



## **University of Wales Trinity Saint David**

BA (Hons) Leadership and Management Skills for the Workplace

**Module: LCLM5002 - Developing and Managing Individuals and Teams**

Assignment Title: Component 2 - Individual Report

## **Contemporary HR Challenges at EnduraMaxx Ltd: Technology, Talent and Diversity, Equity and Inclusion**

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## **1. Introduction**

This report addresses three current human resource (HR) problems encountered by EnduraMaxx Ltd, a UK-based firm situated in Peterborough, which makes polyethylene storage tanks by rotational moulding. Like many small and medium-sized enterprises, the company operates in an environment characterised by fast technological development, fierce competition for skilled personnel and increasing expectations around diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI). These pressures directly impact organisational performance, employee satisfaction and long-term sustainability. The report is written from the perspective of an HR professional and begins by discussing the organisational difficulties around technological change, talent recruitment and retention, and DEI. Based on the literature and professional context, it then reviews existing HR practices that can address these and related concerns. Finally, it critically discusses how departmental managers may ensure that such practices are implemented effectively and as a matter of urgency and presents a conclusion and practical recommendations relevant to manufacturing organisations of this size.

## **2. Explanation of Key Factors**

### **2.1 Adapting to technological advancements**

Industry 4.0 is the digital transformation of manufacturing, including automation, sensors and data-driven maintenance (Vrontis et al., 2022). At EnduraMaxx, production is carried out using computer-controlled rotational moulding machines, and digital tools, such as a computerised maintenance management application, are now used to report failures and schedule repairs. In this way, technology changes not only the machines but also the jobs: workers are now expected to set digital parameters, record data and communicate through applications rather than paper. This poses several organisational issues. First, there is a skills gap between the experience-based abilities of long-serving operatives and the digital skills that are needed for the new systems. Second, digital confidence varies in the workplace, especially for individuals working in a second language, which increases the chance of errors, undetected defects and unscheduled downtime. Third, training time competes with production targets, so progress is often delayed. Armstrong and Taylor (2023) propose that workers unprepared to keep up with technological progress will become disengaged, while those who are supported to develop new skills will become more dedicated. For EnduraMaxx, the question of successful adaptation is one of sustainability: digitised maintenance and quality data can only improve decision-making and productivity if people can access them and are willing to use them.

Figure 1 illustrates how widespread this pressure is now in UK manufacturing.

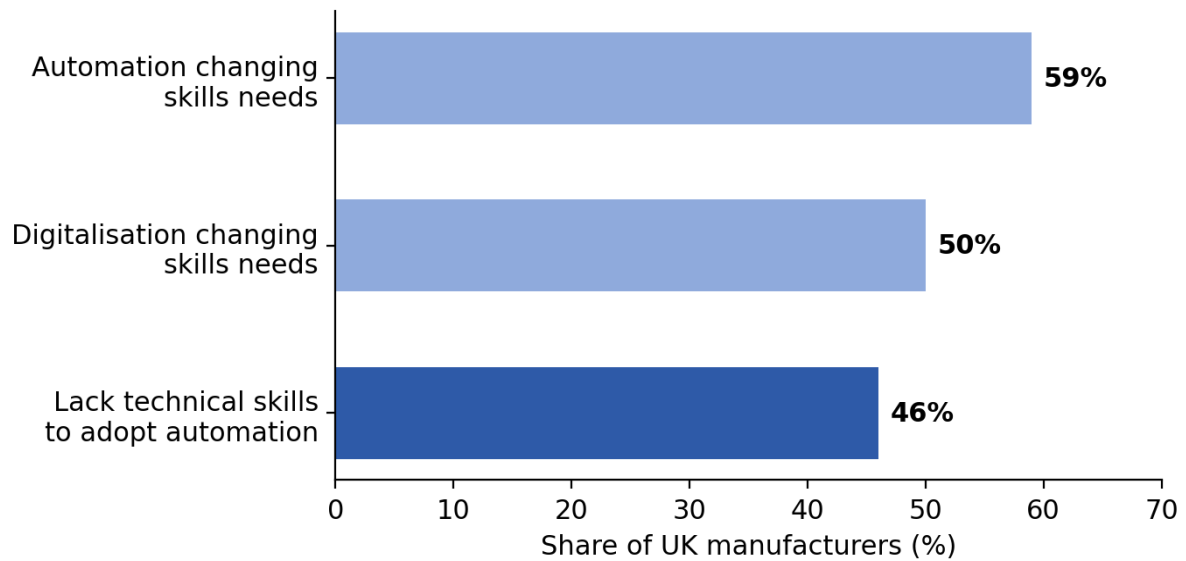


*Figure 1: Drivers of changing skills needs in UK manufacturing (Source: Make UK, 2023)*

## 2.2 Talent acquisition and retention

The UK manufacturing sector is plagued by chronic skills shortages, with many employers finding it difficult to fill skilled operative and technical vacancies (CIPD, 2024). Make UK (2023) warns that automation and digitalisation are increasing the skills required in production jobs at a faster pace than the labour market can respond. EnduraMaxx is in competition with large logistics and warehousing companies that can pay the same for less physically demanding positions in Peterborough. Shift patterns, hot working conditions and manual handling make production roles more difficult to fill, and an experienced but ageing workforce means there is a clear succession risk. As Figure 2 shows, vacancies across the sector remain far above pre-pandemic levels, although they have fallen back from their 2022 peak (ONS, 2024), and The Manufacturer (2024) reports that nearly three-quarters of manufacturers now cite skills shortages as one of the largest hurdles to expansion.

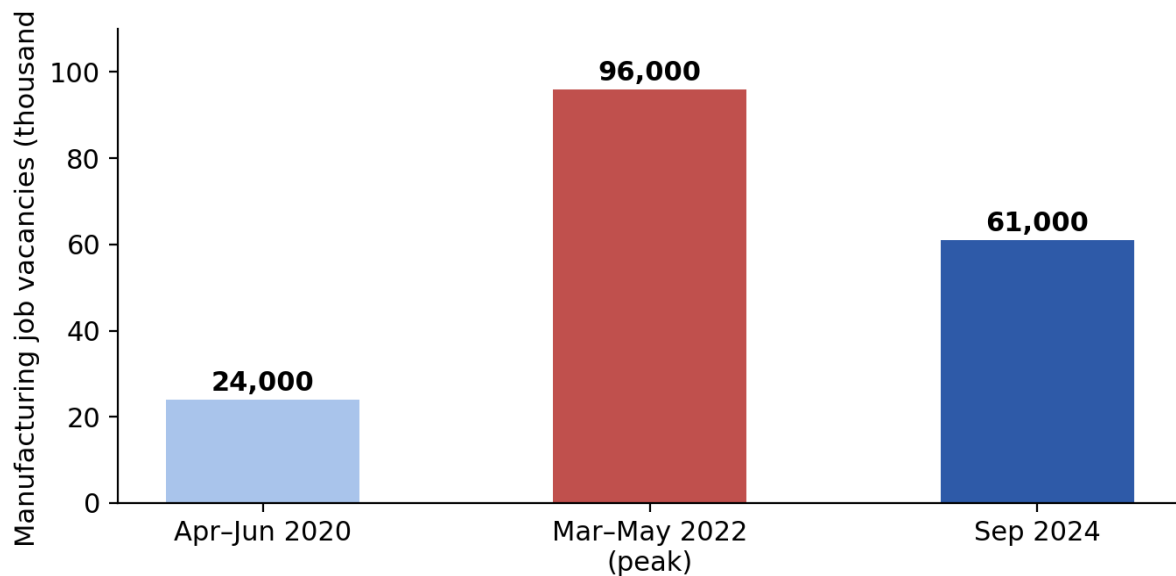


Figure 2: UK manufacturing job vacancies, 2020-2024 (Source: ONS, 2024)

Retention is equally important. Turnover has obvious costs in recruitment and induction, but the real loss is tacit knowledge: moulders often have a detailed understanding of machine behaviour, cycle settings and product quality that is difficult to capture in documentation (Taylor, 2021). When they go, quality difficulties and overtime strain on the remaining workers usually increase. Content theories of motivation, which seek to explain what actually drives people at work, suggest that pay alone is not enough to attract and retain staff: Maslow (1943) shows that once basic needs are met, workers seek belonging, recognition and growth, while Herzberg (1966) distinguishes between hygiene factors that simply prevent dissatisfaction and motivators such as achievement and advancement. Failure to recruit and retain a steady team of experienced personnel will imperil EnduraMaxx's delivery performance, quality and ability to adopt new technology, and threaten the long-term survival of the company.

### 2.3 Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI)

EnduraMaxx has a diverse workforce, with many of its staff speaking English as a second language, and, as in much of UK industry, women are still under-represented in production roles. This creates a number of organisational challenges. Safety risks and engagement issues can arise from language barriers, as they may prevent employees from fully understanding safety instructions, training content and company communications. In addition, access to development and promotion might become unequal if judgements about progression are made through informal networks rather than clear and transparent criteria.

Inclusion is not only a matter of compliance with the Equality Act 2010; it is also a strong driver of performance. Shore, Cleveland and Sanchez (2018) state that employees who feel valued for their unique traits and accepted as part of the team have a greater level of engagement,

well-being and retention. Diverse teams can also broaden the pool of workers and aid problem solving, and McKinsey & Company (2023) continues to report a positive correlation between workforce diversity and organisational performance. However, Mullins and Rees (2023) argue that such benefits only arise when the culture is truly inclusive, as diversity without inclusion can create friction and withdrawal. A weak DEI programme at EnduraMaxx would constrain the company's ability to recruit in an already tight labour market, increase turnover among minority staff and damage its reputation with customers and the local community. By contrast, strong DEI practice directly supports the talent and technology agendas outlined above.

### **3. Evaluation of Contemporary HR Practices**

#### **3.1 Digital HR systems and workforce analytics**

To respond to technological change, EnduraMaxx could use a digital skills matrix, blended learning and workforce analytics. A skills matrix measures the skill of each worker against machines and tasks. This allows managers to aim training at actual needs rather than general courses (Armstrong and Taylor, 2023). Appendix A provides an indicative matrix for rotational moulding operators. Short e-learning modules are useful for shift-based workforces as they can be completed flexibly. Vrontis et al. (2022) argue that the data currently produced by digital systems, such as the maintenance application, can be used to identify recurring faults and new training needs. The benefit of this strategy is that it is objective and focused. Decisions are based on data, not impressions, and investment in training is directed at particular, verifiable gaps. There are, however, clear disadvantages for a small or medium-sized firm. Systems require money and administrative time; analytics are only as good as the data provided on the shop floor; and e-learning can become a tick-box exercise, with little transfer to actual machine operation. Purely digital training may also exclude precisely those individuals with lower digital confidence whom it is designed to help. A blended approach is likely to be most effective, combining short digital modules with organised coaching on the machine by experienced operatives. However, this involves time away from production, and managers need to plan for it proactively.

#### **3.2 Employer branding, workforce planning and retention strategies**

In terms of talent acquisition, employer branding and strategic workforce planning are complementary. Employer branding focuses on what EnduraMaxx provides, such as stable job opportunities, training, and a clear path to the top of the team, and realistic job previews can minimise early departure rates by setting realistic expectations for shift work and working conditions (Taylor, 2021). Workforce planning can draw on Atkinson's (1984) flexible firm model, maintaining a skilled, multi-trained core supported by agency labour during seasonal

peaks. Flexibility and cost control are the key strengths, but overreliance on peripheral workers can create a two-tier workforce, weakening quality, safety and commitment.

For retention, contemporary practice combines pay benchmarking, recognition and structured career pathways. Herzberg (1966) suggests that competitive pay prevents dissatisfaction but rarely motivates by itself, whereas development opportunities and recognition build commitment, which is consistent with promoting progression from the shop floor into team leadership. However, motivation theories are generalisations, and individual priorities differ (Mullins and Rees, 2023); some employees value predictable hours or overtime more than promotion. A retention plan therefore needs regular employee feedback, such as stay interviews, rather than assumptions, and in a smaller company pay ceilings mean that non-financial recognition must carry real weight to remain credible.

### **3.3 Inclusive recruitment, DEI policy and leadership development**

To enhance DEI, EnduraMaxx could implement inclusive recruitment and a clear DEI policy and leadership development. Inclusive recruitment includes plain English job adverts focusing on skills and not qualifications, structured interviews scored against consistent criteria and practical skills-based assessments; the CIPD (2023) reports that these approaches reduce bias and widen the applicant pool, which is crucial in a tight labour market. Inclusion and safety for multilingual staff would be enhanced by translation of induction materials and visual work instructions. Leadership development for team leaders, covering fair allocation of work, feedback and everyday inclusive behaviour, embeds the policy in daily practice.

The strengths of these practices are fairness, legal compliance and access to a broader talent pool. Their limitations, however, are well documented. Noon (2018) argues that one-off diversity or unconscious bias training is largely ineffective when it is detached from accountability, because awareness alone rarely changes behaviour. Policies can become symbolic documents if managers are not measured on inclusion outcomes, and visible initiatives without cultural change risk becoming tokenism and damaging trust. The effectiveness of DEI practice at EnduraMaxx will therefore depend less on the policies themselves and more on the quality of managerial implementation studied in the next section.

Table 1 summarises the practices evaluated in this section, together with their principal strengths and limitations.

*Table 1: Summary of contemporary HR practices evaluated for EnduraMaxx (Source: author's own analysis)*

| Challenge                        | Contemporary practice                                                                 | Key strengths                                                            | Key limitations                                                  |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Technological change             | Digital skills matrix, blended learning, workforce analytics                          | Targeted, data-driven training investment; suits shift work              | Cost and administration; data quality; tick-box e-learning risk  |
| Talent acquisition and retention | Employer branding, strategic workforce planning, career pathways and pay benchmarking | Wider applicant pool; flexibility; visible progression builds commitment | Two-tier workforce risk from agency overuse; SME pay ceilings    |
| Diversity, equity and inclusion  | Inclusive recruitment, multilingual materials, DEI policy and leadership development  | Fairness and legal compliance; broader talent pool; safer communication  | Awareness training alone rarely changes behaviour; tokenism risk |

## 4. Critical Evaluation of Managerial Implementation

Contemporary HR practices often fail not because they are poorly designed, but because they are treated as the HR department's responsibility rather than a line management one. This section assesses how departmental managers at EnduraMaxx can implement the above practices effectively and with urgency.

### 4.1 Leadership accountability and urgency

Departmental managers should own people outcomes in the same way they own output and quality. This means embedding HR indicators (turnover, training matrix coverage, applicant diversity) into managers' goals and appraisals so that implementation cannot be indefinitely postponed. Kotter (2012) argues that change is not effective without a genuine sense of urgency, and senior managers drive this by linking the new practices directly to business risks that the shop floor already recognises: unfilled vacancies, overtime pressure and machine downtime. Accountability without support, however, breeds resentment: managers need training, time and partnership from HR too.

### 4.2 Communication strategies and employee voice

Implementation should be communicated through channels that actually reach a shift-based, multilingual workforce: short toolbox talks, visual boards and translated summaries rather than long emails. Crucially, communication must be two-way. Armstrong and Taylor (2023) argue that employee voice builds trust and improves the quality of change decisions; asking operatives to shape how training or new recruitment processes are rolled out increases

ownership and surfaces practical problems early. This represents a democratic, participative approach to management, where decisions are shared with employees and not just announced to them (Mullins and Rees, 2023). One-way, top-down announcements, by contrast, are a common reason that initiatives are quietly ignored on the shop floor.

#### **4.3 Monitoring and performance measurement**

Progress should be tracked through a simple people dashboard reviewed in existing production meetings, combining lagging indicators such as turnover and time-to-fill, with leading ones such as training hours completed and structured interviews. An indicative dashboard structure is provided in Appendix B. Measurement creates urgency, but it has limits: metrics can encourage tick-box behaviour, for example completing e-learning without real learning taking place. Quantitative data should therefore be balanced with qualitative evidence from exit interviews and engagement surveys.

#### **4.4 Organisational culture**

Ultimately, culture determines whether practices hold. Mullins and Rees (2023) note that employees judge the values of an organisation not only by its policy documents but also by how managers act daily. Team leaders are the main culture carriers at EnduraMaxx, and when they allocate opportunities fairly, use the new systems themselves and respond constructively when problems are reported, psychological safety is raised and the practices become the norm. If they visibly skirt them in the face of production pressure, employees will conclude the initiatives are optional.

#### **4.5 Barriers to implementation and how to overcome them**

The main barriers are production pressure and lack of time, cost constraints typical of a smaller manufacturer, middle-manager scepticism, language differences and change fatigue. These can be overcome by piloting practices at one production line to produce quick, visible wins; recruiting respected experienced operatives as champions; negotiating protected training time with production planning in advance; and phasing implementation rather than launching everything at once. Urgency is best sustained not through pressure alone but by showing early results like a reduction in repeat machine faults after targeted training, which converts sceptics more effectively than instruction.

### **5. Conclusion and Recommendations**

This report has shown that technological change, talent acquisition and retention and DEI are interlinked challenges for EnduraMaxx: new technology cannot work efficiently without skilled and engaged people, and a sustainable, skilled workforce cannot be built without inclusive

recruitment and genuine opportunities to develop. The systems studied, such as digital skills matrices and blended learning, employer branding and workforce planning, retention and inclusive recruitment supported by leadership development, all offer real benefits, but all also have their limitations, which are only solvable through active managerial action. It is recommended that EnduraMaxx introduces a digital skills matrix that is supported by blended training, with protected training hours agreed in advance with production planning. The company must also create an employer brand around a clear route from operative to team leader based on annual pay benchmarking and an inclusive recruitment toolkit, which is built on plain-English adverts and structured interviews and multilingual visual work instructions. Finally, departmental managers must be held to account through people-related objectives and a quarterly people dashboard reviewed by senior management. Combined, these steps would enhance performance, engagement and the long-term sustainability of the business.

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## Appendix A: Indicative digital skills matrix for rotational moulding operators

The matrix below illustrates the format recommended in Section 3.1. Competence is scored from 0 (no experience) to 3 (competent to train others), which allows supervisors to target training and on-machine mentoring where gaps genuinely exist. Operator names are illustrative only.

| Competence area                                   | Operator A | Operator B | Operator C | Operator D |
|---------------------------------------------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| Shuttle oven operation                            | 2          | 3          | 1          | 2          |
| Recipe and cycle parameter setting                | 1          | 3          | 0          | 2          |
| Digital fault reporting (maintenance application) | 2          | 3          | 1          | 1          |
| Quality checks and product inspection             | 3          | 2          | 1          | 2          |
| Mould change and manual handling                  | 2          | 3          | 2          | 1          |
| Mentoring of new operatives                       | 1          | 3          | 0          | 1          |

Scoring key:

- 0 = no experience in this area
- 1 = able to work under supervision
- 2 = fully competent to work independently
- 3 = fully competent and able to train others

## Appendix B: Indicative quarterly people dashboard for departmental managers

The dashboard below illustrates the monitoring structure recommended in Section 4.3, combining lagging and leading indicators so that progress can be reviewed within existing production meetings.

| Indicator                                         | Type    | Frequency | Owner                     |
|---------------------------------------------------|---------|-----------|---------------------------|
| Voluntary turnover (%)                            | Lagging | Quarterly | Departmental manager / HR |
| Average time-to-fill vacancies (days)             | Lagging | Quarterly | HR                        |
| Training hours completed per operative            | Leading | Monthly   | Team leader               |
| Skills matrix coverage (%)                        | Leading | Monthly   | Team leader               |
| Structured interviews used in recruitment (%)     | Leading | Quarterly | HR                        |
| Repeat machine faults following targeted training | Leading | Monthly   | Maintenance / Team leader |

Suggested governance:

- Results are reviewed in the monthly production meeting and summarised quarterly for senior management.
- Quantitative results are balanced with qualitative evidence from stay and exit interviews.
- Targets are agreed jointly by departmental managers and HR at the start of each year.