Designing the Future of Work

The Guide to Digital Solutions for the Human Enterprise

class
Technologies Inc.

Covid sparked a great work-from-home migration—according to a survey from Gartner, **88% of business organizations** switched to remote work in the days following the initial March 2020 lockdown. Now, 18 months later, the workplace has fundamentally changed, and many employees don't want to go back to the office. Whether by default or by design, companies are staring down a permanent shift to remote and hybrid work.

For HR leaders, the remote-work transition added another layer of complexity to the challenges they faced, pre-pandemic. For years, HR teams have been working to tackle critical business objectives around people and culture, including employee acquisition and onboarding, upskilling and reskilling, DEI, and leadership training. But how to continue—or begin—to implement these complex initiatives in a world where the office is no longer the central connection hub?

To solve this problem, many HR leaders are undertaking their own digital transformation efforts to meet the needs of the future workforce. The shift to remote and hybrid work has resulted in reimagined approaches that use technology to enable the attraction, retention, and growth of people. In this guide, we'll explore four major people challenges keeping HR leaders up at night, and offer strategies to implement digital solutions that can support and enhance existing initiatives, while expanding connection and inclusion in the workplace.

## The Great Remote-Work Experiment: What We've Learned

For many organizations, the switch to remote work was new territory. But after a year and a half of working from home, a pool of data is now available—and the results might surprise you.

Remote work leads to increased productivity.

Employees are 13% more productive when they can work from home.

Digital infrastructure increases belonging.
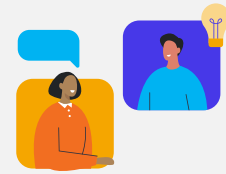
Remote employees that are given digital tools report feeling twice as connected to their colleagues.

Most workers don't want to go back to the office.

93% of workers want the ability to choose when they work, and 76% want location flexibility.

### Remote work can boost employee wellness.

Remote employees are five times more likely to report feeling "good about stress and anxiety," and 77% said that flexible work options would help them be healthier.

1 **Upskilling and Reskilling to Meet the Needs of Tomorrow**

With millions of jobs unfilled and fears of ongoing worker shortages, filling business-critical roles is an urgent concern for many employers. According to Forbes, 9.3 million people were unemployed as of May 2021—and there were also 9.3 million open jobs. Although many factors are involved, one reason for the gap is that jobseekers simply don't have the skills to do the work that's needed.

The pandemic only accelerated digital transformation efforts that were already underway, with a projected $4.2 trillion investment in technology in 2021. However, research by Forrester suggests a deteriorating correlation between tech spend and productivity gains. What has become abundantly clear is that technology alone doesn't solve business problems, people do, and they need to be equipped with both digital and human skills. Indeed, with a diminishing shelf life of technical skills, human skills are emerging as the top priorities for business executives.

## Behavioral skills emerge as the most critical for members of the workforce today.
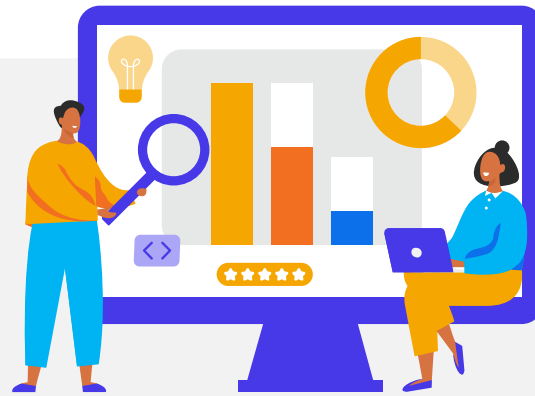
1. Willingness to be flexible, agile, and adaptable to change

2. Time management skills and ability to prioritize

3. Ability to work effectively in team environments

4. Ability to communicate effectively in business context

5. Analytics skills and business acumen

6. Technical core capabilities for STEM

7. Capacity for innovation and creativity

8. Basic computer and software/ application skills

9. Ethics and integrity

10. Foreign language proficiency

11. Fundamental core capabilities around reading, writing, and arithmetic

12. Industry- or occupation-specific skills

● Behavioral skills   ● Core/technical skills

Source: IBM

To ensure business growth, HR leaders know they can't rely on external applicants to fill the essential roles of the future—they have to foster talent inside the company by investing in learning and development programs. In the 18 months since the initial coronavirus outbreak, for example, 42% of employers reported that they recruited more employees into their upskilling and reskilling initiatives to support workers during the transition to remote work.
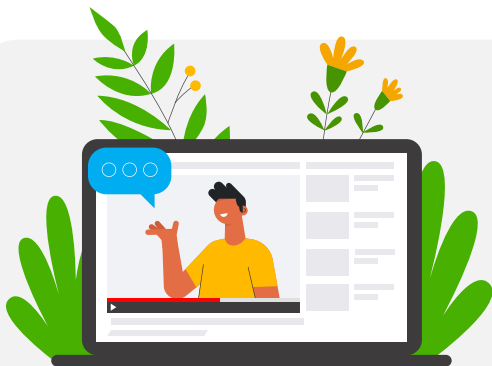
Millennials Want to Learn

Investment in L&D is particularly important for companies looking to hire and retain younger employees. According to Lorman, 87% of millennials say that workplace development is important, and 59% say that access to learning opportunities is a significant factor in deciding to apply for a job.

Key Strategies for Adoption

- Use agile, human-centered design approaches to connect learner needs with business objectives.

- Spread out learning over time with shorter, interactive sessions.

- Ensure your upskilling and reskilling opportunities are applicable in the real world. You can even use existing challenges in the workplace as the foundation of your training.

- Use live, synchronous workshops to role-play, provide instant feedback, collaborate, and build connections. Soft skills, which are critical to job performance, are hard for employees to learn independently.

- Look for learning platforms that are easy to use and integrate with your existing tools.

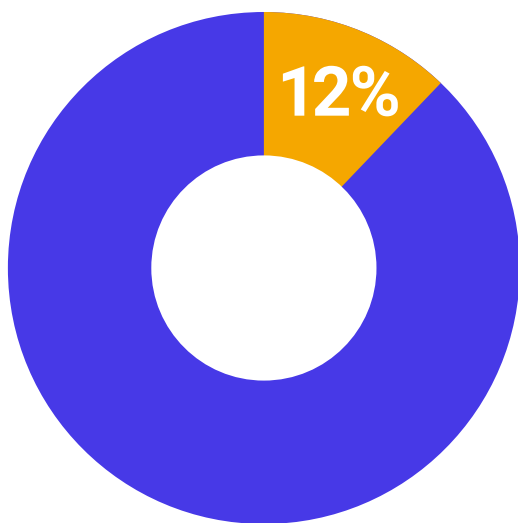## 2 Onboarding Processes That Emphasize Connection and Belonging

In a business environment fraught with Covid-related turbulence and worker shortages, retaining talent is a critical need. But more than a quarter of employees quit in the first 90 days on the job—often because of ineffective onboarding. How important is onboarding? A Society for Human Resources Management study showed that at one company, 69% of employees who went through a well-designed onboarding process were likely to stay in their jobs for at least three years.

Onboarding is critical for retention—which means it's not enough to send remote workers a PowerPoint presentation about your mission or share a link to a welcome video. Ideally, your onboarding procedures should be personalized, should prepare employees for the job, should foster critical relationships between new hires and their managers and peers, and should reflect company values. When it's done right, onboarding can set up an employee for success and solidify their commitment to the organization. A staggering 91% of employees who receive effective onboarding report feeling connected to their team, according to a study from BambooHR. Even better? They are 18 times more likely to commit to their new company.

91%
of employees

who receive effective onboarding feel connected to their team, and they are **18x** more likely to commit to their new company.

Key Strategies for Adoption

- Rather than taking a "firehose" approach and pack lots of information into a day-long orientation, use digital onboarding to spread out training over a longer period of time. Your employees will retain more, they'll be able to return with questions as they gain experience and start putting words into action, and they'll feel supported even after their first day is over.

- Use video conferencing, chats, and other open lines of communication whenever possible to integrate remote employees into the company culture. Make sure new employees feel empowered to access managers and ask questions.

- Make onboarding inclusive and engaging using technology and give employees the chance to learn alongside their peers if possible.

- Collect feedback on the onboarding process with regular check-ins and digital polls.

12%

Only 12% of employees strongly agree their organization does a great job of onboarding new employees

Source: Gallup

3 Building a New Generation of Leaders

New ways of working require new ways of leading. In addition to heavy investment in technology, 64% of CEOs are increasing their investment in manager training to equip them with the skills to lead a more virtual workforce. By investing in leadership training, employers give workers continued opportunities to grow with the company, while ensuring that future leaders have the skills to support business success.

64%
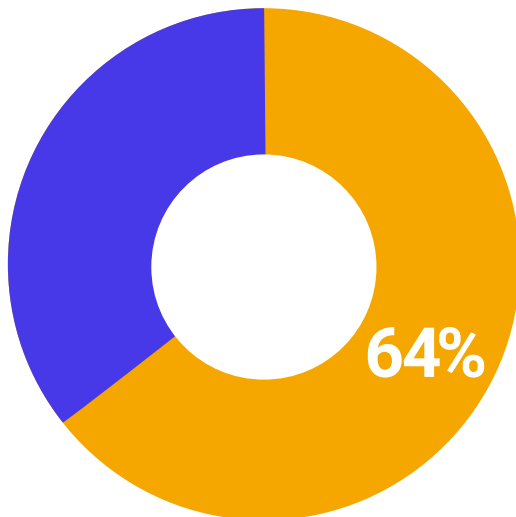
64% of CEOs are investing in training for managers to lead a more virtual workforce

Source: PwC.

Access to leadership training is particularly important in hybrid workplaces, because many remote workers are at a disadvantage when it comes to promotions. One study from UC Davis revealed that "passive face-time," like casual chats in the break room, can significantly affect who gets promoted within an organization. Giving remote workers access to online leadership training can help level the playing field.

Key Strategies for Adoption

- Schedule events and time for senior leaders to actively engage with staff. Often, this is easier in a digital environment because CEOs can more easily make space in their calendar for an online meeting than an in-person workshop.

- Build in time for breakouts and discussions to make training collaborative and give emerging leaders a chance to practice their skills.

- Use your leadership training program as an opportunity to showcase the diversity of leaders within your organization.

- Ensure that training covers many leadership styles and highlights how leadership skills can be used in various positions—not just by the C-suite.

4 Foster Inclusion With Digital DEI

Both the global pandemic and the Black Lives Matter protests that shook the nation in 2020 have forced organizations to take a closer look at their diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives.

To their surprise, many companies discovered that remote work is a boon for equity initiatives, allowing them to attract more diverse talent from across the country, or even the globe. Others have realized that work-from-home environments can be more inclusive for many employees, like people of color, working mothers, and people with chronic illnesses or disabilities. According to Business Insider, Black workers have reported a 50% increase in their sense of belonging since working from home—likely because they experienced fewer instances of workplace racism.

DEI is the top area of human capital investment in 2021

Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion

Learning & Development

Technology Optimization

Employee Experience

Talent Acquisition

0%   20%   40%   60%   80%

Source: Brandon Hall Group.

While offering remote or hybrid work options can support equity initiatives, companies also need to take an active role in providing diversity training. Digital DEI initiatives help organizations connect employees from different backgrounds across time and location, making room for employees and leaders to work together to address equity issues in a safe and supportive space.

Key Strategies for Adoption

- Use digital classes, workshops, and conferences to provide equitable access to training, allowing people from different locations and branches to connect across your entire organization.

- Leverage online and hybrid classes to access educators and trainers from a wider variety of backgrounds and disciplines—not just those inside the office.

- During synchronous trainings, encourage employees to share their experiences and perspectives, foster empathy, and create a sense of belonging.

- Conduct collaborative exercises, like perspective-taking activities, to shift workplace culture.

Creating Community Across the Digital Divide

Experts are calling the post-pandemic job market a "war for talent." More than 50% of employees say they are open to looking for a new job in the next year, and nearly one in five knowledge workers will leave their current position in 2021. But HR leaders don't have to let their company become one of the statistics. By investing in digital solutions that prioritize access, flexibility, and agility, organizations can do more than just retain their talent. They can prove to employees that they are ready for the new world of work—and create a stronger, more sustainable community across the digital divide.

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