VOL. VII, ISSUE V

EMPLOYMENT ENTERPRISES INC

HR INSIGHTS

Magazine

from the eyes of industry leaders

AI IN THE WORKPLACE

THE GAME CHANGER OF TOMORROW

IN THIS ISSUE »

FROM THE PRESIDENT

THE SUMMER IS OVER, and the interns and the summer help are back in school. As an employer and the President of a Workforce Solutions company with almost 4 decades of experience, I can honestly say that the biggest challenge any business faces today is that of a tight labor market. Hiring is tough, and turnover is high.

Organizations are struggling to find the talent they need. Net job growth averaging 170,000 positions per month, is forcing employers to think out of the box and consider apprenticeships, rehiring the aging workforce, using freelancers and provide increased wages, benefits and life style options. If current trends continue, there will be more than one job opening for every unemployed person in the U.S.

The days where businesses believed that a longer hiring process was helpful to allow for adequate time to compare candidates are over. Top talent can come and go in a blink of an eye and the need for speed in hiring is increasing. Statistics show that top candidates stay available for only 10 days before being hired.

The use of digitization and cloud base hiring tools will help companies to quickly identify talent sources, but that alone is not sufficient. Greater focus on the candidate experience combined with the ease of onboarding is essential. Reports show that 62% of companies agree they will need assistance in finding and retaining talent, while hiring managers expect a 168% increase in the amount of work done by flexible talent (temporary, freelance or agency workers) in the next 10 years.

As we move into the final quarter of 2018, we are prepared to assist our clients through these complex employment challenges and offer solutions that increase recruitment efficiency and support the retention of superior talent.

"Great things in business are never done by one person. They're done by a team of people."

— Steve Jobs

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HR INSIGHTS Magazine

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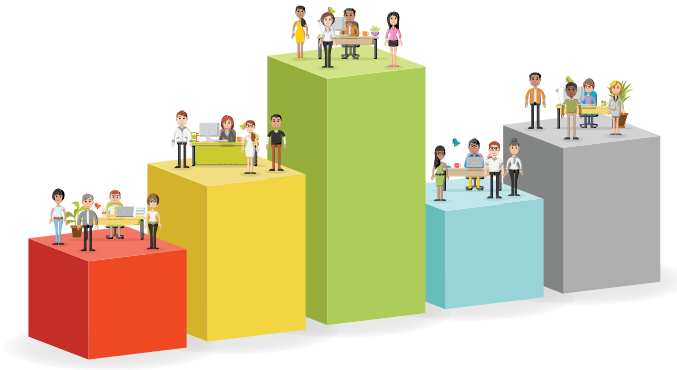
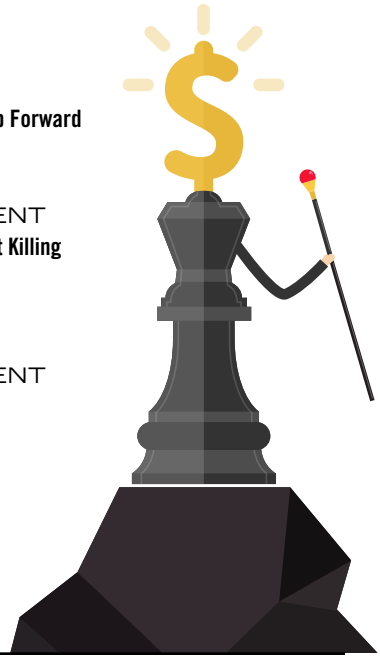
COVER STORY





HR INSIGHTS

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Karla Gutierrez Trejos

DESIGN

The Office of Kristian Bjørnard

AI IN THE GAME CH

BY NICHOLAS MCQUIRE

Fueled by an explosion of data, the rapid growth in cloud computing, and the emergence of advanced algorithms, the business world's adoption of artificial intelligence is proceeding at an accelerating pace. In one recent survey of IT decision makers, 58 percent of respondents said they were "using, trialing or implementing, or researching [AI] technology for deployment in their businesses."[1] Respondents to the same survey also estimated that as many as 30 percent of their business applications would be enhanced with machine learning by July 2019—a bullish view, considering the technology's well-documented problems with trust, cost, and the lack of people with the skills needed to train machine learning systems.

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Speech-based and image-based cognitive applications are emerging at an ever-increasing rate in specialized markets such as fraud detection in finance, low-level contract analysis in the legal sector, and personalization in retail. New AI applications are also making forays into corporate function areas such as customer service, HR, sales, and IT. These early implementations indicate that AI will almost certainly change the nature of work and transform the business world over the next few years.

THE INTELLIGENT WORKPLACE

One of the most promising areas of early AI activity is workplace technology (which marketers have dubbed "the intelligent workplace"). Forward-thinking companies regard workplace AI as part of their digital transformation strategies and efforts to improve the employee experience. This approach takes place against a backdrop of high levels of employee dissatisfaction with workplace technology, poor productivity, and low employee engagement. Almost half of the respondents to a 2016 survey of employees in North America and Western Europe, for example, said that their workplace technology did not fully meet their needs.

Drowning in a sea of data, employees now use an average of 6.1 mobile applications to do their jobs.[2] Since the 2008 financial crisis, there's been a lag in macro productivity because people waste a lot of time doing mundane tasks (such as searching for data and booking meetings) and mixing cumbersome legacy technology with an array of disconnected enterprise and personal applications. In this context, new AI capabilities may enable workplace technology to evolve in exciting directions.

- **Productivity apps**. Assistive, cognitive features are becoming more prevalent in productivity software. These include search, faster access to documents, automated e-mail replies, and virtual assistants that display contextually relevant information for employees and can automate simple, time-consuming tasks.
- **Voice control**. The integration of voice or natural-language processing in productivity apps will further boost productivity. The rise of speech-controlled smart speakers such as Google Home, Apple HomePod, and Amazon Echo devices signals the likelihood that the creation of documents through speech dictation (and the use of natural-language queries to parse data or control functions in spreadsheets) will become widespread in the near future.
- **IT support**. When organizations have poor IT support services, they hold their employees back by draining their productivity. Firms are increasingly turning to virtual agents and machine learning technologies to automate low-level, repetitive, and high-volume support problems (such as resetting passwords, logging help desk tickets, and providing directions to self-service tools). Such solutions can help companies allocate IT support personnel to higher-value tasks, but their primary function is to increase employee satisfaction with workplace technology.
- **Cybersecurity**. Perhaps one of the biggest uses of AI will be to protect companies from spam, phishing attacks, and malware. The alarming increase in the number of data breaches across the globe combined with a critical shortage of cybersecurity experts mean that companies need AI to help them improve how they detect risks and respond to incidents.

TIPS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

As part of their preparations for one of the most important technology shifts of this generation, the widespread adoption of AI, businesses of all shapes and sizes should consider the following suggestions:

- **Start simple.** Assistive AI features in off-the-shelf productivity and collaboration software can help employees become familiar with AI technology and its benefits. Smart e-mail, improved document access and search, chatbots, and speech assistants are just a few of the simple and accessible features that can save time, improve workflows, and enhance employee experiences.
- **Build and buy.** To take advantage of the tremendous amount of supplier investment in AI, companies can combine "build and buy" approaches to those technologies. For example, a firm can buy off-the-shelf solutions for horizontal applications (such as security products that incorporate machine learning for threat intelligence and anomaly detection) and at the same time focus research and development and talent-management strategies on building domain- and company-specific applications that improve the organization's competitive advantage.
- **Be aware of the fear.** Not all employees will immediately embrace AI technology in the workplace. Although people have generally positive feelings about AI, there's still a lot of fear and confusion about how it could eliminate jobs, be prone to bias, or violate privacy. Throughout the process of implementing new AI strategies, organizations need to be mindful of the importance of good communication, the ethical uses of AI, transparency, and, above all, employee engagement.

As more organizations explore using more AI technology to assist employees and enable smarter work, the quest to build more intelligent workplaces will no doubt face some challenges over the next few years. Companies that want to benefit the most from the shift toward more AI in the workplace should start preparing now—not later—for its arrival. ■

With over 15 years' experience in enterprise technology advisory services, Nicholas McQuire is the vice president of enterprise research at CCS Insight, where he focuses on digital workplace such as mobility, security, artificial intelligence, and cloud computing. He can be reached at nick.mcquire@ccsinsight.com.

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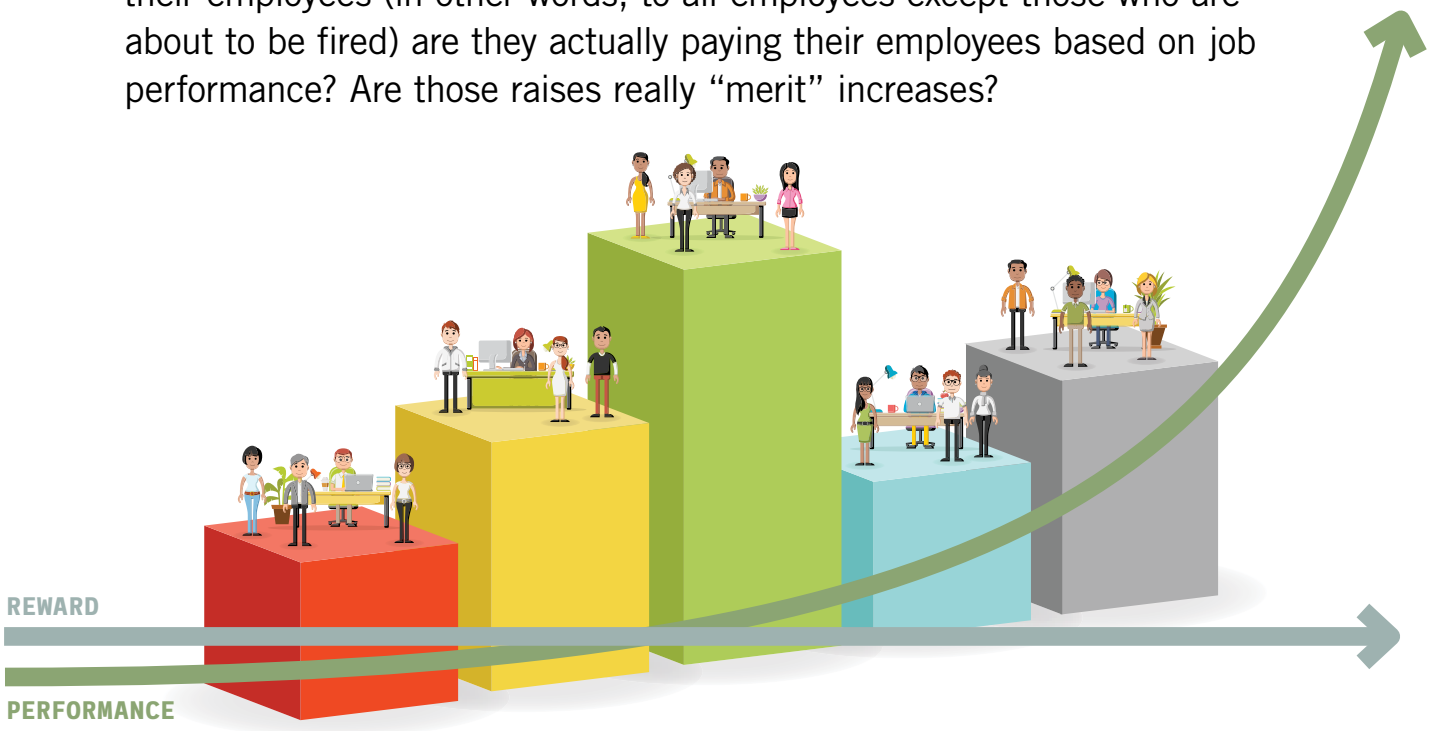
The Problem with Most Pay-for-Performance Programs

BY CHUCK CSIZMAR

Today, nearly every organization claims to have a pay-for-performance program. But when companies give merit increases to over 95 percent of their employees (in other words, to all employees except those who are about to be fired) are they actually paying their employees based on job performance? Are those raises really "merit" increases?



The answer to both of those questions is a resounding "No!"

Here's a more accurate description of a true merit increase: when an organization has a limited amount of merit increase monies available, it first rewards its best performers properly for their contributions, then distributes remaining funds to other employees in decreasing amounts, based on the degree of each person's individual contribution. Under this arrangement, some employees who are performing at a level described as "adequate" (or "sufficient" or whatever term the organization uses for average work) should not receive merit increases. There simply isn't enough money for everybody, so the ones who deserve it the most should be the ones who actually get it. Some of those average employees will get mad and maybe even quit—but such losses are acceptable if they enable a company to reward and motivate those who make the greatest individual contributions to its well-being and success.

Advocates of the status quo who believe that everyone deserves to get an annual raise will say, "You can't do that! How unfair!" But those who champion rewarding the average among their employees need to look past the emotional rhetoric to consider what they should be paying for.

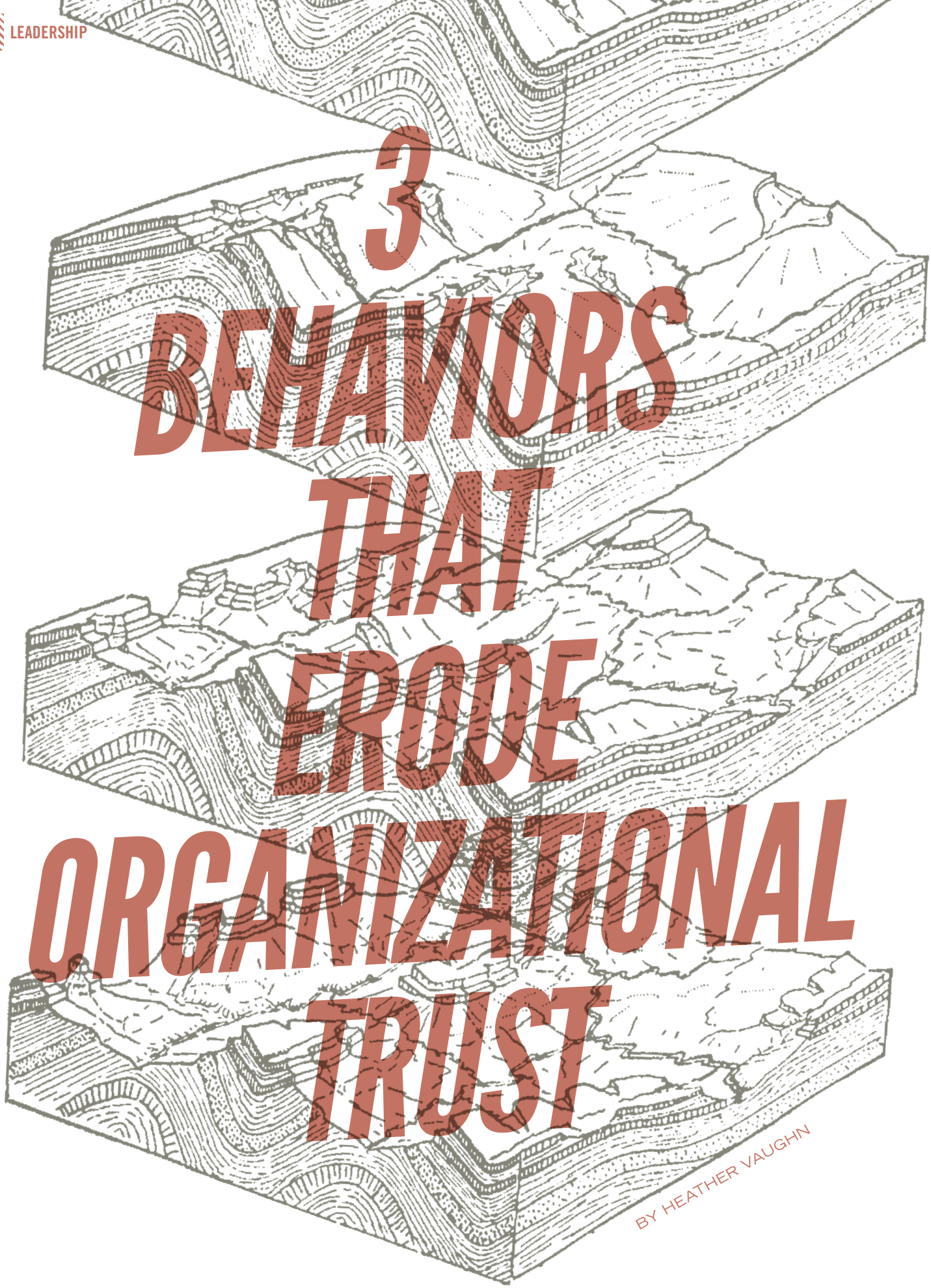
Unlike groceries, movie tickets, or shoes, a reward for job performance is not a commodity with a fixed value. Rather, its value varies: it's greater for those who provide higher levels of performance and less (or even nonexistent) for those who provide lower levels of performance. Companies don't have endless amounts of money to pass around, so they should first take care of those who make the greatest contributions.

Most organization won't like this proposal. Many business leaders and even some compensation practitioners believe in the unwritten social contract that holds that employees who perform well enough to keep their jobs should get something for their efforts at the end of a performance measurement period.

But what happens when there isn't enough reward money to retain a superstar employee? What happens when the difference in reward levels is so narrow that top performers start to think "Why bother putting in the extra effort?" There's always a recruiter out there who will call them and say, "Come to work for us. We respect you as a high performer, and we'll take care of you."

Organizations need to make sure that their pay-for-performance programs don't focus too much on rewarding their average employees. If companies don't take care of their superstars first (and not as an afterthought with whatever money happens to be left after other rewards are paid out) they may end up pushing those top performers away—and toward the competition. ■

Chuck Csizmar is the founder and principal of CMC Compensation Group, an independent global consulting firm that helps companies manage the effective and efficient utilization of financial rewards for their employees. He can be reached at ccsizmar@cmccompensationgroup.com.



3 BEHAVIORS THAT ERODE ORGANIZATIONAL TRUST

BY HEATHER VAUGHN

Considering the number of articles, books, and lectures that have emerged in recent years about how building positive workplace cultures and a better employee experience can have a positive impact on business goals, one might expect organizational trust to be on the rise. But a recent study by EY found that "less than half of global respondents have a 'great deal of trust' in their employer, boss or team/colleagues."[1] With such a strong recent focus on employee experience, why is there still a disconnect between leaders' and employees' perceptions of trust?

Improving trust takes more than implementing a new culture initiative. It requires building strong relationships in the workplace—a process that takes time. Organizations can facilitate relationship building, but they need to watch out for behaviors that can sabotage those efforts. If unrecognized and unchecked, those behaviors can actually erode organizational trust rather than strengthen it.

CUTTING CORNERS TO ACHIEVE GOALS

Thanks to technological advances, business now moves faster than ever before. Regrettably, operational speed can have a negative impact on how employees perceive trust. Rob Seay, employee experience director at Bonfyre, points out that in their pursuit of a goal or deadline, leaders might delay other projects—and "the initiatives that get pushed aside or overlooked to achieve those goals are often things that have an impact on the employees' view of trust . . . such as team-building activities, training courses, special projects, or team meetings."

Working toward a shared company goal can build trust among coworkers. But cutting culture- and relationship building initiatives in order to meet that goal when resources are scarce may have the opposite effect: the organization not only undermines its efforts to build organizational trust but actually erodes it. Prioritizing speed to the point that employees feel they are juggling (and even dropping) basic tasks for an extended period of time can leave them feeling more like operational assets than valued team members.

DISCONNECT BETWEEN WORDS AND ACTIONS

In the EY survey, respondents identified "delivers on promises" as the most important factor that determines whether they have "a great deal of trust" in their organizations.[2] When dealing with customers, many companies use the "under-promise and over-deliver" strategy to ensure higher success rates in hitting their deadline, quality, and budget goals. But they often fail to apply this practice to their own employees and, consequently, harm that relationship. Leadership coach Peter Stark points out that when a company offers only "vague promises about bonuses or promotions that never materialize, [its] employees feel deceived and begin to lose trust."[3]

In his book, *Everybody Matters: The Extraordinary Power of Caring for Your People Like Family*, Bob Chapman writes about how he discovered discrepancies between his leadership's behavior and the principles of trust he wanted his company to embrace. When he learned that manufacturing supplies were locked away in cages due to fear of employee theft, he decided to remove those locks and eliminate several other practices that were misaligned with his organization's new principles and undermined trust with its employees.

Failure to follow up on solicited employee feedback is another common complaint, especially when it comes to employee engagement surveys. By ignoring the results of those surveys, companies may be doing more damage than they realize to their corporate culture. In order to improve organizational trust, organizations need to listen to and respect what their employees tell them.

INSUFFICIENT OR DELAYED COMMUNICATION

Fifty-nine percent of respondents in the EY study cited whether an employer "communicates openly/transparently" as a factor in determining the level of their trust. The lack of clear and timely communication can undermine trust in any relationship. Waiting too long to answer employees' specific questions can allow false theories to brew in the workplace. To build trust with employees, Seay says, rather than stay silent, companies should instead share an incomplete message (without all the details) as a sign of support for transparency. This can be as simple as an announcement letting employees know the current state of affairs with a promise to provide more details as they become available.

When an organization commits to building organizational trust, it's vital that its initiatives align with the words and actions of its managers and leaders. Trust doesn't develop overnight or with a single new culture initiative; rather, it takes time to build workplace relationships that will lead to trust among coworkers. By considering (and avoiding) these three problem areas, companies can develop effective trust-building initiatives. ■

Heather Vaughn is a writer and storyteller with more than 15 years corporate communications experience in the retail and technology industries. As an editor of the blog *Gather Around* (bonfyreapp.com/blog), she researches, writes, and publishes stories to help companies improve their culture through better communication and connections to their colleagues.

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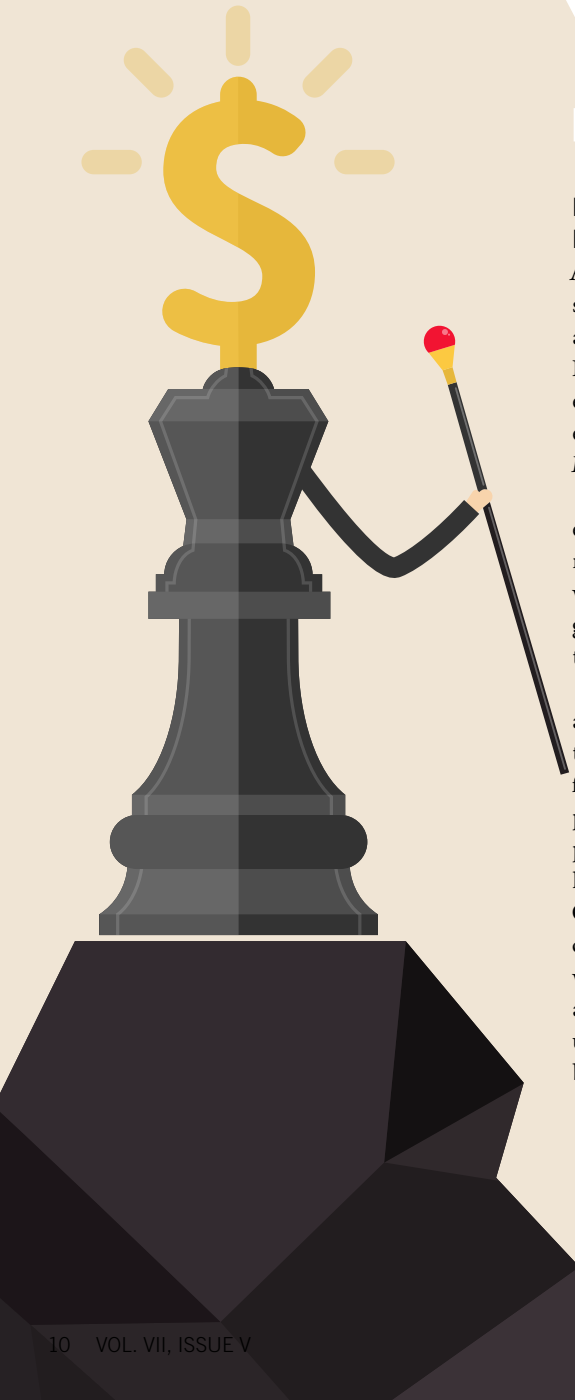
5 STRATEGIES TODAY'S LE

BY DAN MILLER

As the pace of business growth continues to accelerate, the candidate pool continues to shrink: in April 2018, for the first time in U.S. history, there were more available job than people to fill them, with 6.7 million open jobs and 6.3 million people out of work.[1,2] These numbers strongly indicate that U.S. employers need to prioritize building work cultures that attract and retain employees. Here are five strategies that today's business leaders should consider when figuring out how to make their companies places where people look forward to going to work.



1

ESTABLISH AND EVANGELIZE A HIGHER PURPOSE

A higher purpose is a goal that connects to something more important than the needs and wants of one individual or organization. In the business world it transcends profit or efficiency, as two business school professors explain in a recent article in *Harvard Business Review*:

A higher purpose is not about economic exchanges. It reflects something more aspirational. It explains how the people involved with an organization are making a difference, gives them a sense of meaning, and draws their support.[3]

The authors point out that though having a higher purpose doesn't necessarily mean that an organization will definitely achieve financial success, some research "suggests a positive impact on both operating financial performance (return on assets) and forward-looking measures of performance (Tobin's Q and stock returns) when the purpose is communicated with clarity." Simply put, when people connect with a higher purpose and find meaning in their work, their work usually improves—and their organizations benefit.

2

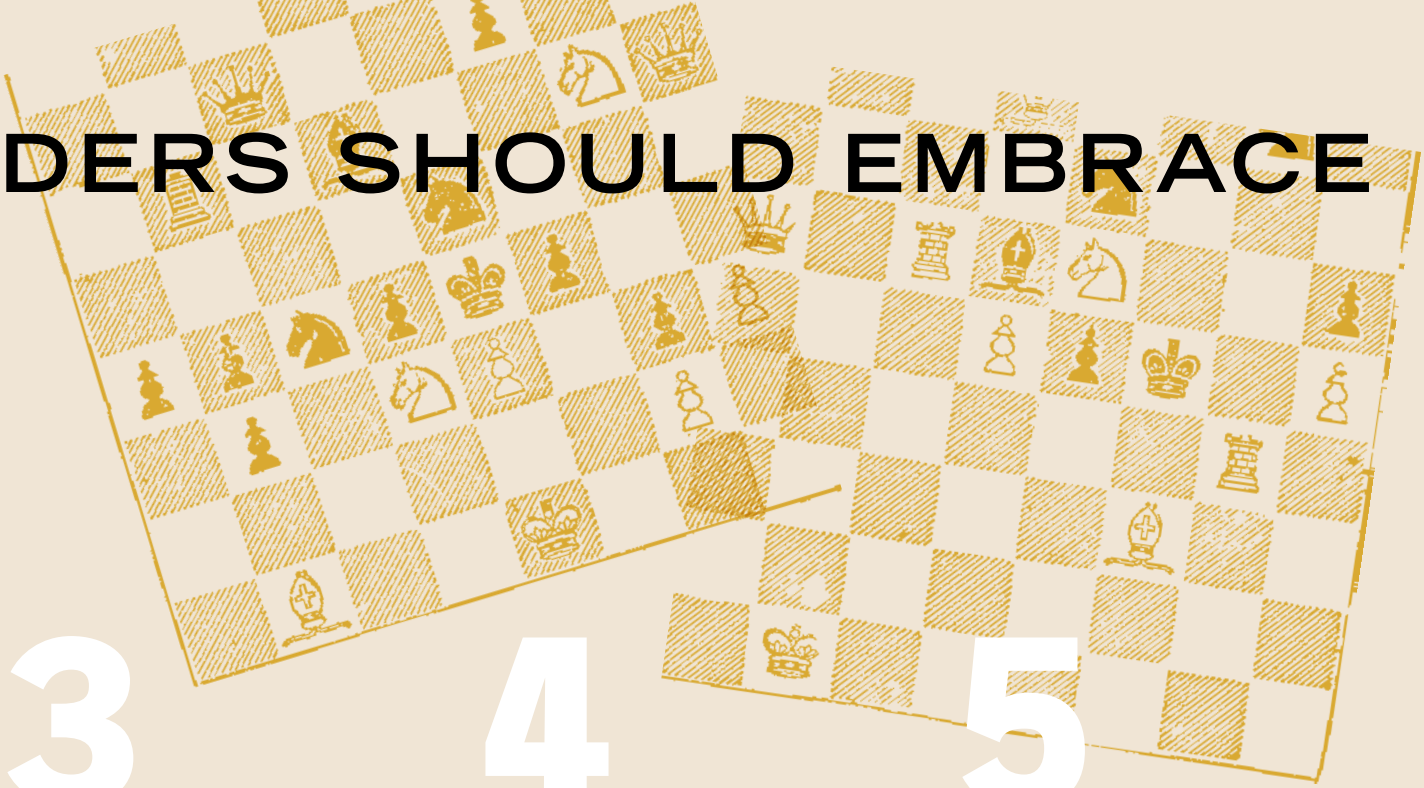
LEVERAGE THE INPUT OF THE CROWD

Everyone knows that people don't leave companies—they leave managers. Companies that give individuals too much power (or even influence) over other employees risk alienating and losing those workers when they feel they aren't being treated fairly. Involving others (including peers and colleagues) in certain evaluation and decision processes can help employees feel that they aren't at the mercy of one person.

When a candidate applies for a job, the interview process includes multiple people to reduce bias. So once someone is hired, why wouldn't a company continue to involve more than one person to his or her development? Why would a company dedicate multiple people to determine if someone should work there but then leave the new hire's future in the hands of just one person (his or her manager)?

By empowering its entire workforce (and not just a manager) to provide feedback, a company reduces the risk that an employee will feel that his or her self-worth is determined by one person. When employees believe that their peers "have their back," they feel more deeply connected to each other. Crowdsourced peer reviews provide richer performance analyses that can lead to greater growth opportunities. Companies that understand this will investigate systems to provide this richer form of feedback.

ADERS SHOULD EMBRACE



3

MODERNIZE VARIABLE PAY STRATEGY

To modernize its total rewards strategy and investment, a company should start by empowering all employees to provide social recognition (through positive feedback and monetary awards, for example) when they see good work that supports the organization's core values. To do this without increasing budget, companies can find "hidden dollars" in ad hoc, disparate programs (e.g., dinners, sporting events, gift cards) and centralize the programs – and associated costs – to maximize their use as a reward strategy. In revised variable pay structures, rewards are more tightly aligned to how, when, and where the work happens. There's a sense of urgency for HR to start paying attention to modernizing performance development, because, as John Bersin (principal and founder at Bersin/Deloitte Consulting) recently pointed out, "We don't have the old vertical career model we used to have—we have careers with people moving from role to role . . . [and] we need to find a way to continue to engage them."[4]

4

EMBRACE THE BABY BOOMERS

Within the shrinking talent pool, one segment is actually growing: older workers. As of May 2018, people age 65 and over make up 18.8 percent of the employed part of the civilian labor force, up from only 12.8 percent in May 2000.[5] This upward trend in the continued employment of older workers is likely to continue, Bersin observed, and presents both challenges and opportunities for management: "How do we reward people who probably aren't going to become the CEO, probably not going to get promoted, but want to stay in the workforce? They want to add value, they want to share everything they learned, they want to have the psychic benefits of work."[6] By modernizing their variable pay strategy, organizations can accommodate individuals' specific needs through configurable plan design.

5

CREATE AND SUSTAIN MINDFULNESS

Because today's fast-paced workplace holds leaders accountable for developing and implementing strategy while running from meeting to meeting, many leaders find themselves so focused on what's next that they gloss over the simple pleasure of seeing work get done in the present. Rasmus Hougaard (founder and managing director at Potential Project) recently declared, "The only thing we have is right now—and we're not present right now. We're completely missing out on great work, on great relationships, so mindfulness is becoming increasingly important."[7] With focus becoming more and more challenging to maintain amid today's many distractions, Hougaard stressed the importance of developing executives and managers who lead with mindfulness, selflessness, and compassion. ■

Dan Miller is the director of content marketing for Globoforce (www.globoforce.com) where they empower employees and teams to recognize and reward each other, celebrating meaningful moments, big and small.

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THE DISRUPTIVE OF HR

BY JESSICA MILLER-MERRELL

In her book, *Mindshift: Break through Obstacles to Learning and Discover Your Hidden Potential,* Barbara Oakley encourages a focus on learning and points out that failure is an important part of understanding how to fuel one's own development and personal growth. HR leaders can glean much from this approach, because they must not only focus on their own learning and development but must also foster learning and development opportunities for employees to help keep them engaged in their work (and happier in their lives). Indeed, change through learning and development is the only way HR leaders can serve as strategic partners in talent acquisition for the companies with whom they work and consult. But unless HR practitioners innovate and improve their industries (and themselves), they will cease to be of value to the businesses they support.

TIME FOR SOMETHING NEW

If HR wants to move forward on the evolutionary scale, the field must be disruptive, ready to fail, and capable of shaking things up. HR is at an impasse, constructed in large part by administrative professionals who are deeply rooted in compliance and paperwork. The bureaucratic role isn't necessarily obsolete (after all, it's a big part of HR's history and still important in its current functions), but it lies in direct opposition of the strategic business partner role that helps HR grow an organization's most important asset: talent.

To be a strategic partner, HR needs to get out of its comfort zone and engage learning and development in new ways beyond the old standbys of industry-oriented conferences, events, publications, and meetups. HR professionals can't expect to push boundaries if all they do is listen to the same people who have been speaking at their local SHRM chapter meetings for the past decade. Consider, for example, how many of today's meetings feature "Millennials in the Workplace" talks that sound not unlike the "Generation X in the Workplace" talks that dominated the meeting circuit in 1999. When it comes to recruiting innovation and development, HR needs to stop getting stuck in the past and needs to start looking forward.

POWER

GETTING COMFORTABLE WITH DISCOMFORT

In order to have conversations with C-level executives and hiring managers about what's broken (and how to fix it), HR professionals must develop a level of comfort with discomfort. Having uncomfortable conversations is part of HR's job, as is teaching other people how to accept constructive criticism. HR managers who haven't had a difficult conversation with their CEOs or department heads in the past year might be overlooking a terribly important facet of their jobs: being strategic partners in talent acquisition. HR has to push the envelope when it comes to diversity, accessibility, and other topics that make people (including themselves) uncomfortable. Problems in these areas will never be fixed unless they become part of an everyday conversation in human resources. True, disagreement and questioning the status quo can be uncomfortable. But the HR professionals who are willing to be "that person" are the ones who can most bring about change in their field.

KNOWLEDGE IS EARNED, NOT INHERENT

Sometimes it seems that certain people are "naturals" when it comes to recruiting leadership. The truth is, though, that none of this work comes "naturally." Every single innovator or leader in the HR industry has a backstory that includes failure—and important lessons learned from that failure. Sometimes they were the only ones willing to introduce uncomfortable discussions and point out the elephants in the room. By taking those risks they brought about change, found their passion, and had genuine impacts on the HR industry.

In order to be a strategic asset, HR needs to push itself and move to a very uncomfortable place—and that shift must start with individual HR professionals. If they truly want to drive and innovate in the businesses they support, they must first start with themselves. Only then are learning and growth possible for businesses, teams, HR departments, and individuals. ■

Jessica Miller-Merrell (@jmillermerrell) is a workplace change agent, author, and consultant focused on human resources and talent acquisition living in Austin, TX. Recognized by Forbes as a top 50 social media influencer and is a global speaker. She's the founder and chief innovation officer at Workology (www.workology.com), a workplace HR resource and host of the Workology Podcast.

HOW TO IDENTIFY

BY KARLA GUTIÉRREZ TREJOS

If making its workforce more competitive is one of a company's goals, then it needs to identify its employees' critical skills gaps. Defined as "the perceived difference between the skills employers require from workers and the skills workers actually possess," a skills gap exists when a company realizes that, unless its employees can learn or improve certain skills, it can no longer advance, keep up with previously set goals, or be competitive against other companies.[1]

Identifying these gaps is critical to building effective and focused training programs. Unfortunately, companies often launch training programs without enough understanding of the skills gaps in their workforces. This approach just produces poor results. After all, it doesn't make sense for an organization to increase its customer service training when what its employees really need are leadership initiatives, right?

A thorough skills gap analysis can yield a multitude of benefits. By examining existing skills within the context of the organization as a whole, this analysis can identify whether employees can learn lacking skills through training or if the company may need to hire different workers. It pinpoints what training is required first and where the company needs to spend the most money and time. This simple, five-step analysis can enable any organization to get to the heart of its most pressing skills gaps.

1) IDENTIFY THE COMPANY'S OBJECTIVES

Although it might seem nice to have well-rounded employees, most businesses usually rely on just a few skills. By first identifying its goals, a company is more able to identify what training its employees need now and in the future. It's crucial not to overlook this first step: an organization should spend as much time and effort learning about its business objectives as it does on creating its training programs.

2) IDENTIFY THE SKILLS NEEDED TO ACHIEVE THOSE OBJECTIVES

Again, it might seem like a good idea for all employees to have customer service skills and be well-rounded workers, but a company's IT people probably need far less of that kind of training than its sales staff and call center representatives do. To make sure its employees aren't getting trained in the wrong areas, the organization first needs to identify the skills most needed for each role in the company, then assess what skills its employees already have.

- First, group job titles and combine similar jobs. (For example, technical support representatives and customer service representatives go together because they are likely to require some of the same training. But technical support representatives should also be grouped with IT specialists.)
- Next, prioritize skills based on position level. (For example, a senior team member or supervisor would likely need expert-level skills, whereas other roles may require proficiency in certain areas and others may need only a basic knowledge of some fields.)
- Finally, create a list of those skills and make sure that managers know what their team members are expected to know and how knowledgeable they are supposed to be.

3) IDENTIFY WHAT SKILLS EMPLOYEES ALREADY HAVE

Once business priorities and the required skills for each position are clearly established, the next step is to evaluate whether the people currently in those positions are well-equipped to do their jobs. Don't assume that current employees already know what they should; even longtime employees may have skill gaps that result from not needing certain skills on a regular basis or from their jobs becoming specialized.

SKILLS GAPS

Identifying the most important skills needed by a person in a particular job will yield the information needed to conduct a training needs analysis (TNA), which measures the skills against the employee's level of existing knowledge and how much training would be required. A TNA can include some or all of the following steps:

- Learn about employee skills, certificates, and other competencies via individual online profiles or surveys, group discussions, assessment tests, and personal interviews. (The tools used can vary depending on the size of the workforce.)
- Use customer feedback to evaluate employees and to see where gaps may exist.
- For large workforce groups, use assessment software to start the TNA process or as a gauge to measure progress periodically.
- In addition to online or paper testing (which both have their benefits), observe how employees actually work. Not only does observation offer a critical window on what employees do, but it gives management a chance to let employees know exactly what it wants to be done and how.
- Use knowledge surveys, assessments, and questionnaires to find out if employees actually know what they need to know about the company and its values.

4) GATHER, ANALYZE, AND COMPARE DATA

Simply stated, a skills gap is the difference between the skills that an organization needs (the data identified in step 2) and the skills that its employees already have (the data identified in step 3). This step of the skills gap analysis entails compiling all the data gathered so far and comparing the two main data sets to find the gaps between them. The data review process can include the following items:

- Skills that the current workforce lacks
- Training needed to address skills gaps in the current workforce
- Skills to hire for
- Training required for different groups or teams
- Employees who have shown leadership and exceptional skills (and who could be promoted)
- Current employees who have critical skills (and how they might be used to help train others)
- Skills that will be needed in the future (and what can be done to prepare for them)

5) START CLOSING GAPS

Once an organization identifies (and prioritizes) its skills gaps, it can start creating an action plan to use both training and hiring to close them, starting with the most crucial ones. The training-oriented parts of the plan should list reasons why employees should be improving those skills, discuss the best ways to address the gaps, and explain what support is needed to complete the plan. It should also include certain details to make sure it's realistic and to keep it on track:

- Costs
- Training content (and level—basic, advanced, etc.)
- Format of training (traditional classroom with an instructor, online with e-learning programs, coaching, mentoring, etc.)
- Training provider
- Key dates (including an end date) and milestones

Skills gaps are all the buzz these days; everyone's talking about them, and everyone's afraid of them. Fear will get a company nowhere, though. The best way to address skills gaps is to identify them and then create and implement a plan to mitigate them. ■

Karla Gutiérrez Trejos is an inbound marketer at Aura Interactiva (www.aurainteractiva.com), the developers of SHIFT e-learning software. She can be reached at kgutierrez@aurainteractiva.com.

1. American Staffing Association. 2017. "'Skills Gap' Is Unfamiliar to Americans." American Staffing Association website, October 3, americanstaffing.net/posts/2017/10/03/skills-gap-unfamiliar-americans/.

QUALITY OF HIRE: TAKING A GIANT STEP FORWARD

BY TONY RESTELL

Imagine how much more successful an organization's recruitment campaigns would be if:

- big data made it possible to develop hiring profiles for the ideal candidates;
- better collaboration among the company's hiring managers and recruiters led to a much more thorough understanding of candidate requirements and of red lines (and acceptable compromises) for hiring;
- better measurement tools made it possible to narrow the interview short-list to the candidates who are most likely to succeed in the long term; and
- ongoing assessment enabled benchmarking of candidate sources based on the quality of hire that their recommendations yield.

This list may appear to describe some impossible reality in which companies have (and act on) all the information and tools they need in order to make perfect hires every time. But the fact is that all of those goals are actually achievable today with currently existing tools. Companies just need to take advantage of them!

LEVERAGING BIG DATA

A company that can accurately capture data that enhances its prospects of making successful future hires for any given position can gain a long-term competitive advantage. Compiling and acting on such data moves a company away from using gut instinct (which yields unreliable and even damaging results) and instead toward focusing its efforts on identifying the exact hiring profile that's proven to be most successful within the organization.

Imagine an IT company that has always considered a college degree to be a prerequisite for being a successful business developer in that industry. Over time, however, the company discovers that it's actually the candidates with previous telesales experience who have proven to be the most successful employees there. Ordinarily, a decision to drop the long-held requirement for a college degree in favor of telesales experience would likely meet resistance—and the importance of telesales experience might even go unnoticed.

But when the right data is being collected on an ongoing basis, these are exactly the types of insights that rise to the surface, making companies far better placed to make the right calls on hiring criteria. When that same rationale is applied across an entire company—and the organization's hiring activity provides a rich data set—the resulting findings can dramatically shape the profile of hires that business looks to make. Rather than make decisions based on preconceptions, the company can use hard facts to make much better decisions.

IMPROVING COLLABORATION

In addition to improvements based on better use of hiring data, companies can also reap tremendous gains in hiring effectiveness simply by improving the communication channels between hiring managers and recruiters. Consider how often a recruiter presents a proposed short list of candidates only for the hiring manager to reject the majority of them immediately (perhaps because the hiring manager decided on new priorities after giving out the hiring assignment). In order for the hiring process to be the most successful, hiring managers need to brief recruiters thoroughly. At the same time, recruiters need to be able to push back on hiring managers' demands and provide reality checks on what is genuinely achievable.

By making this collaborative briefing process a prerequisite for launching a hiring campaign, organizations can ensure that recruiting resources are invested only when the goalposts have been clearly established. When participants are forced to establish hiring criteria (includes acceptable tradeoffs) together, they avoid the classic problem of hiring managers' expectations simply being set too high, with little or no chance of the resulting hiring profile ever being achieved by the recruiting team.

IMPROVING SHORT LISTS

Getting that agreement between hiring managers and recruiters is absolutely key. But it's also important to check—objectively—throughout the process whether key criteria are being met. This process allows both parties to see how candidates compare with the initial brief, both at the candidate screening stage and then again once interviews have actually been conducted. Crucially, this minimizes the possibility that human intervention jeopardizes the hiring process. (For example, a particular candidate may have had a great interview, but if something about his or her profile indicates that he or she is unlikely to be a success in the business, having a better short list makes this more transparent to both the hiring manager and the recruiter.)

Of course, the longer an organization has been using such short lists, the more powerful the insights they yield can become. In one company, for example, history may well show that people with unrealistic salary expectations have typically gone on to become unsuccessful hires; they simply have not stayed with the business long enough to be considered a match for the organization's ideal hiring profile. With that data in mind, all future hiring briefs will be conducted with the knowledge that making an exception for a candidate who falls short in this way is likely to be a poor decision. This approach still contains the element of human fallibility, of course. But with strong data backing it up, the decision to go against what's proven to work in the business will be much more obvious as the best course of action—and far less likely to be resisted.

ASSESSING SOURCES OF HIRE

With such a system in place, the data that becomes available to the company opens up all sorts of possibilities. An organization might start to see distinct differences in the quality of hires made by different offices within the company, for example. It might start to see distinct differences among individual recruiters on its team. But one piece of data that will no doubt interest recruitment decision makers more than any other will be how different sources of candidates perform in terms of the quality of hire that they deliver.

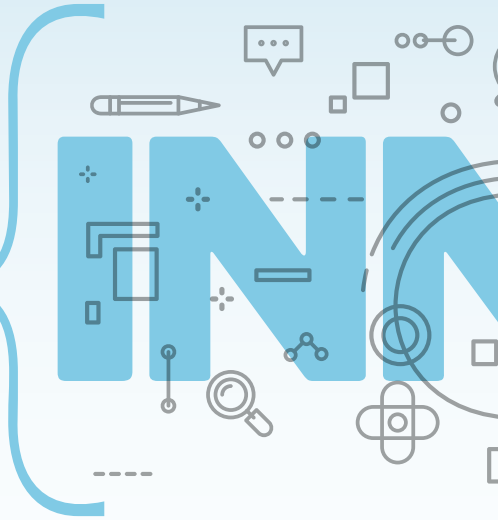
In most companies, the assessment of candidate sources stops at the point at which a hire is made. So today's typical scenario is likely to be one in which a company scores (and invests in) different candidate sources according to the cost per hire that they are ultimately able to deliver.

But what if hiring data started to show that certain sources were much more likely to produce high-quality hires (that is, people who would stay with the business far longer or go on to be far more successful)? Such findings could have a material impact on how organizations allocate their recruitment budgets and might shake up preconceptions about using tools such as LinkedIn or external recruiting suppliers.

All in all, a new approach to evaluating quality of hire could really transform how many companies recruit over the coming years. It could change the profile of hires that companies make, shape who is perceived to be the best recruiters in an organization, and transform conventional thinking about the best sources of candidates. There's also the added benefit of mending bridges between hiring managers and internal recruiting teams. And of course, this new approach can lead to better, more successful hires. ■

Tony Restell is the founder of Social-Hire.com, which helps candidates and recruiters leverage social media. Having spent the last 15 years serving the recruitment industry, he frequently speaks about the ever-changing job market and about how both candidates and recruiters must adapt in order to thrive. He can reached on Twitter at @tonyrestell.

HOW TO Manage Employees WITHOUT KILLING INN



BY VALERIE GRUBB

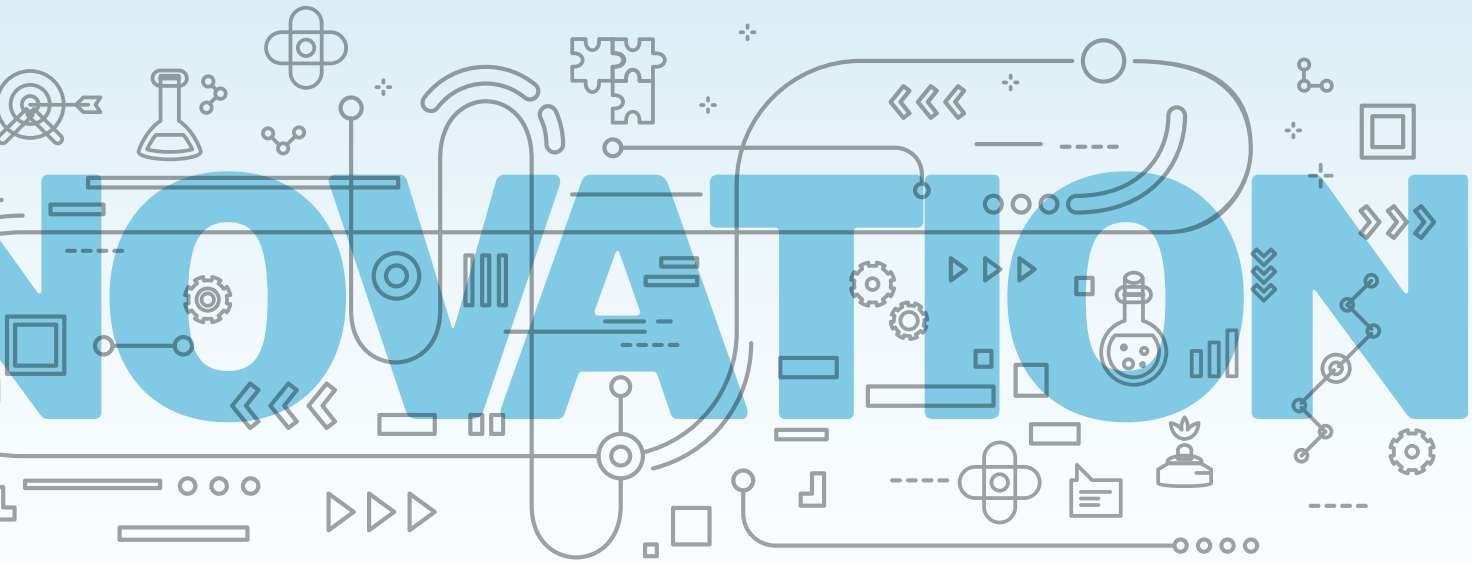
By Massupa Kaewgahya, TH / The Noun Project

Great leaders often have assertive and confident personalities that heavily influence their interactions with others. Sometimes these "strong" personalities go hand-in-hand with similarly forceful management techniques that can squelch innovation and the effectiveness of your team, because when people are worried about disappointing (or even angering) a boss they see as very much "totally in charge," they may be reluctant to speak up and do their best work.

Does your management style cross that line between "strong" and "domineering"? Is it possible that you are unknowingly stifling your employees' actions and opinions? Are you unwittingly killing innovation?

Take a look at the following problematic management scenarios and their solutions:

- **People don't speak up at meetings.** To encourage more participation from "silent spectators," end each meeting with a question such as "What are you going to do differently as a result of this meeting?"—then give everyone a chance to answer it. This not only keeps people on their toes, it also accustoms them to presenting their ideas in front of you and gives them opportunities to learn from how others present their ideas.
- **Others embrace your viewpoint too quickly.** Savvy managers know that thoughtful and thorough discussion can yield new (and often unexpected) ideas, so they welcome reasoned disagreement. When employees quickly give up on their opinions, challenge them with a smile: "You're accepting this idea that easily? What about . . . ?" Then offer arguments in support of their side for a while. Demonstrating a willingness to look at things from different perspectives will send a clear signal that you want people to speak their minds.
- **Staff members don't present new ideas.** This scenario can arise when you shoot down their ideas immediately or completely without giving them careful consideration. Instead of saying "no" right off the bat, take the idea to the next level by reviewing the pros and cons of continued exploration. Employees will see first-hand not only that you are open to new ideas, but also that you are invested in helping them grow and understand their own thinking better. After you've used this approach a few times, your employees will be even more eager to present their thoughts to you.
- **Few people come to you with issues or concerns.** Even superstar performers run into challenges, and when they are too afraid to tell you that they need help, that can lead to big problems down the road. When they approach you, first listen without judgment, then focus on coming up with potential solutions (and not on analyzing how they got into this situation). If an employee is truly not performing up to your expectations, work with him or her to develop a formal performance improvement process (PIP) plan. Otherwise, coach—don't condemn.
- **You rely on only a few people.** This creates a perception of favoritism and an atmosphere in which, outside the circle of "favorites," only a very few extremely assertive people are likely to speak up with you. To assess whether you favor certain employees over others, create a spreadsheet with your staffers' names and note how often you speak with each of them. If you see a pattern of favoritism, commit to broadening your communication efforts.
- **Your entire team is not living up to your expectations.** If you find yourself in this situation, it may be time to look in the mirror. Unless you've made very bad hires, poor performance on the part of an entire team typically indicates problems with leadership rather than with individual employees. Examine your overall management approach and be sure to surround yourself with employees who are smarter than you (they make you look better!) and focus on how you can unleash their creativity and talents while clearing obstacles in their paths.



Do any of those scenarios seem familiar to you? If so, in addition to implementing the specific solutions described for each one, it may be time for you to reconsider your management style in general. That doesn't mean you have to overhaul everything you do, though. You just need to develop a more nuanced approach that recognizes that different situations call for different strategies at different times. Here are some possibilities:

- **Command and control.** You make the decisions and tell people how to carry them out. In a crisis, you act with authority—and maybe a little forcefulness, too. (When the pressure's off, however, you're better off using other management styles.)

  Example: *There's an accident in the lab, and it's critical to isolate the problem and evacuate everyone. To accomplish this quickly and safely, you need to act like a drill sergeant and issue direct orders.*

- **Command and execute.** When an employee lets you down at crunch time, you must step in and do (or redo) his or her work. (Note that this scenario most commonly occurs in small or cash-strapped organizations where there's not enough training time for staff development.) If you have to resort to this management technique, make sure that you follow up after the crisis with coaching and encouragement to help ensure that it doesn't happen again (and to mitigate any sense of demoralization or intimidation the employee might feel after you "swooped in to save the day").

  Example: *Right before it's due, you realize that a grant application that you had delegated to a senior staffer needs to be redone, so you rewrite it. After the completed application is submitted, sit down with the staffer and go over what went wrong and discuss what can be done to prevent a similar crisis in the future.*

- **Consensus building.** You communicate a vision and want the team to participate in exploring ideas, deciding which goals to set, and determining how best to achieve them. When decisions are made based on consensus, everyone feels that his or her input is valued—and you get everyone's buy-in on the project.

  Example: *As a new manager in a chemical-testing lab, you decide to use the "command and control" strategy to implement new safety procedures—a heavy-handed approach that alienates many of the company's experienced lab techs who have been using the old procedures for more than a decade and feel that the new ones slow them down. In this situation, a better tactic would be to include the lab techs in the decision-making process. First ask them how they could meet new safety requirements while maintaining productivity, then work together to create new procedures that everyone accepts.*

- **Coaching.** Provide individual mentoring to help employees develop critical skills. One way to do this is to look at how they accomplish their goals, then offer advice, suggestions for improvement, and encouraging stories about your own career development. This management technique can help build closer, more trusting, working relationships as well as increased productivity and better performance.

  Example: *Your new employee has a conflict with a more senior employee over time schedules and use of equipment. If you were a micromanager , you would impose a solution; if you were an impatient manager, you might merely warn the new arrival not to get a reputation as a hothead. But if you were committed to offering effective coaching, you would help the new employee develop the skills he or she needs to resolve this conflict (and, perhaps, future ones), by offering suggestions for how to work things out peacefully or by describing your experiences with similar situations early in your own career.*

Management doesn't involve simply telling people what to do. Good managers exhibit leadership by paying attention to their employees' behaviors and adjusting their management styles to address issues, needs, and other concerns. Such adaptability is the key to managing employees to achieve their best results—and if they work for you, that is exactly what you want! ■

Valerie M. Grubb of Val Grubb & Associates Ltd. (www.valgrubbandassociates.com) is an innovative and visionary operations leader with an exceptional ability to zero in on the systems, processes, and personnel issues that can hamper a company's growth. Grubb regularly consults for mid-range companies wishing to expand and larger companies seeking efficiencies in back-office operations. She is the author of *Planes, Canes, and Automobiles: Connecting with Your Aging Parents through Travel* (Greenleaf, 2015) and *Clash of the Generations: Managing the New Workplace Reality* (Wiley, 2016). She can be reached at vgrubb@valgrubbandassociates.com.

REPLACING Human Managers WITH PROGRAMMING IN THE GIG ECONOMY

BY REBECCA KING

Although legal tests for determining employment status in the gig economy have taken center stage (thanks to numerous recent high-profile cases), lurking in the background is an even bigger question: what happens if and when traditional "manager" roles are filled by automated systems? A case study of one automation-dependent company yielded findings with interesting implications not only for that company and its industry but for all companies that rely on automated platforms to fulfill many managerial functions. Drawing on stakeholder theory (which "suggests that a company's managers should make decisions based on the considerations of all parties, including workers . . . [and not] exclusively on stockholders"), a team of researchers who evaluated drivers' stakes in Uber concluded that the ride-sharing platform itself fulfills some traditional managerial roles.[1]

The most obvious managerial function handled by Uber's automated platform is the assignment of work: the system uses its algorithm to assign pickup requests to Uber drivers. (Unlike the subordinate in a traditional manager–subordinate relationship, though, an Uber driver can choose to decline an assignment for any reason.) The system also conducts a type of performance review by averaging passenger ratings and feedback regarding the percentage of pickups a driver accepts: "drivers with a low average passenger rating and acceptance rate may be subject to review or even immediate deactivation on the ridesharing platform"—a practice that parallels termination for poor performance under traditional management conditions.[2] The platform can also send drivers requests to work particular shifts if it predicts heavy demand (though drivers who choose not to work those shifts suffer no consequences).

Although drivers can decline assignments and choose their own hours, a management platform could certainly be programmed to take actions (such as making assignments mandatory or automatically scheduling required shifts) that more closely support traditional manager–subordinate roles. Using artificial intelligence to take over some of these traditional management functions may become an increasingly appealing solution to organizations. In particular, companies may be more likely to make that shift if replacing managers with machines results in cost savings.

However, the study did reveal some of the significant shortcomings of such a system. These platforms do not yet seem to have a good way to collect and evaluate ideas or proposals in order to take the best ideas "up the ladder" to improve the company's products and services. Also, there does not seem to be a way for these systems to recognize interpersonal conflict or challenges among team members—an omission that could potentially leave explosive situations unresolved.

In addition, these systems have little ability to address grievances and investigate complaints. Although dealing with complaints may not be the most glamorous part of a manager's role, workers' ability to voice their concerns and grievances is important for the health of the company. And, perhaps most importantly, managers usually play an integral role in investigations of complaints because they generally have knowledge of the events and circumstances surrounding the complaint as well as the ability to voice the rationale behind business decisions. These investigations can be crucial both to identifying and terminating problematic workers while retaining good workers and to defending against claims or lawsuits.

Although machines have not yet replaced human managers, it may only be a matter of time before they do. In addition to evaluating any implications for determining independent contractor status, however, companies should be aware (and prepared to address potential issues) raised by the use of mechanical managers, particularly in regard to the resolution of grievances and investigations. ■

Rebecca King is an associate in the Irvine, California office at Fisher Phillips – a nationwide law firm specializing in workplace law. She counsels and defends clients in all areas of labor and employment law. In addition, Rebecca has experience resolving matters at all stages from pre-claim negotiations through successfully obtaining a defense verdict at trial. She can be reached at rking@fisherphillips.com.

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2. Min Kyung Lee et al. 2015. "Working with Machines: The Impact of Algorithmic and Data-Driven Management on Human Workers." Proceedings of the 33rd Annual ACM CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems, www.cs.cmu.edu/~mklee/materials/Publication/2015-CHI_algorithmic_management.pdf.

QUESTION:

Do we have to pay for time spent at appointments related to workers' compensation?

ANSWER:

In general, an employer is obligated to pay an employee only if he or she is seeking medical attention during work time at the employer's direction. Section 785.43 ("Medical attention") of the Fair Labor Standards Act states: "Time spent by an employee in waiting for and receiving medical attention on the premises or at the direction of the employer during the employee's normal working hours on days when he is working constitutes hours worked."[1]

In workers' compensation cases, this requirement would typically apply to the medical attention received at the time of an injury. Employers should not try to get around this requirement by having employees wait until their shift is over to seek medical attention unless it's very clear that the issue is non-urgent and would not be exacerbated by the employee continuing to work.

Follow-up appointments, on the other hand, do not need to be paid. Such appointments would be treated the same as other doctor appointments and may be unpaid time off for a non-exempt (overtime-eligible) employee. If the employee has time off available (e.g., PTO, sick leave, vacation), I recommend allowing him or her to use that time to cover the absence. If your state has sick leave, the employee must be allowed to use any accrued time for this kind of appointment.

You'll also want to report any injury-related time away to the workers' compensation carrier, because the employee may be eligible for wage-loss benefits. And remind the employee that he or she must keep all appointments and follow the prescribed treatment plan, because failure to do can result in termination of benefits.

QUESTION:

What is section 7 of the NLRA?

ANSWER:

Congress enacted the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA) in 1935 to protect the rights of employees and employers, to encourage collective bargaining, and to limit certain labor and management practices that can harm the general welfare of workers, businesses, and the U.S. economy. Although a good portion of the NLRA deals with unionization, section 7 provides protections for all nonsupervisory employees, even those not involved with a union.

Specifically, section 7 defines and protects concerted activity by employees. Generally, protected concerted activity takes place when employees act as a group (i.e., in concert) for their mutual aid or protection. That said, it's easy for an individual employee to gain protection under the act if he or she is discussing the terms and conditions of his or her employment with coworkers in the same physical space or virtual space (e.g., Facebook). The terms and conditions of one's employment include pay, benefits, treatment by management, dress codes, workplace policies, scheduling, and more.

The most common mistake employers make in violation of section 7 is to place restrictions on discussions of wages. If you have policies or practices that explicitly or impliedly forbid employees from talking about how much they are paid, those should be eliminated immediately. ■

In addition to live HR consulting, HRisEasy offers an award-winning online support center packed with HR tools, documents, legal updates, and more. Learn more about our services at hriseasy.com.

1. U.S. Department of Labor Wage and Hour Division. 2011. "Regulations Part 785: Hours Worked." Department of Labor website, www.dol.gov/whd/regs/compliance/wh1312.pdf.

THE POWER OF STORYTELLING IN RECRUITING

BY MIKE MCKERNS

IN THE JULY ISSUE OF OUR *HR Insights* e-newsletter, I shared an article by David Sturt and Todd Nordstrom (both of the O.C. Tanner Institute) titled "Science Says, If You Want People to Respond, Tell a Good Story." The article focused on how leaders can leverage stories to inspire their employees. But it also got me thinking about how recruiters, too, can use great stories to improve their work.

The power of storytelling and its emotional connection to the buying process are well documented in the areas of sales, marketing, and business development. But storytelling is highly underutilized as a tool that organizations can use to woo top candidates. The typical job interviews are conversations about candidates' backgrounds, the positions they're interviewing for, and their qualifications for those roles. During this time of record low unemployment, however, some employers forget that in such a buyers' market, candidates are evaluating whether they even want to work for the companies that are interviewing them.

This is where powerful stories, such as tales of extraordinary employee success and accounts of a company's impact on its community, can influence the course of the hiring process. Stories can nudge a candidate toward choosing to work for that organization (and not choosing to go to a competitor) by helping him or her feel a connection to that company. This connection isn't based purely on emotions but is actually a physiological response caused by the release of oxytocin (often called "the love hormone") in the brain. This hormone "is a key 'it's safe to approach others' signal in the brain," and "is produced when we are trusted or shown a kindness, and it motivates cooperation with others."[1]

Not everyone is a good storyteller, however, and over time even the best stories are often become forgotten or change to the point of being unrecognizable. Recruiters and hiring managers can't tell powerful stories if they don't know them (or know how to tell them). So what's an HR department to do if it wants to leverage the power of good stories?

The solution: create a central database of stories to be used specifically for recruitment efforts and marketing jobs! Such a database can take whatever form works best for your organization (a separate website is one possibility, as is a simple Excel spreadsheet). Entries can take different forms, too, such as text documents, audio recordings, or videos.

Regardless of what type of database and files you choose, it's very important that your system use easy-to-search categories. Without them, your recruiters and hiring managers will have a hard time finding situation-specific stories when they need them. When rolling out a program to build a story "library," consider offering incentives to employees who contribute content, and ask current employees to evaluate the stories for their emotional impact so you have an idea of how effective those narratives will be in a hiring situation.■

Mike McKerns is the editor in chief of *HR Insights* and cofounder of Mamu Media LLC. He can be reached at editor@mamumediallc.com.

1. Paul J. Zak. 2014. "Why Your Brain Loves Good Storytelling." *Harvard Business Review* website, October 28, hbr.org/2014/10/why-your-brain-loves-good-storytelling.

A CROWD-PLEASING MULTITASKER

Recipes are usually divided into strictly defined categories, and rarely does a dish straddle the boundaries between the groups. The Sicilians, however, have managed to create a dish so versatile that it refuses to be pigeonholed: caponata. This sweet-and-sour eggplant-based dish makes a terrific appetizer or salad course, holds its own as an entrée, and even pinch hits as a sandwich filling. Plus, it's easy to make and can be served at any temperature! What's not to like?

Nutrition Facts

Amount per Serving

Calories:	259 cal
Fat:	125 g
Dietary fiber:	7 g
Sugars:	18 g
Protein:	4 g

CAPONATA

YIELD: 4 servings (as an entrée)

TIME: 40 minutes

WHAT YOU'LL NEED:

4 Tb olive oil
1 medium eggplant (about 1 ½ lbs), unpeeled and cubed into ½" pieces
1 medium onion, cubed into ½" pieces
4 large garlic cloves, minced
1 lb roma tomatoes, peeled and chopped [fresh summer tomatoes are ideal, but canned tomatoes are a fine substitute]
3 Tb red wine vinegar
2 Tb pickled capers, drained
½ cup raisins
½ cup fresh basil, chopped

DIRECTIONS

1. Heat 2 Tb oil over medium heat. Add the eggplant and fry until browned (about 15 minutes). Remove eggplant and set aside.
2. Heat remaining 2 Tb oil over medium heat. Add onions and garlic and cook until softened and slightly transparent (about 5 minutes).
3. Add the tomatoes and cook for 10 minutes.
4. Reduce heat to low, then add the vinegar, capers, and raisins. Simmer for 5 minutes.
5. Return the eggplant to the pan and cook everything together until warmed through (about 5 minutes). Add the basil just before serving.■

Corporate Headquarters
10550 Linden Lake Plaza, Suite 200
Manassas, VA 20109
703-361-2220 / 888-222-0457

Fredericksburg
10500 Wakeman Drive, Suite 105
Fredericksburg, VA 22407
540-310-0208 / 888-222-0457

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