



What Does the Future of Work Mean for HR Business Partners?

by Russ McCall

The future of work has many implications for the HRBP role. HRBPs and HR leaders must understand the trends that will shape the way work gets done in the future, as well as the key actions HRBPs will take to support the line in operationalizing these trends.

Pandemic-driven flexible work models, empowered employees and societal debates have pushed the topic of the future of work to the forefront for HR professionals and business leaders alike. HR business partners (HRBPs) must widen their understanding of the future trends that will impact work along with how that impact will shape the support they provide to the line. The future of work goes beyond the question of where work is done to broader questions like how new technologies can enhance our workflows, how well-being can enrich our

work lives and even how employers can help employees cultivate more meaning in work itself. HRBPs will play a pivotal role in operationalizing these trends.

We have identified the future-of-work trends that will likely have the greatest impact on organizations in the years to come. (For a complete discussion of these trends, view our webinar, [11 Trends That Will Shape Work in 2022 and Beyond](#).) Most of these trends, whether individually or in combination, will impact HRBPs in the following ways.



Fairness and Equity Become Top Priorities, but Hybrid Harms DEI Efforts

HRBPs will be pivotal in understanding and addressing the tensions surrounding fairness and equity that impact employee experience in a hybrid work environment. They will need to listen more closely to employees to understand how they experience and perceive business decisions.

Actions to Take

- **Narrative creation** — HRBPs will need to tell the story of how the organization's investments connect to individual employees' needs at scale to shape perceptions of fairness. They will also use non-data-driven arguments to help managers recognize their own biases toward in-person work and its association with high performance.
- **Employee listening** — HRBPs will use innovative employee listening techniques to determine acute challenges related to fairness and equity. They will move beyond the annual engagement survey and focus groups to seek out real-time data from pulse surveys, data scraping and sentiment analysis.
- **Internal mobility process redesign** — HRBPs will experiment with alterations to the processes that result in perceptions of inequity, especially internal mobility and recognition. They will work with line leads to create tools that increase transparency in the promotion process. They will also measure overall equity in promotions, paying particular attention to the differences among remote, hybrid and on-site employees.

Employers Trade Hours for Pay

As organizations move from flexibility around where work happens to flexibility around how much work is done (reduced working hours, shortened workweeks), HRBPs will be tasked with proving the value of these new ways of working. They will also need to adjust key talent management processes to increase line managers' acceptance of a reduced workweek.

Actions to Take

- **Experimental design** — To prove that giving employees more flexibility in the amount of work they do has a return on investment and does not disrupt business outcomes, some HRBPs will deploy A/B experiments, comparing the outcomes of employees within a given cohort who do and do not have this type of flexibility. Others will leverage the natural experiments that have developed through variation among business units and individual leaders' decisions.
- **Business case generation** — HRBPs will have to prove to stakeholders that a change in work hours uniquely contributes to positive talent and organizational outcomes. Data-driven business cases will be important in convincing business leaders of the need to experiment further.
- **Outcome-driven performance management** — With increased flexibility around how much employees work, HRBPs will have to help their business units conceptualize and operationalize a performance management system that prioritizes outcomes over inputs.

Hybrid Drives More Turnover

As flexible working weakens employees' social ties to their organizations and more remote opportunities reduce the cost of switching jobs, HRBPs will focus on isolating and correcting the causes of heightened turnover. They will use data-driven and emotive-based tools to identify these causes, and they will humanize elements of the employee value proposition (EVP) to mitigate them.

Actions to Take

- **Employee journey mapping** — HRBPs will use journey mapping to understand how employees interact with their organizations during different life- and work-related moments. They will use this analysis to empathize with different employee groups and discover unmet needs and pain points.
- **Data collection and analysis** — To analyze the causes of heightened turnover, HRBPs will collect and interpret data to understand the nuanced reasons behind each employee exit and determine whether these reasons are shared among a specific employee segment or persona.
- **Rebalance the EVP** — HRBPs will work with line leaders to humanize aspects of the EVP to counteract turnover. They will apply insights gathered during the discovery phase to better respond to employee needs during and outside their workdays.

Automation Changes the Manager Role

HRBPs will work with managers to reshape their roles, skills and behavioral competencies as emerging technology automates most managerial tasks. HRBPs will spotlight empathy as the key capability for people leaders to succeed in their roles, and they will update the ways organizations select, promote and evaluate leaders in line with empathetic management.

Actions to Take

- **Organizational design and role scoping** — HRBPs will work with managers to determine which tasks are ripe for automation and which can be resourced at scale through a COE. HRBPs will reconstruct the manager profile to target empathetic and human management, detailing the underlying competencies that are new and expiring.
- **Revamp successor mapping** — Given the updated scope of people leadership, HRBPs will adjust high-potential employee selection criteria and successor matching to prioritize human leadership skills.



Hybrid Tech Becomes Performance Tech

The connection, sharing and communication software that employees use today in flexible work environments will become embedded with tracking technology to evaluate employee performance, pushing HRBPs to become well-versed in data ethics and the impacts of data misuse. They will employ change management tactics to ensure these emerging technologies target employee performance instead of monitoring employees' activities.

Actions to Take

- **Data ethics** — As flexible work spurs on the creation of a larger data-tracking provider market, HRBPs must be fluent in ethical data usage and aware of trends and changes in employee acceptance of tracking. For example, they will evaluate questions around the purpose, amount and fairness of the data being collected. They also must be equipped to challenge line requests by discussing the pros and cons of these tools and how to leverage them, if at all.
- **Change management** — To successfully deploy these new data tools, HRBPs must co-create the purpose behind their usage with employees, bring employee voice into the technology rollout and increase general employee awareness of these tools and their benefits.
- **Performance design** — As technology evolves and widens the possibility of performance inputs, HRBPs must consider how to incorporate these inputs into performance systems and assess the weight they should carry.

Wellness Becomes the Newest Metric, While Sitting Becomes the New Smoking

HRBPs will seek to understand how employee needs connect with organizational well-being investments to increase participation in well-being benefits and prevent negative health outcomes related to flexible work. HRBPs will nudge managers toward recognizing the importance of greater involvement in their direct reports' well-being.

Actions to Take

- **Data collection** — As more organizations invest in broader well-being interventions, HRBPs will seek out passive data and proxy data to help prove the return from these investments. They will use these resources to measure small improvements and gain buy-in from skeptical line leaders to do more advanced tracking.
- **Manager training** — HRBPs will work with total rewards leaders to craft training that enables the mindset and skill set shifts necessary for managers to become effective stewards of employee well-being.
- **Employee journey mapping** — As flexible work arrangements become permanent, HRBPs will seek to understand how employees' interactions with work have shifted, including how much time they spend sitting versus standing or moving around. HRBPs will use this information to recommend tactical solutions to "sitting disease" such as walking meetings, reduced virtual meeting time and virtual nudges.

Rise of the Chief Purpose Officer

Employees continue to expect greater organizational involvement in societal and cultural issues. As organizations respond to these expectations, HRBPs will find themselves in a critical position between employees and leadership. As a result, HRBPs will be fundamental in understanding employee sentiment in real time as societal flashpoints emerge and in using employee voice to act on these issues.

Actions to Take

- **Employee listening** — As social and cultural debates emerge, HRBPs will need to use more sophisticated listening techniques to gauge employee sentiments and expectations regarding emerging issues. HRBPs will present their findings to the line to gain consensus on taking action.
- **Network enablement** — As organizations take stances on societal and cultural debates, HRBPs must find, engage and leverage segments of employees disproportionately impacted by the emerging issue. They must bring these groups of employees into the process of determining concrete actions the organization can take in response.

