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The talent challenge for 2019 (and beyond) Print – Issue 171 | Article of the Week

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How to develop, rather than lose talented employees is a challenge HR Directors need to take seriously in 2019.

New CEMS (Global Alliance in Management Education) research has found that almost half of graduates in their early 20s expect to reach executive level in five years and under. They consider work/life balance, opportunities for quick career progression and the opportunity for global experiences among the things they look for when considering a role. These future leaders have desire to create influence and impact quickly, on a global scale.

This transformation is not just down to the young. [A 2017 report](#) by The Centre for Ageing Better found that older workers look for employment that is personally meaningful, flexible, intellectually stimulating and sociable. They are likely to stay in work if they think that their work matters and that their needs are taken seriously.

With this in mind, HR teams must think radically in 2019 about how to harness talent. They need to take an approach far-removed from the traditional, 9-5, career-ladder-focused, hierarchical workplace of the past, if they hope to create an agile culture that will set them apart.

The biggest business challenges of 2019

Ultimately, wider business challenges funnelled down to HR teams, so it is useful to think about what some of these challenges might be moving into 2019, before looking at how these might help reframe the issue of talent.

Some of the main challenges, are:

- **AI and technology** – Because the rapid pace of change in technology is creating so much unpredictability in traditional markets, today's employees won't be able to easily draw from the past in order to know what to do in the future. They will be expected to creatively leverage new technologies in ways that can't currently be anticipated or understood.
- **Social vs remote learning** – As people work more remotely, companies must find ways to get people to learn through peer social interaction e.g. peer coffee chats, online communities.
- **Community-thinking** – This trend emerges clearly in [PWC's Workforce of the Future](#) (essential reading for HR Directors). The organisations who become industry leaders will be those who serve community, as opposed to only buyers – as today's customers are sophisticated and knowledgeable, it is important to broaden your target vs old style buyers and customers.
- **Generational mix** – Amazingly, by 2020 half of the workforce will be millennials. Soon we will find ourselves in the scenario where baby boomers, gen x, gen y and gen z are operating side by side, with varying approaches to work. So how do you get the best out of teams made up of several generations?

Thinking differently about talent

These challenges should impact the way that HR teams think about talent. In particular when it comes to:

1. Leadership

Great leadership drives talent, which creates an innovative culture. Successful modern-day leaders require a range of capabilities, from emotional intelligence, inspirational communication and curiosity to reflection, collaboration and co-creation.

In a globally interconnected world, intuition and psychological aspects of leadership – softer skills – are increasingly relevant. True leaders are asking how they can get the very best from everyone.

Most importantly leaders should know their own life purpose and lead organisations according to their values. The CEMS students (future leaders) I teach often ask me how to navigate all of the opportunities open to them. I encourage them to think clearly about their values and life purpose, to help them focus.

Future leadership will become increasingly virtual, due to flexible work practices; in fact there may no longer be offices at all. However, human nature will never change, which means leaders need to work hard to build authentic relationships and communities. In a remote, automated environment, a leader will have to be able to pick up more quickly on signals of working styles. They will also have to be highly intuitive, because they'll have fewer social cues to pull from and use every learning opportunity in a social context – for example social coffee corner chats.

Leaders must dig even more deeply, to understand who individuals are, so that they appreciate what each team member brings to the table. One book that has most influenced me is *Unboss*, by Lars Kolind and Jacob Bøtter – which looks at how knowledge, purpose and collaboration, rather than hierarchy, competition and a bottom-line-only approach to leadership, make the difference between success and failure. The 'Unboss' philosophy captures how leaders can leave space to explore full potential of their staff and let people do their best, through harnessing skills and capabilities.

2. Hiring

There is a huge cost in wrong talent. The best companies are already targeting better and pulling out talent acquisition as a separate function, to make sure that the most talented employees are matched with the right roles and teams.

In 2019 and beyond, the best companies will also be the ones who use the technological revolution to their advantage – such as LinkedIn and virtual networks – as almost a 'Tinder' concept in a professional context. This involves matching the right skillsets and attitudes with the culture of company, in the same way Tinder matches the personalities of people (mainly) seeking long-term relationships. The keyword here is 'capability' rather than 'employability' – matching skills and personality to culture. Through developing 'capability' people will automatically become employable, as a natural progression.

Ultimately, the employee lifecycle is a network, constantly in flux. A spider's web rather than a ladder. We cannot look at employee lifecycle traditionally – rather we must think of employees as customers. Hiring should be based on attitudes, behaviours and values, as opposed to ticking boxes. Promotion will also change; shifting away from 'rungs' on career ladder to a more lateral system of people moving across, adding skillsets and branching out dynamically.

3. Talent development

Strengths-thinking is a key word for 2019. What is the extra USP that people are bringing in the face of significant challenges? If you can tap into the USP of every talent, you gain competitive advantage.

Traditionally companies have measured performance with merit and salary increase, however some companies – Deloitte, Accenture for example – are now experimenting with looking at performance in a totally different way. Performance based pay is pass! instead of developing talent by developing weaknesses, it is about unleashing the full potential of individuals and harnessing strengths.

HRDs must focus on the fact that everyone has talent – not just high-potentials – and that it is possible to develop the strengths of each individual, by looking at the things they are good at, rather than the things they struggle with.

To achieve this, innovative companies must turn learning and development on its head and move away from traditional training programmes, making development a continuous process, involving coaching, mentoring, on the job training and community learning. This might include 'learning circles,' where employees learn from each other by sharing knowledge and experience.

4. Creating a culture of innovation

Every day I see brilliant ways in which companies are creating a culture of innovation to get the best out of their talent.

For example, reverse mentoring is a fantastic idea, as CEOs and more experienced employees can work closely with younger generations for mutual benefit. People are doing pioneering work in collaborative spaces – they are very different types of work places.

Think tanks bring bright minds together, internal start-ups drive growth, innovation funds unite cross-company teams to tackle problems and hackathons to challenge employees to come up with collective solutions, with teams working overnight coming up with brilliant ideas. Scrums are another methodology of working in agile organisations; a bit like rugby scrum, groups come together as needed, then disband just as quickly.

Companies are also experimenting in the workspace with outside areas, informal spaces and creative-activity based spaces, using these for people to connect, rather than meeting in traditional rooms.

Even language can be used differently. Traditionally we have talked about competition and winning – but should we instead talk about *delighting customers*? New job titles – *curiosity champion*, *innovator* – can give people different structure and language to build on this digital and millennial culture.

Taking the talent challenge seriously

Fundamentally great organisations need to start asking what people want from jobs, what their skills are (because we all have them) and bring people together across the organisation. All generations want to find meaning in their work. Rather than stereotyping, organisations should be asking how we can use strengths and how we can bring diverse groups together to provide creative solutions.

You may feel that your company is currently miles away from this vision – however 2019 is certainly the year to start taking these talent challenges seriously and putting strategies in place to get the best out of your people.

The need for change is difficult to ignore. After all, it would be sad if lack of action meant that your creative, talented employees, with their boundless energy ended up moving somewhere else. So ask yourself this year – are you doing enough to respond?

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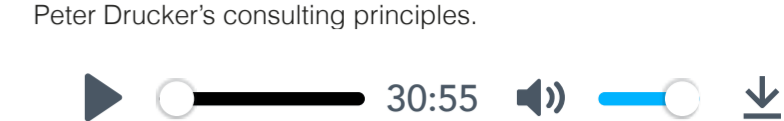
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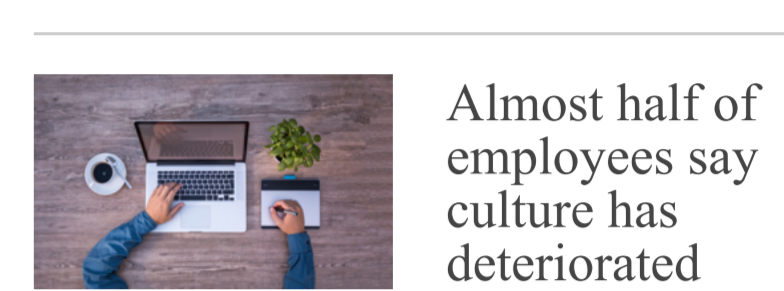
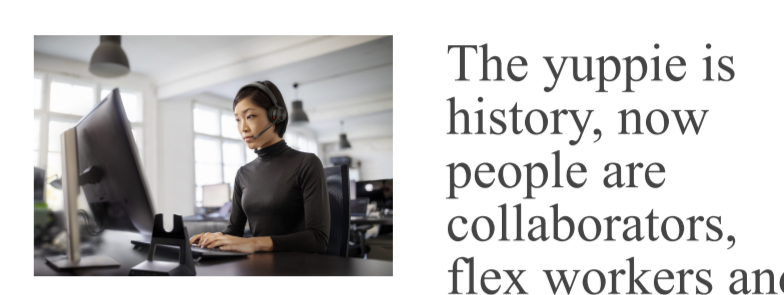
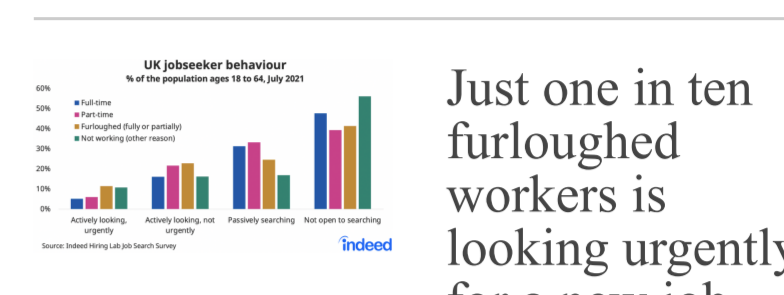
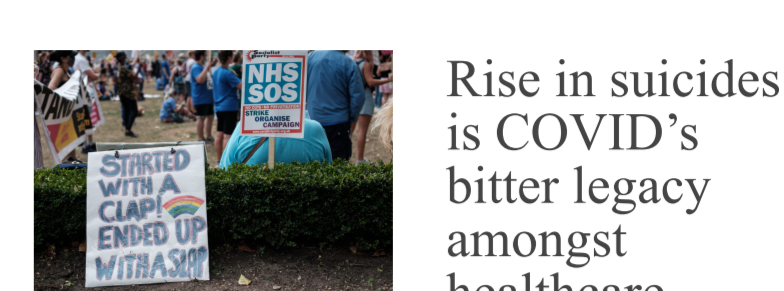
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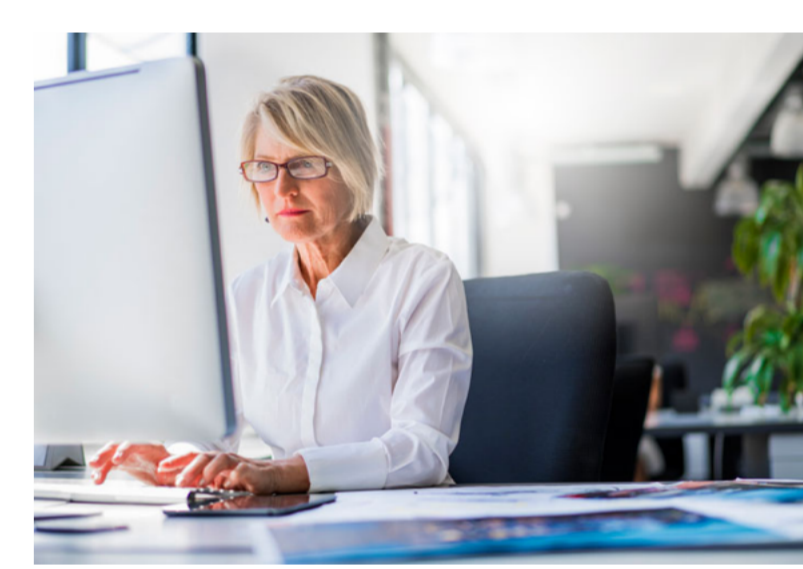
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