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REPORT ON

# Workplace Digital Solutions Enhancing Employees' Well-Being

*A roundtable convened by SHRMLabs & Techstars Workforce Development Accelerator*

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## Introduction

The global pandemic has propelled human resource departments into the forefront of organizations, with HR professionals being asked to tackle unprecedented, exceptional challenges. In a time of uncertainty, we are experiencing massive shifts in the labor market and workforce overall. Employee expectations are evolving, and employers are scrambling to fill roles as we emerge from a global pandemic and tread together into the future of work.

On January 13, 2022, nine key industry leaders and innovators gathered virtually for a roundtable to discuss digital solutions that enhance employees' experience, resilience, and well-being in the workplace. The roundtable covered key insights, trends, and guidelines regarding how the pandemic catalyzed rapid change for employee experience and the workplace environment. Participants discussed what is working well and the gaps that need to be addressed. The HR landscape is rapidly shifting given the disruption caused by social distancing and the strain induced by extreme fluctuations in hiring—from layoffs and furloughs to rehiring and recruiting.

The roundtable participants address the following key topics:

### **Work/Life Integration | Employee Culture | Attracting Top Talent**

This report highlights participants' voices on each of these points. It proposes ways to foster work/life integration in remote- and hybrid-work environments, followed by an exploration of elements that constitute a great employee experience and effective employee culture, closing with a discussion of how companies can attract (and retain) the best talent in the face of a tight labor market and the Great Resignation.

**“Innovation, at the end of the day, is critical if we intend to reset, rethink, reimagine HR.”**

—Johnny C. Taylor, Jr., SHRM-SCP, President & CEO of SHRM



## WORK-LIFE INTEGRATION

### Fostering a healthy work/life balance in remote- and hybrid-work environments

The concept of “work/life balance” has evolved tremendously since the amendment of the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA), which established the standard 40-hour workweek. The movement originally intended to give workers back their personal time and has since evolved into the work/life balance trend that emerged in the ‘70s and ‘80s, driven in part by the Women’s Liberation Movement when workers strived to achieve a balance between career, family, and personal life. The trend centers around keeping work and personal life separate.

Flashforward to 2022—we are no longer faced with radical separation between work and home. According to the SHRM Research Institute nearly half (**45%**) of U.S. workers indicated that they feel burned out from work more often, compared to before the pandemic. A better work/life balance was one of the top reasons employees say they are looking for opportunities elsewhere. In fact, 58% of U.S. workers believe a healthy work/life balance is more important than higher pay or salary.

The traditional “work/life balance” model views work and home as two separate spheres. In reality, these spheres intersect, much like a Venn Diagram.

And the trend of “work/life integration” is on the rise, as the lines between work and life blur, seamlessly integrating to become the new norm. Perhaps work/life balance as we know it is dead. The Covid-19 pandemic exposed many employees to mental and physical health issues, loneliness, and financial hardships. According to Gallup’s 2021 State of the Global Workplace report, it drove their daily stress to rise by 8 percentage points, impacting how they do work. Since then, organizations have been integrating well-being into work, realizing the positive impact it has on employee engagement and their overall business performance. According to the 12th Annual Employer-Sponsored Health & Well-Being Survey from Fidelity Investments, **90%** of large employers in 2021 are integrating their employees’ well-being in their overall business strategy. It appears work/life integration is here to stay, which means companies need to adjust their expectations, culture, and policies to better suit the needs of their employees’ well-being.

# 69%

of younger Millennials & and members of Generation Z

# 64%

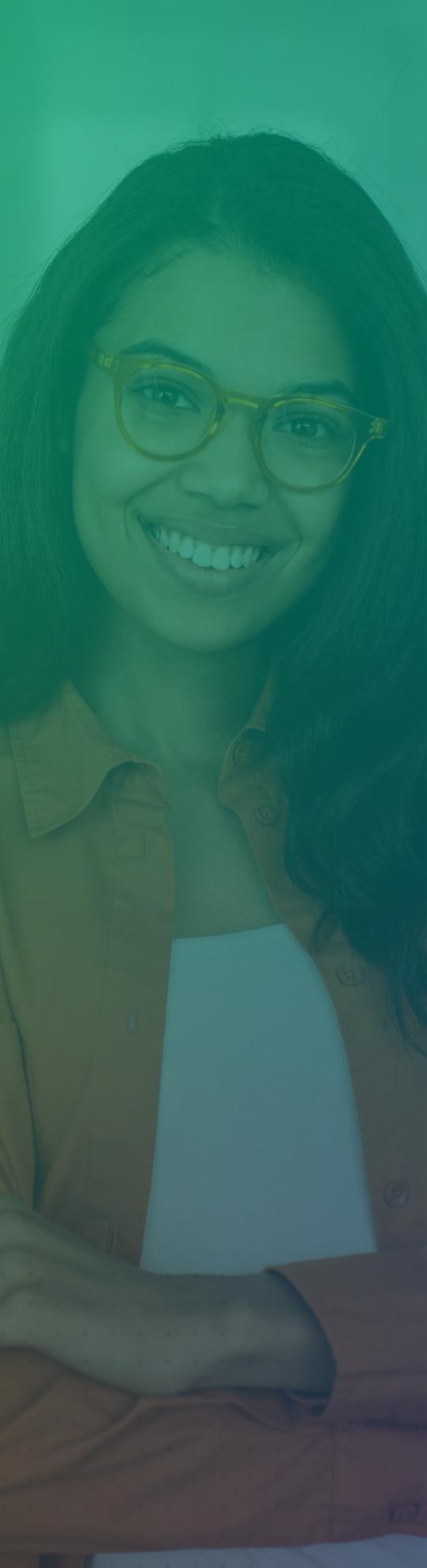
of older Millennials

# 60%

of members of Generation X,

# 45%

of Baby Boomers and Traditionalists are more likely to apply for a new job if it has a work/life balance.



## 1 Embrace Flexibility in the Workplace

Seven in 10 executives who responded to the 2021 Deloitte Global Human Capital Trends survey indicated that their organization's shift to remote work had a positive impact on well-being. The flexibility afforded by work-from-home scenarios is moving the needle on employee productivity. By giving employees control over their work environment—when, where, and how they work—employers see increased productivity alongside improved retention rates, higher employee satisfaction, better talent acquisition, and preferable work/life integration. This trend of personalization empowers employees to construct their workplace to suit their needs and urges managers to evolve policies accordingly. It is vital to recognize that there is no one-size-fits-all solution anymore; every organization is unique, and so are the needs of each employee.



## Develop Employee Working Personas

To determine key components of your new, flexible work environment, consider what tasks and activities employees are performing within your organization and the environments that best support those activities. Create personas for each type of employee and identify how each prefers to work within your organization while considering cross-functional collaboration to meet your greater team's objective.



# 2

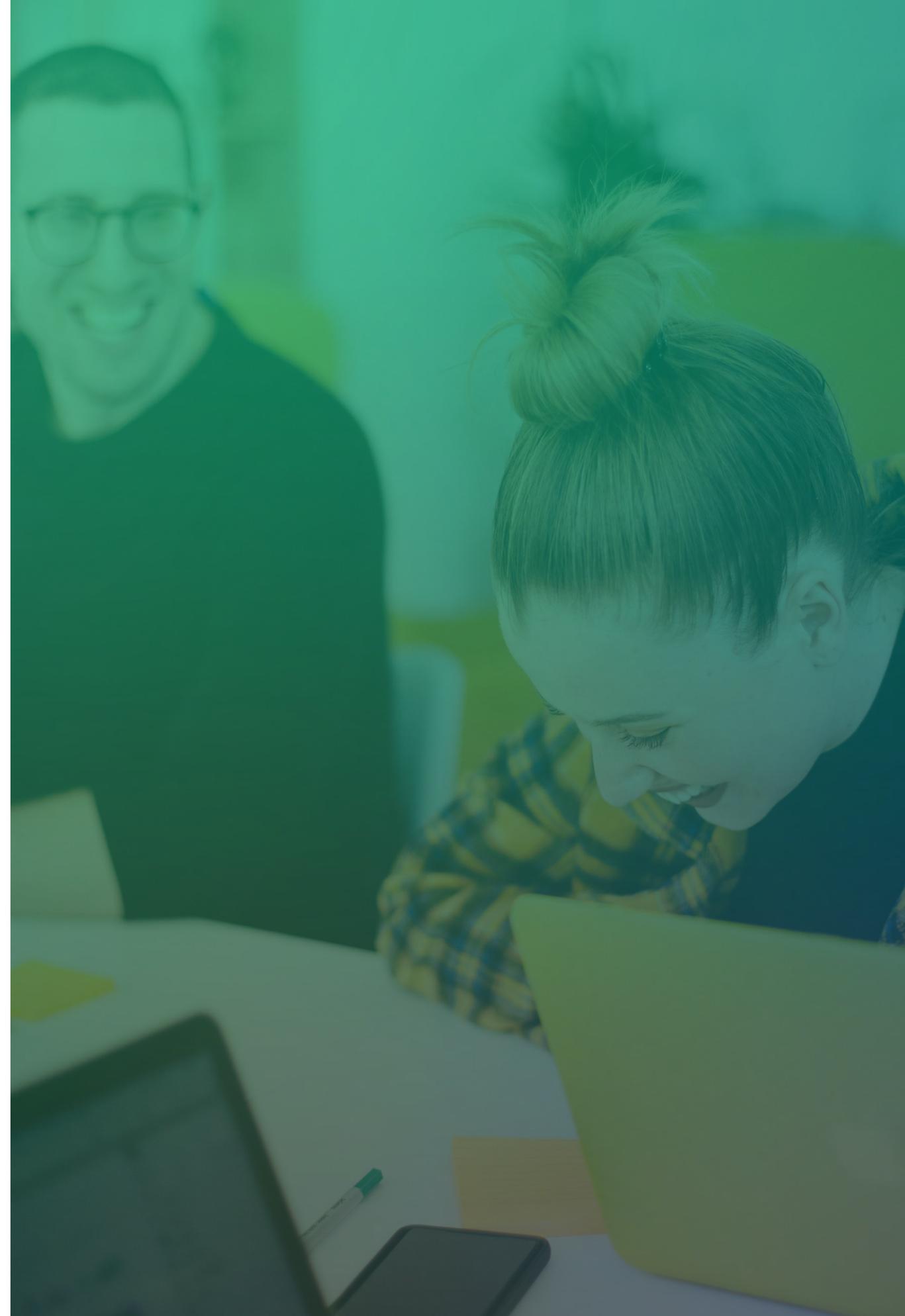
## **Give Employees Agency and Develop Accountability**

It is time to place your trust in your employees. As an organization, it is essential to develop accountability in relationships between employees and you as the employer. It starts with you doing what you say you are going to do and trusting your team will do the same. By giving employees more ownership and agency, you empower them to be more successful and autonomous in their roles, which is a win-win! Redefine expectations and encourage your team to work smarter, not harder.



### **Integrate a Relational Model**

Managers should focus on finding solutions for the collective group to collaborate cross-functionally, with a hybrid-friendly methodology thus enabling employees to deliver key outcomes. This starts with a pivot from a transactional relationship to a relational model, centered around authentic engagements and relationship-building. Simplify things for your employees by leveraging the power of automation. Introduce solutions that encourage team productivity, efficiency, and accountability. Provide your team with the leadership and tools to get their jobs done proficiently.



### 3 Drive Efficiency with Asynchronous Communications Tools

According to Harvard Business Review, employees spend up to 80% of their time in meetings, on the phone, and responding to e-mails. Hybrid and remote teams require more communication, which can result in e-mail and Zoom fatigue. The modern memo does not have to be an e-mail anymore—meet communication preferences! Ask your employees how they prefer to communicate. Get their feedback on which channels are natural with their preferred workflow, and when they like to use which channels and for what. Work together as a team to determine which scenarios require different types of communication. By cultivating a culture around efficient communication, you can reduce the volume of e-mails (and meetings), in addition to personalizing communication to suit each team member's preferences. This strategy allows employees to virtually engage in more informal, organic ways that mimic in-person communication styles.



TOOL

#### Infuse organic interaction into virtual engagements

Reduce unnecessary meetings to free up your employees' time to do more strategic work. Deliver information to them in the most effective and efficient ways while infusing in-person communication techniques into your virtual meetings. Though many nonverbal cues are lacking in the virtual experience, you can leverage tools such as emojis to express how you are feeling, raise your hand to indicate you are leaning forward on the table and have something pivotal to say, or chat to emulate those shared glances or side conversations that naturally occur in an in-person engagement, without interrupting the flow of the meeting. Consider diversifying your communication channels to include asynchronous tools like audio notes or video recordings to deliver information.

# 4

## Personalize Benefits to Improve Employee Experience

Paychex's 2021 State of Mental Health in the Workplace Report found that 66% of employees who were offered well-being benefits appreciated their employees more. It is challenging to develop a one-size-fits-all policy around benefits: One central HR program cannot solve for every employee's work/life integration (yet). However, voluntary, nontraditional, and customizable wellness benefits can be a step in the right direction. Not only are these benefits on the rise, but they are particularly attractive to employees and aid in talent acquisition and retention.



TOOL

## Give Employees Agency with Lifestyle Spending Accounts

Consider offering a range of benefits and empower employees to choose the options that best address their individual needs. Lifestyle spending accounts are employer-created and employer-contributed accounts specifically for employees to invest in their personal and professional development. Essentially money can be put directly into the hands of employees and empower them to use curated perks that align with their unique needs. Solutions like [Compt](#), [PERKS](#) and [PTO Exchange](#) support wellness and lifestyle benefits and can work well to support an initiative of this nature.



**97%**  
**of executives agree that their actions have a direct impact on Culture.**

—Workplace Culture Report, SHRM, 2021

## Building a Workplace Culture That Wins

At the onset of the pandemic, employers realized the benefits of virtual work and employees realized the benefits of working from home, achieving work/life integration. However, this poses a challenge to building profound, authentic relationships over digital communication platforms, like Zoom. Social distancing and remote work are negatively impacting workplace culture, employer loyalty, and camaraderie at work. Gallup data shows that the disengaging effects of remote work can be as serious as **17%** lower productivity and **24%** higher turnover for individuals with an absolute preference for working in person. Data also indicates that even without being forced to work virtually, about **60%** of employees (virtual or not) cannot fully agree that they know what their company stands for. The “cultural nerve” is being lost—we are losing the cultural connection within the workforce. Of all the HR professionals who say their workplace culture has worsened during the pandemic, **42%** cite a shift to remote work as a reason why.

Remote and hybrid work each pose a significant challenge, particularly for managers who are in person, as it is easy to give preferential treatment to employees who are in the office, given the visibility and proximity. There is an emerging inequality of employee experience with the variance in work modality, from in person to hybrid or remote. In some cases, particularly in hybrid modalities with some employees working remotely and some in person, remote employees are being overlooked for promotions or new projects. More than **4 in 10** supervisors (**42%**) say that when assigning work tasks, they sometimes forget about people who are working remotely. This appears to occur more frequently in hybrid environments, as having employees either fully in person or all remote tends to level the playing field. Over half (**55%**) of supervisors agree that it is difficult to manage a remote team, whereas almost **72%** of

supervisors would prefer to have all their subordinates in the office. Regardless of whether employers require their employees to return to the worksite or allow them to continue working fully remote from home, or a hybrid format with a combination therein, the way we build and sustain positive employee cultures has changed. Incorporating positive workplace cultures cannot be done by HR alone. It requires an effort from every manager to weave employee well-being into the organization’s social norms and behaviors. Effective people management is directly correlated with strong workplace culture. More than half of managers spend an average of one to 10 hours per week managing their workplace culture. A resounding majority of them (**94%**) agree that a positive workplace culture creates a resilient team of employees.

## 1 Be more transparent in the workplace

Managers must learn to lead with empathy, intentionality, and vulnerability. Around two in 10 (**20%**) of employees who quit their jobs in the past year said their organization's leadership lacked empathy. More than half quit because of their relationship with their manager. The measurement of empathy has long been regarded as abstract and intangible. To foster deeper connections and build trust with employees, managers will need to adjust their leadership styles to be more inclusive, while leveraging empathy and transparency to engage authentically. Trust is built when leaders exhibit vulnerability, respect the ideas and feelings of their employees, and accomplish tasks that are considered valuable to others.



TOOL

## Invest in tools and practices that reinforce your empathy-centric culture

Enhance your behavioral interview screening to ensure the managers you hire understand your organization's definition of an empathy-centric culture. Hire people who will promote empathetic and transparent working environments. Platforms like [Pillar](#) can help empower your team to hire right. Host "ask me anything" sessions, involve your team in decision-making processes, make information accessible to employees, provide access to channels for communication, and honor feedback. Managers believe that training opportunities are lacking. Invest in the soft-skills development of your team with a focus on empathy. Consider education solutions like [ion Learning](#) that are integrated into work, enhance managers' EQ, and help develop a better understanding of their teams' needs.

## 2 Encourage managers to coach outcomes instead of outputs

Focus on measuring performance with productivity. This can be accomplished by embracing agile workflows that inherently require all teammates to take ownership over tasks, by documenting who is doing what and reporting regularly on what is being accomplished. When you utilize an agile workflow or implement a project management system, it is easier for employees to tangibly demonstrate the work they are accomplishing and quantify the value they are providing at work to both their manager and other team members.



TOOL

### The 360 Feedback Loop

is an incredible way to establish trust between employees and the organization overall by utilizing an employee-centric performance review to identify blind spots and gain peer-driven feedback. This approach helps the employee get a more accurate, reflective view of performance by considering others' perspectives. This tool supports team members to work more effectively together and better understand their personal (and organizational) development needs within the company or department. Other key tools to consider for goal setting and executing critical strategic priorities include cascading Key Performance Indicator (KPI) systems, Objectives and Key Results (OKRs), and the Four Disciplines of Execution.

## 3 Develop a cultural contract with your employees

Hybrid work can be more challenging to execute than either fully in-person or all-virtual modalities, as it requires more thoughtfulness to bring the workforce together with cultural alignment. Establish company values and begin to incorporate those values into your feedback system. These values must be embraced both by those at all leadership levels and the employees they manage. Seventy-five percent (75%) of employees claim their organizational values helped guide them through the pandemic. By developing a correlation between your values and employee benefits structure, you can organically infuse values into your culture.



TOOL

### Implant your company values into your hiring process

Incorporate values-fit questions in the interview process. Hire diverse talent that aligns with your company's values. Include your cultural agreement in the employment agreement. Empower your team to become your cultural ambassadors. Lead by your guiding principles and provide reinforcing opportunities for your team to understand why each principle matters and understand their fit in the bigger picture.

# 4

## Create a sense of shared purpose to drive employee engagement

Companies need to allow employees to connect organically and get to know one another through virtual channels to develop the personal connections that so often drive the purpose and culture of the organization. The people we work with are what most strongly connect us to the company. When employees cannot find that deeper connection or relationship at work, they are more likely to seek other employment opportunities. Managers should strive to create an environment where in-person and remote employees can participate and collaborate seamlessly to avoid favoring one modality over the other. Consider allocating time before your meetings to engage your virtual team in an informal way, the same way you would in the physical boardroom before a meeting begins. These “watercooler,” newly coveted moments are foundational to developing culture and building deeper connections.



TOOL

## Encourage employees to build meaningful relationships at work

It is time to envision a digital watercooler—employers need to develop intentional cross-departmental and cross-functional relationships that create mobility for employees. This can be accomplished with tools such as [Donut](#), a randomized virtual coffee meeting with teammates from within your Slack workspace, or through more robust programming such as one-on-one peer mentorship connections or Mentor Spaces that connect employees around topics of interest. Envision a virtual workplace where each employee does have their own office or “room” to personalize and host virtual meetings with collaborations across the globe. Platforms like ohyay enable users to create customized virtual spaces in which people can gather. Consider leveraging collaboration tools such as [Miro](#) or [Loom](#) to improve accessibility, collaboration, and communication for hybrid and remote workers.

## Attracting Top Talent in the Face of the Great Resignation

In a time of uncertainty, we are experiencing massive shifts in the labor market and workforce overall. A record 4.4 million Americans quit their jobs last September alone. Since then, nearly half of workers are actively searching for a new job or are planning to. The top three reasons why employees are looking for opportunities are better compensation, better work/life integration, and better benefits. What is concerning is that the Great Resignation has a domino effect. **42%** of workers who have had a close colleague leave their organization say they have thought about leaving their job more often than they did before.

Job openings are taking longer to fill. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics shows that while 7.7 million Americans were unemployed in September 2021, there were 10.4 million job openings at that time. Over 7 in 10 executives are seeing less-qualified applications for job openings in comparison to pre-pandemic. Only **46%** of remote organizations said they were effective at finding and recruiting talent with the necessary skills versus only 18% of in-person organizations.

# 87%

of in-person organizations

# 83%

of hybrid organizations

# 75%

of remote organizations reported labor shortage challenges in the past year.

—State of the Workplace Study, SHRM, 2022

Employee expectations are evolving, employers are scrambling to fill roles, and we are treading into the unknown as the pandemic subsides. Over half (**52%**) of U.S. workers took on more work and responsibilities since their colleagues left. The increase we are seeing in work responsibility is undoubtedly intertwined with a profound sense of burnout, which is contributing to the Great Resignation. Some previously coveted jobs are no longer as attractive as they once were—working 70 hours a week can seem less glamorous without the business travel perks and swanky client meetings. What can you do to attract top talent?

# 1

### Use Great Talent to Attract the Right Talent

Psychology 101—people want to feel desired and valued by others. Talent attraction is about employees knowing that they are appreciated. Your employees are your corporate brand ambassadors, and the best way to attract good talent is by retaining great talent. Make retaining your employees your highest priority.



TOOL

### Focus on measuring employee experience

Struggling with employee retention? Consider implementing “stay interviews” alongside your “exit interviews” to gather key insights regarding the employee experience at your company. Launch an attractive employee referral program. Measure and improve the employee experience to retain existing high-quality talent. Solicit feedback to aggregate data around the employee experience overall. Then, you can leverage tools that connect employee experience across the entire employee journey. Strive to capture feedback and key insights from employees by performing an Employee Journey Mapping Exercise to discover hidden aspects or unseen experiences and identify opportunities to cultivate diversity and inclusion.

## 2 Build Your Employer Brand

To build an employer brand that people are attracted to, you have to give employees the ability to express themselves, participate in honest dialogue, and feel valued and appreciated. A positive employer brand communicates to future employees that this is a great place to work. It also helps retain your talent.



TOOL

### Establish your employer brand to reflect your overall workplace culture

Develop and use metrics to assess and track the progress of your employer brand. Monitor metrics such as the quality of the new hires, brand awareness, employee satisfaction, and employee referrals.



## 3 Invest in Your Workforce's Professional Development

Employment has traditionally been built on uniformity. However, both the workforce and the work we are doing has evolved: At the turn of the last century, many employees were doing factory work, whereas today employees are, in many cases, performing more strategic work. With this higher level of work comes an expectation to develop both soft and hard skills needed to perform better. Support your employees during all stages from onboarding to beyond. Offer learning pathways and development opportunities for your workforce. There is no doubt that learning and development programs increase employee retention and attract new talent. Prepare your workforce to become tomorrow's managers and leaders by investing in their growth and development.



TOOL

### Think about using highly tailored solutions like [PILOT](#) or [Mentor Spaces](#) that encourage peer learning

Platforms like [Future Fit](#) help organizations provide resources for their employees to explore career paths, and reskill and upskill their workforce to meet the employer's future business challenges.

# 4

## Put Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Front and Center

The murder of George Floyd sparked many employers across the country to pledge their support for the social justice movement by launching various diversity, equity and inclusion (DE&I) initiatives. DE&I initiatives were proven to not only benefit the bottom line of the business and customer satisfaction but also lead to employee engagement, team diversity and belonging, and success in recruiting and retaining top talent. Companies that are not following through with their commitments or, worse, do not genuinely prioritize a diverse workforce inclusive of underrepresented minorities are less attractive to potential employees. This is problematic because people of color are more likely to say they're actively searching for a new job.



TOOL

### Define what diversity and inclusion mean for your organization

Compile data of your workforce and compare it to the labor market. How diverse is your team? Hybrid and remote work make attracting diverse talent from anywhere possible. If your team lacks diversity, consider platforms like Fairstream that give you access to diverse talent. Leverage the VUCA (Volatility, Uncertainty, Ambiguity, and Complexity) model to identify sources of stress and needs within your organization, then introduce policies that can positively impact your DE&I. Support employee resource groups and employer-sponsored DE&I awareness events for employees. Measure effectiveness and impact of these initiatives. Collect feedback from your team on ways your organization can improve.



## Conclusion

We are collectively striving to build better workplaces. The key insights, trends, frameworks, and tools discussed in this roundtable report are foundational for organizations that are pioneering the workforce experience for future generations of employees. The landscape of work, how we approach it, and where we are going are evolving—we can either embrace change to grow with culture or miss an enormous opportunity and fall behind.



## Roundtable Moderators



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