.g., remote work), and changing attitudes towards work (e.g., the recognition that employee well-being is critical to organisational success).

According to Gartner, "organisations that prioritise work-life balance can benefit from increased employee engagement, improved retention, and a more positive organisational culture." By creating a work environment that supports work-life balance, organisations can improve employee engagement and productivity.

The same is true for organisations that focus on employee wellness. Organisations that prioritise employee wellness can benefit from increased employee engagement, improved productivity, and reduced absenteeism and turnover. This trend is particularly relevant today, as employees face new and unique challenges related to the pandemic, remote work, etc.

The hybrid workplace presents both challenges and opportunities for the employee experience. On one hand, remote work can increase flexibility and autonomy for employees, which can improve engagement and productivity. Conversely, remote work can also lead to feelings of isolation and disconnection from colleagues and the organisation, which can negatively impact engagement and productivity.

Numerous studies have demonstrated the link between the employee experience, engagement, and productivity. For example, a study by Gallup found that engaged employees are 21% more productive than disengaged employees. Another study by Deloitte found that organisations with a strong culture of employee well-being are three times more likely to report significant improvements in overall business performance.

The employee experience encompasses all aspects of the employee's interactions with the organisation, including the physical workspace, technology, policies and procedures, leadership, and culture. When employees have a positive experience in these areas, they are more likely to be engaged and productive.

A positive employee experience can also lead to other benefits, such as improved customer satisfaction. According to a study by Harvard Business Review, companies with a strong employee experience outperformed their competitors in terms of revenue growth, profitability, and customer satisfaction.

Technology can play a critical role in shaping today's employee experience, helping to bridge the gap between employees and the organisation.

For example, collaboration tools such as Slack, Microsoft Teams, and Zoom can facilitate communication and collaboration among remote and hybrid teams. These tools can also help maintain a sense of community and connection among employees who are physically separated.

Employee self-service portals can also improve the employee experience by allowing employees to access information and resources quickly and easily. For example, employees can use self-service portals to check their payslips, request leave, and update their personal information. These portals can reduce administrative burdens on HR teams while also providing employees with more autonomy and control over their work lives.

Conclusion

During 2023 and beyond, HR will face a myriad of organisational challenges that will require a fresh approach to how it does business. Using a combination of analysis, employee-first thinking and technology, solutions are at hand. But fortune favours the brave, and action is required to ensure your organisation not only survives these turbulent times but thrives in them.

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Michael Howard, Founder