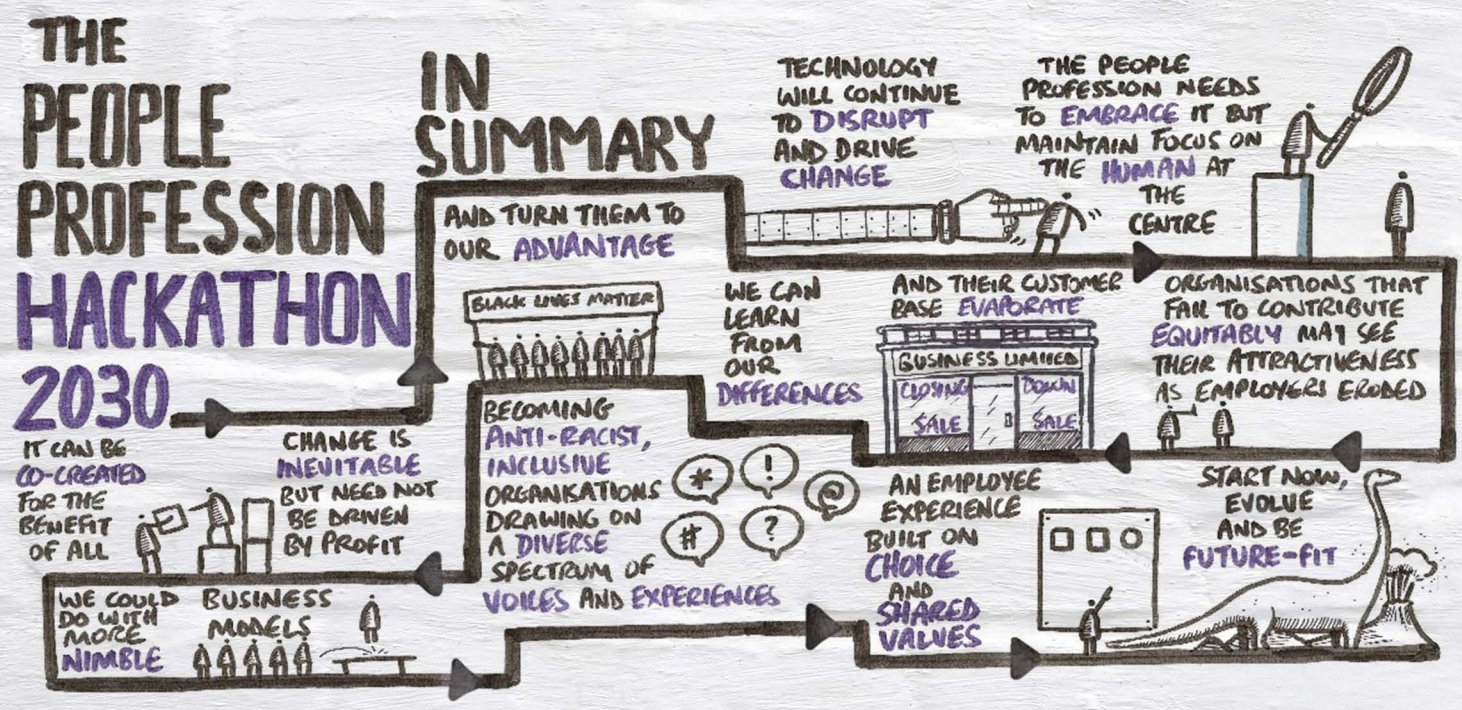
CIPD

*Championing better work and working lives*

REPORT | *November 2020*

# People Profession 2030

## A collective view of future trends



The CIPD is the professional body for HR and people development. The registered charity champions better work and working lives and has been setting the benchmark for excellence in people and organisation development for more than 100 years. It has more than 150,000 members across the world, provides thought leadership through independent research on the world of work, and offers professional training and accreditation for those working in HR and learning and development.

Report

# People Profession 2030: a collective view of future trends

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## Acknowledgements

This report was written by Mel Green, Rebecca Peters and Jake Young at the CIPD.

We'd like to thank all the people professionals who gave their time to this research – without your collaboration and insight this report would not be possible. This includes senior people professionals that took part in scoping interviews and roundtables, and people professionals from all over the world that took part in the hackathon. Special thanks goes to our volunteers that facilitated the hackathon discussions and branch volunteers for providing feedback on the project and support throughout.

Thank you to Simon Heath for the illustrations throughout the report, which provide a visual summary of the hackathon discussions.

Finally, we are grateful to CIPD colleagues across the UK, Ireland, the Middle East and Asia for supporting this project.

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# 1 Foreword

Our profession, as with the world of work, is in many ways at a pivotal point in time. It is important for us all to reflect, to look ahead, and to work together in how we can influence and shape the future, as well as the role of the profession and the capabilities we will need.

The pandemic has presented great challenges for every organisation, but it has also helped to put people more at the centre of the business agenda. The longer-term outcomes could see significant shifts in how people work, and shape changes in organisations and even sectors across our economies. Technology has long been seen as a major driver of change, and application of automation, robotics and AI is likely to impact many jobs and the skills people need. At the same time, the vital importance of wellbeing, inclusion, and fairness and opportunity at work have become more visible to all. Work in all its various forms should be a positive force for good, and be good for people.

These are critical agendas for our profession, but also opportunities to be at the very heart of business thinking and business strategy, and to shape a better future for all. The principles of good work, and of responsible and sustainable business, should drive us, but we will also need to have the evidence and insights to take the right actions and to understand the outcomes for all stakeholders.

This is exactly what this research programme was set up to do – to horizon-scan ten years into the future, and to gather an understanding of what the key trends and drivers might mean for work and for the profession, as defined by people professionals themselves. By co-creating this vision collectively, people professionals are in a position not just to react to change, but to help to positively shape it.

So far we've collaborated with people professionals from all over the world, gathering inputs and viewpoints to create a vision that's representative and can help guide us in our efforts to support and develop the profession. It is very encouraging to see how the profession has responded, the level of ambition, but also the level of challenge to us all. As one participant summarised:

> *We can (for example) drive transparency and fairness in pay and reward, we can build inclusive cultures with diversity considerations mainstreamed through our policies and processes, we can demonstrate the return on investment in skills development in our local communities, we can develop leadership selection criteria which values compassion as core leadership competence. People professionals will need to have a broad understanding of business drivers, be powerful influencers, and partner closely with other leaders across their organisations.*

The insights that we share in this report provide stimulus and food for thought. But we want to take the research further, connecting with more business leaders, with economists, with futurologists, as well as with those who are crucial in delivering this brave new world, like line and people managers, and other business functions like IT.

This journey towards better work and working lives we hope and believe should be a guiding purpose for all of us. As the CIPD we want to play our part in helping to encourage, support, and challenge our profession towards that future, and to champion our profession everywhere. We look forward to working with all of you in realising these ambitions.

**Peter Cheese**
**CEO, CIPD**

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# 2 Introduction

To ensure that the people profession is equipped to thrive through the ever-changing world of work, the CIPD invited senior HR leaders and people professionals to discuss and debate key trends that will influence the future of work and how it will affect the profession.

There is plenty of debate about the changing world of work, and the macro changes we see in our societies influence the shape of our workplaces. Our 2015 research *From Best to Good Practice HR: Developing the principles*[1] identified eight trends that will influence the future world of work. These trends continue to be relevant in 2020:

- utilisation of technology
- workforce diversity
- globalisation
- diversity of employment relationship
- industrial change
- individualism
- social responsibility
- quality of education.

Our *People Profession Survey 2020*[2] gives a snapshot of the 'here and now' of the profession, including current priorities, challenges and professional practice. It also identified that economic change, industrial change and digital transformation were common drivers of change for people professionals across sectors.

Beyond our research, a PwC report[3] examines how collectivism (where fairness and equality dominates) and individualism (where 'me first' rules) interact with business fragmentation, where small businesses become more powerful and large ones lose their dominance, and corporate integration, where big business becomes more influential.

Another from Deloitte[4] focuses in on the impact of changing workplaces on HR. It identifies two key drivers expected to shape HR in the future: the quality of employer–employee relationships and the automation of HR processes. Using these two factors as scales, the report explores what the world of work could look like, if determined by the quality of employer–employee relationships and automation.

These are far from the only trends that influence the world of work, but all have implications for people professionals, whether this be the impact on the HR jobs of the future[5] or as a starting point from which to explore other trends[6] which will emerge to shape the future of work.

Which trends are most important in driving future change? We can't perfectly predict the future, but we can explore what trends and drivers will influence the future of work, and therefore our profession. The goal of our People Profession Now and For the Future work is to understand what trends are shaping the world of work and relevant to the people profession and, in turn, to equip the profession with the tools to anticipate and drive these changes.

The first part of this work is to co-create a future vision of the profession with the people profession community. This report shares the findings of collaborative research, in which we engaged with hundreds of people professionals around the world to create a collective understanding of the future of the profession. This approach ensures that we draw on professional expertise as a key source of evidence. Being evidence-based is one of the CIPD's key values, outlined in our new Profession Map.[7] Engaging with the best available

evidence in order to make the most effective decisions allows us to support the people profession, now and for the future.

Our research focuses on the following questions:

1 What are the external drivers of change and how will they impact the key trends in the world of work?
2 What are the key trends expected to influence the world of work in the future?
3 What do these trends mean for the skills and capabilities of people professionals and people teams looking ahead and where can the profession add value?

## The research journey

As mentioned above, CIPD research on the future world of work and factors influencing professional practice began back in 2015.

**Figure 1: Research journey**

**In 2015:**

- We defined and tested a set of principles to support people professionals to make better decisions in their practice.[8, 9]
- We conducted a review and identified eight lenses offering different perspectives on workplace dilemmas to support practitioners to navigate an ethical approach to decision-making.[10]

**In 2016:**

- We explored and analysed evidence for the importance of culture within organisations and at board level and identified four key themes:
  - leadership and communication of organisational cultures, values and behaviours
  - HR strategy and operations: building productive and engaging cultures
  - engagement, employee voice and employee relations
  - contextual factors: economy, diversity and technology.[11]

**In 2017:**

- We explored the factors that shape professional and organisational identity and how these factors influence ethical practice.[12, 13]

## Research in 2020

### People Profession Survey 2020

In collaboration with Workday, this survey provides an annual snapshot of the perceptions and experiences of the people profession.[14] This research highlighted that economic change, digital transformation, and organisational agility were influential drivers of change for the profession.[15] In addition, we partnered with the World Federation of People Management Associations, the Society for Human Resource Management and the Australian HR Institute, to gather and explore international data on the people profession. At the time of writing, this report is due for publication in 2021.

### Scoping interviews with senior leaders

We conducted scoping interviews with senior leaders in the people profession to explore:

- how professional practice is changing
- how organisations and people functions need to adapt
- capabilities gaps and how the profession addresses these gaps.

**People Profession 2030 Hackathon**
To build on all our previous pieces of research, we facilitated an eight-day virtual hackathon in August 2020. This brought together people professionals from around the world to debate and discuss how key trends will influence the future of work, and what this means for the people profession. For more details on the research methodology, see appendix.

**Senior leader roundtables**
Following the hackathon we then conducted a series of roundtables to engage with senior people professionals working across a variety of sectors and industries. This enabled us to further explore the key trends that surfaced throughout the hackathon and get expert insight, from leaders within the profession, on the implications these trends have for the people profession. For more details on the research methodology, see appendix.

**Figure 2: Sources of evidence for our 2020 research**

## This report

This report shares the outcomes of the hackathon and roundtables, taking a deep dive into the key trends influencing the people profession, as identified by the people profession community. Direct quotes from hackathon and roundtable participants are italicised throughout the report. Alongside sharing insights from the hackathon and roundtables, we offer practice reflection points and next steps for people professionals within each trend.

The trends are:

A internal change: evolving organisational models, structures, and processes
B digital and technological transformation
C changing demographics and D&I strategy
D diversifying employment relationships
E sustainability, purpose and responsible business.

We recognise that these trends are not an exhaustive list of drivers that will influence the world of work and the people profession in the next decade. However, these areas are front of mind for people professionals considering what the next decade may bring.

In the next section, we outline other important macro drivers of change in the world of work that all play a part in the trends outlined above, before taking a deep dive into each of these trends.

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# 3 External drivers of change

Our organisations are subject to a huge number of large-scale external drivers of change – including economic, political and social influencers as well as unexpected disruptors. Some are unexpected and create immediate disruption and set in motion potential changes for our future workplaces, like the COVID-19 pandemic.

Using the PESTLE framework, we briefly consider three of the six PESTLE factors (that is, political, economic and social drivers) and how these broad external drivers influence our workplaces beyond the work of the people profession. We draw on hackathon participant insights to demonstrate the potential impact of these trends.[16] We suggest the following reflection points to keep in mind when reading the remainder of this report:

- How are the five trends we discuss in more detail in the rest of this report influenced by these drivers? In other words, how do political, economic and societal change 'dial up' or 'dial down' the rate or direction of change within these trends?
- How do these drivers influence decision-making in your organisation?
- How do these drivers influence your day-to-day role?
- How could they influence your role in the future?

### Political change

Political stability, or a lack thereof, can affect business operations, particularly for those that operate internationally. While the UK is relatively politically stable and has a generally 'fair' approach to allowing the public to influence the inner workings of the country, there has been a great deal of uncertainty over the decision to leave the European Union (and the implications this will have for businesses,[17] for example changes in trade control and employing migrant workers). Our Brexit hub[18] has guidance and resources to support businesses throughout this transition. Beyond the UK, changes in government regulations and political stability can affect business operations and strategy in a multitude of ways – from legislative changes in employment law to taxation policies to corruption and unethical business.

There was particular mention of political change altering the role of the people profession in workplaces of today, and the future, within the hackathon. For example, continuing tensions around the UK's integration with Europe and uncertain international relationships mean that people professionals within businesses, especially those with international markets of supply and demand, can no longer 'think small' or in national context; they have to consider wider implications – particularly thinking about healing rifts after the upheavals of Brexit and the COVID-19 pandemic.

### Economic change

Economic factors play a large role in determining how a company makes its decisions, particularly financial ones. So, factors such as varying exchange rates can of course affect how much a company has to pay its international suppliers, which can affect profits and use vital resources. An economic recession, as we saw in the UK in 2008/09, can change the attitudes of customers, meaning companies have to drop their prices. The UK has seen a slow recovery from the recession, even over a decade.

Hackathon participants had little doubt that economic change, particularly an economic downturn, will drive a great deal of change in our organisations in the next several years. In times of limited financial resources, the people profession should be at the heart of advising the wider business: *'from recruitment to downsizing and finding optimal solutions to keep operations without much harm to the business'.*

While economic change may be inevitable and somewhat daunting, hackathon participants felt confident that this presents an opportunity for the people profession to show innovation and creativity in 'doing more with less', and enhancing the skills and capabilities of staff will still be vital, but this will need to be approached with more subtlety and creativity as budgets will be tighter and resources fewer.

Finally, contributors noted that irrespective of economic change, things like digital transformation, a desire for truly inclusive and diverse workplaces, and a need for responsible and sustainable business will not go away. So ensuring people professionals focus on organisations having the right purpose and skills in place will allow them to lead the change.

### Societal change

Social factors are of course important as businesses look externally to see the social and cultural changes that may influence the workplace. For example, in the UK, there is a generally high standard of living; however, inequality means this is not available to all. There is also a renewed focus on the treatment of marginalised groups in the workplace, especially as working demographics become more diverse. Internationally, population growth, access to resources and quality of education are some examples of societal changes that can impact on business. Social factors can also indirectly influence business strategy, for example, changes in the consumer market.

Throughout the hackathon, people professionals discussed societal change as a springboard from which positive change can occur, particularly in the realm of diversity and inclusion. Organisations will need to adapt as societal – and therefore employee – expectations adapt too.

### Unexpected external disruptors

The COVID-19 pandemic is an example of an unexpected, widespread external disruptor that businesses have had to adapt to quickly. Where relevant, we've referenced COVID-19 throughout this report. The box below highlights some of the discussions from the hackathon on the immediate impact of COVID-19 and the response of the people profession, but it remains to be seen whether the short-term changes we've seen in our workplaces due to COVID-19 (such as an increase in remote working and changes to office space) will last once the pandemic has resolved. We therefore have focused on wider trends through this report but share some key insights from the hackathon on the potential impacts of COVID-19 below. Our Coronavirus hub has guidance and resources to support businesses in their response to the pandemic.

#### Hackathon perspectives on the impact of COVID-19

- Hackathon participants felt it unlikely that workplaces will be entirely virtual, even though office space will be used differently – this is echoed by our recent report[19] that found many organisations expect to introduce hybrid working post-pandemic.
- It's also important to note that many cannot work remotely, so their workplace experience will not have changed in the same way.
- There are also productivity, social and wellbeing considerations to be made to make remote working effective in 2030, with some challenging whether fully remote working is sustainable or good for wellbeing over the long term: *'It is unhealthy to create a work space at home – you are mixing your work with your personal life, overlapping the two, bringing the stresses from two different places to one – where is your safe place?'*

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- In turn, this could change how we use office space – for social and collaborative tasks, for example.
- The people profession needs to support these organisational changes:

  *Leaders need much better and practical support on how to manage dispersed teams; that support comes from the expertise of people teams, but it also benefits from IT and real estate/workplace teams being articulate about how the tech and space enable hybrid working (or – frankly – any type of working) in a space.*
- There are also challenges and opportunities for learning delivery for a dispersed workforce: *'A key [challenge] would be providing continuous learning for this workforce by changing delivery modes to primarily online and virtual.'*

# 4 Influential trends for the people profession in 2030

*We've got to re-imagine what HR is and what we want HR to be in the future. We are in danger of sleepwalking into the future, dreaming of the past and not recognising what is right in front of us.*

This section will explore the key trends highlighted by the hackathon and senior leader roundtables, and what implications these trends have for the people profession in 2030. The trends are:

A internal change: evolving organisational models, structures, and processes
B digital and technological transformation
C changing demographics and D&I strategy
D diversifying employment relationships
E sustainability, purpose and responsible business.

We recognise that the themes and factors surfaced by this research are often current issues faced by organisations and people teams, including current people priorities and immediate operational demands for the profession (for example, managing remote working brought about by COVID-19).

This is very much a reflection of the demands on the profession right now, who have often been front and centre of the COVID-19 crisis response. However, it's important that we look beyond the medium-term challenges faced by the people profession.

Our ambition is to better understand the strategic long-term direction of the profession, which requires us to understand the issues that will be faced by future workplaces in 2030 and beyond. To do this, we need to take a future-focused approach and engage beyond the profession, to test our people practice assumptions and build a more robust and comprehensive view of the alternative scenarios of the future world of work. This will form the next phases of this research – see more in section 6.

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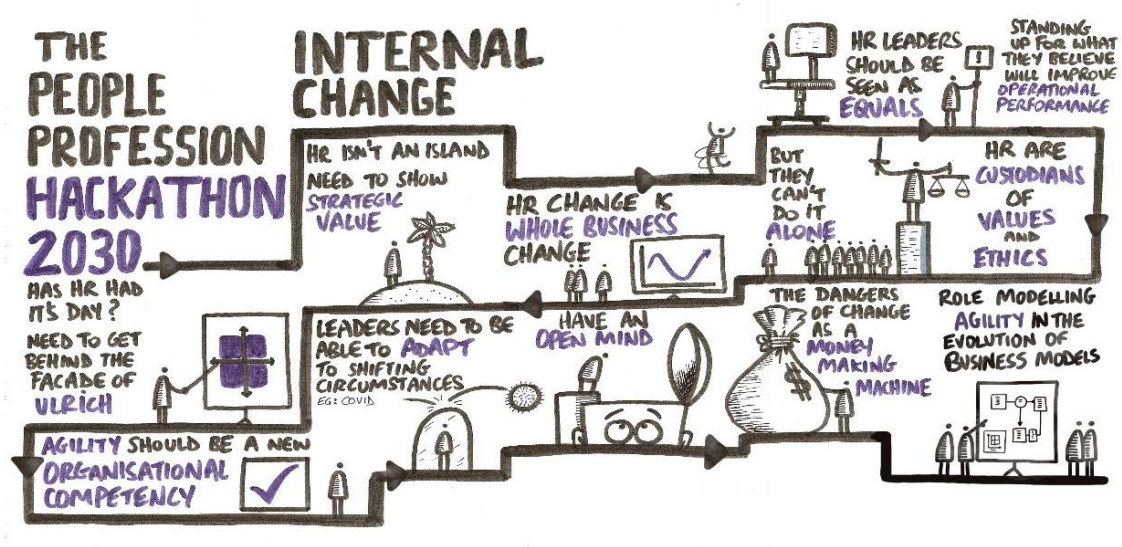
### A. Internal change: evolving organisational models, structures, and processes




*The old power systems are dying rapidly in organisations. Traditional ways of organising to get work done are becoming redundant. Digitisation is speeding up processes and shortcutting working methods, social attitudes towards the meaning of work are shifting dramatically and global disruption caused by COVID is compelling us to rethink what our work space actually is.*

#### What do we mean by internal change? Evolving organisational models, structures, and processes

Change isn't new to our workplaces, but in a complex and fast-paced world, it is inevitable. External disruptors – like political, economic, and societal upheaval – demand that organisational structures and business models are flexible enough to meet the needs of consumers and employees. Fixed, structured and traditional business models can become outdated, and fail to allow for the agility and adaptability that is required for organisations to thrive in response to rapid change.

People professionals need to be at the helm of organisational change, to ensure it is sustainable for business and people outcomes. This poses some questions for people professionals' future practice:

- How do we ensure HR's involvement with developing agile and flexible operating models?
- Do current management models and people management practices allow this flexibility?
- Do we need to adapt our thinking, practices and organisational culture for sustainable change?

Below, we explore people professionals' perspectives on this trend.

## Hackathon participant perspectives

**The modern workplace requires agile, adaptable business models**
The need for people professionals to adapt to a rapidly changing world of work was a key theme throughout the hackathon – this was also identified as a key driver of change in our *People Profession Survey 2020*.[20] People professionals often referred to operating within a VUCA world – a term that refers to volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous environments.

Participants identified the following potential influencers:

- COVID-19 has undoubtedly forced organisations to change how they operate and make decisions. However, it's as yet unclear how COVID-19 disruption will change organisational structures long term.
- Traditional ways of working – in both location and process – are changing, which has been accelerated by digital transformation and COVID-19.
- Societal attitudes about work and the value of work are changing.
- We are less dependent on traditional hierarchical decision-making structures and there is a move to more decentralised organisations.
- There are future external disruptors that we cannot predict.
- Employment relationships are shifting, impacting organisational structures.

Business models and structures will need to adapt to these – and other – changes. However, many participants noted that this would require more agile and responsive organisational design: *'most business models, and thereby their strategies and operations, are fixed at a moment in time no matter how much agility we try and bake into them.'* In other words, we operate in a constantly changing world, but businesses often find it difficult to adapt and make changes at pace.

There was discussion across the hackathon around what more agile organisational structure could look like. One aspect of this was disrupting traditional models of leadership and team structures, with a move away from 'teams' and set 'leaders', instead forming different work teams for specific problems:

> *Employees across functions, especially in the back-end offices, would come together, forming different work teams, looking into specific problems, developing solutions, implement decisions and then create evaluation criteria to assess implemented solutions. At that point, the team dissolves once the team objectives are achieved.*

**Managers and employees need support to thrive in a changing world**
Another potential challenge was supporting employees and managers to be comfortable with this complexity and facilitate new ways of working; *'This constantly changing environment requires effective leadership and managers who can act as connecting agents to [enable] innovation... and [adapt organisation design].'*

And, it could also mean more focus on upskilling and reskilling, in 'soft skills' like flexibility and persuasion, as well as new areas of knowledge and competencies:

> *The people profession will need to reskill and provide for reskilling. L&D would need to improve its own digital capability and digital instructional design. Learning design will have to become agile. HR would need to truly partner with business to understand the real challenges and areas that employees need to be developed.*

### People professionals need to role-model agility and lead the way

Participants felt that the need for agility and change is a real opportunity for people professionals to be fully involved in business strategy and drive required change in organisational design and development. This will involve greater business partnering and working more collaboratively across organisational departments, recognising the complexity of our organisations: *'It will depend on us to prove ourselves as real and active business partners. It will be crucial to become extremely flexible and open-minded, resourceful and persuasive.'*

Hackathon participants were confident about the future. The people profession's work throughout the COVID-19 pandemic has proved that HR can be agile and lead organisational responses: *'The pandemic has shown to us that in times of crisis HR is at the forefront of changes and it is HR that should act as a change agent first.'*

There were words of caution that change can be uncomfortable or even stressful for employees – so critical questions need to be asked of organisational change (read more about ethical change in our organisational development thought piece collection).[21] People professionals need to have the courage to challenge in this area and ask a number of questions:

> *We need to think about the impact that frequent change can have on an organisation, and bear in mind that people adapt to change in different ways... What is the underlying purpose of the change? Is this change necessary? What impact will this change have on our employees and other stakeholders? How many recent changes have we already implemented and how did they land? How do we communicate and get buy-in for the change? How will we monitor how our employees are coping with the change and how will we review how successfully it has been implemented?*

#### What senior leaders thought...

Senior professionals discussed the potential barriers and enablers of organisational change and adaptation. Current structures and decision-making models are often a blocker of agility, although COVID-19 has forced organisations to adapt more quickly. However, it remains to be seen whether change will continue at such pace as the initial pressures of COVID-19 recede, and business begins to return to 'normal'.

There was also a sense that it is too early to understand the long-term impacts of COVID-19 and how this will change businesses, as current changes are reactive, rather than long term. More important will be what actions and strategies organisations put in place post-COVID-19 – for which people professionals need to be front and centre to ensure changes are good for businesses and the people in them.

Internal change creates complexity for senior people professionals. They'll need to juggle the restructuring of the business to adapt, as well as restructuring the people function alongside this, to best serve the needs of the business.

### Looking ahead: what action should the people profession take to thrive in 2030 and beyond?

**Develop future-fit skills**

- People professionals must continue to be agile to thrive in a changing world. Previous research[21a] has identified a number of qualities and competencies, including purposefulness, learning mindset, change orientation, autonomy, empowerment, relationship management and collaboration.

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- The education and curriculum of HR must keep up to speed with the rapid changes within the people profession to ensure future graduates and practitioners are prepared for the futures and shifts that we see occurring over the next decade.
- The profession needs to build skills associated with change and project management practices.

**Make horizon-scanning a priority**

- People professionals need to scan the external environment to understand the drivers that influence the direction of business and therefore how it affects the organisation and its people.
- The people profession will need to anticipate upcoming shifts within the workplace to develop solutions and initiatives that consider people needs from the very start – continuing to put people first as the profession enables businesses to thrive.

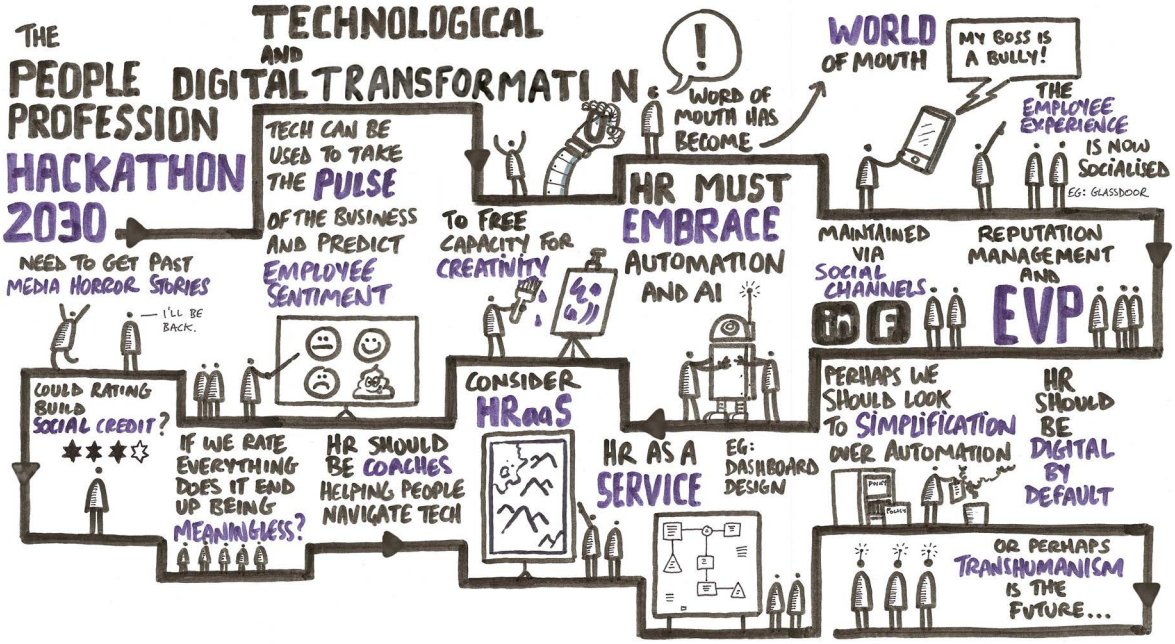
**Adapt people functions**

- People functions will need to adapt for the context they are working in. While there will always be key principles to guide the profession, they will need to truly partner with businesses and adapt the set-up of the function itself to do this effectively.
- The people profession needs to role-model adaptive, agile ways of working within their own teams.
- Senior people professionals also need to consider how the people function can evolve to facilitate agile ways of working and adapt with organisational change.

**Lead on strategic change and development**

- A key part of strategic HR will be to lead and influence organisational change and development strategy, rather than reacting to it – and balancing the needs of employees and the business in doing this.
- This means an increased need for people professionals across all specialisms to lead on organisational change and development, rather than this being expertise largely centred in specialist change and organisational development roles.

### B. Digital and technological transformation



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*A digital world cannot remove humans from the equation and HR professionals will have more opportunities to focus on individuals, thus interpersonal skills will be highly valued and sought after.*

*Digital and technology transformations are a total shift of mindset, culture and behaviours that requires HR skills to support the success of such transformations – does the profession have the skills?*

### What do we mean by digital and technological transformation?

People professionals talked about digital and technological transformation as a highly influential trend covering a vast range of technological changes impacting businesses and employees – from artificial intelligence and automation, to robotics and advancing technology, to people data and analytics. It's unclear how technology-centric organisations will be in ten years' time. What is certain is that the speed of transformation varies across sectors and is moderated by employees' willingness to change.[22] For the people profession, recent reports have also attempted to predict how future HR jobs will evolve depending on the level of technology adoption over the next decade (for example, see '21 HR jobs of the future').[23]

A report by the OECD (2019)[24] suggests more than one in ten jobs (14%) will cease to exist within the coming 15–20 years and a further 32% will be significantly different due to automation possibilities.

Recently, we have witnessed how digital transformation can make a large-scale impact on business continuity, as moving to digital ways of working allowed many businesses to operate remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, our *Workplace Technology: The employee experience*[25] report found that 29% of employees felt that the use of portable devices blurs home and work–life boundaries. As this data was collected pre-COVID-19, these figures are likely to be significantly higher in the current mass homeworking climate, due to the increased risk of digital presenteeism and burnout.

People professionals have a responsibility to address the many nuances associated with digital transformation and its impact on people. A risk of failing to manage digital transformation in a strategic way could affect many people concerns and ultimately result in people risks and job losses, instead of job creation, adaptation and more efficient working practices. People professionals need to be at the forefront of tech and digital initiatives, but how can we ensure that our profession has the right influence and capabilities to deliver digital transformation that is beneficial rather than detrimental to organisations and the people in them? This trend explores these questions, as well as the opportunities and challenges of digital transformation, as highlighted by the people profession community.

### Hackathon participant perspectives

**Managing tech inequalities and resistance across work communities**

The impact of technology on work varies across job roles and levels and is not evenly distributed. As mentioned above, job automation is set to steadily increase over the next 15–20 years and this will more likely impact lower-skilled employment. According to the OECD,[26] fewer young people enter the labour market at a middle-skill level because there are fewer jobs at this level. This illustrates just one example of the potential inequalities on the impact of technology in the workplace.

Across the wider landscape of work, economic drivers will also widen technological divides and have wider implications for society and work. For example, lack of access to remote learning in schools will have a detrimental effect on education and subsequently future talent pipelines.

Additionally, access to technology (or the lack of) and subsequent inequalities could result in divides across the workforce between different groups of workers. This may result in tensions between workers, for example between office-based and operational-based employees. It also raises moral and ethical considerations such as fairness across the workforce. At an organisational level, there will be differences among businesses who have more investment in digital transformation and advancing technology. Recognising and managing these inequalities will be a challenge that will fall to the profession to lead on – specifically, how to address ethical considerations for people when introducing new technology and automation. Ethical issues with decision-making using algorithms have already impacted societal trust in these methods: *'Consider the parents protesting the AI-derived student grades... Employees will have different expectations; a louder voice, lower tolerance for mistakes and higher standard of trust.'*

**What senior leaders thought...**

Senior leaders of the profession highlighted that tech-centricity and the level of adoption will differ across sectors and industries. One example was given for the transport industry 'defending traditional ways of working' and being slow to transition into advancing technology, given the vast implications it would have on their infrastructure, business models and skills demand.

Senior leaders also emphasised that willingness to adopt new technology varies across sectors and industries. For example, one leader talked about the transport sector being reluctant to shift by defending traditional work given the huge shift and practical implications advancing technology would have on their sector (that is, implications of going cashless, developing transport technology requiring more advanced engineering skills). They perceived such transformations as a slower, ongoing progression that would require large-scale retraining and reskilling of the workforce to support the developing business infrastructure.

Hackathon participants felt that people professionals will need to lead on engaging the workforce with such transformation to minimise disengagement and resistance: *'adopting different behaviours and being involved in helping those who are resistant to the changes in technology.'* Conversations with senior leaders built on this by acknowledging the cultural element to the delivery of successful digital transformation, which was seen as a role that sat firmly with people professionals:

> *What are the fears around these aspects of digital transformation and what is the cultural impact that such initiatives will have? How do HR enable a culture conducive to digital transformation where there is less resistance and employees are ready to embrace digital transformation?*

Our *Workplace Technology: The employee experience*[27] report noted that consulting with employees on the implementation of new technology has a positive influence on perceptions around job quality (see employee voice section of the report, pp18–21). However, only 35% of employees were consulted prior to the implementation of new technology. This highlights the importance of employee consultation to understand the perceptions and potential impact surrounding new technology and transformations.

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**What senior leaders thought...**

A successful transformation is more than digital and should engage people early on to ensure they feel part of the change. In particular, senior leaders highlighted that employees should be recognised as key stakeholders in the transformation process: '*We should be thinking about the internal customer experience rather than how we can get colleagues to do what we need them to.*'

Suggestions around engaging with and consulting the workforce on digital change programmes included prioritising regular communications and in-person sessions (where possible) to avoid developing a culture where employees are perceived as passive stakeholders: '*digital transformation should not be done to them.*'

Senior leaders also talked about using the voice of the workforce to engage employees and use their operational knowledge as a sounding board to 'test' and refine transformations.

## Adoption of advancing tech and automation and the role of people professionals

People professionals were very clear about the importance of HR's involvement with digital and technology initiatives as well as the use of software analytic tools, from conception stage. The absence of people professionals in the early stages of design and strategic planning around such initiatives risks overlooking people considerations and the impact on employees.

Hackathon participants noted that it would be highly detrimental to the success of such programmes to retrospectively fit people considerations once digital transformation plans have been decided.

**Working example: automation of job roles and tasks**

Depending on the scale of automation, there would be several key aspects that people professionals would need to question and challenge the wider business on, for example:

1. Decide what can and can't be automated – where do you need people in roles as opposed to large-scale automation, which dehumanises the workplace?
2. Decide what you do with the employees whose roles are being automated – for example, redesign their role, upskill/reskill.
3. Decide what areas of the business will be needed and how to support talent and skills gaps (that is, hiring new talent, upskilling the current workforce, borrowing/sharing talent and skills across the business).
4. Manage job loss, redundancies and the behavioural and psychological aspects of the transformation programme (including employee resistance).

Advancing HR systems enable people professionals to automate transactional/operational tasks that require less human interaction, which in turn frees up practitioners' time to undertake more strategic, value-adding work and focus on the more 'human' side of their role:

> *HR in the future will be completely different. Say goodbye to the [large] number of HR jobs we experience today. Say hello to the HR chatbot who will replace all but the most complex of HR tasks. HR systems are already well advanced and need little human interaction.*

This raised discussions around soft skills becoming more critical for people professionals:

> *A digital world cannot remove humans from the equation and HR professionals will have more opportunities to focus on individuals, thus interpersonal skills will be highly valued and sought after. With AI, automation and digital systems, the soft aspects of HR skills will become a key differentiator. So today's soft skills will actually become the future's power skills.*

On the other hand, increasing the level of automated HR could result in a more rigid, policy-driven HR culture: *'HR policy will become less flexible and more process-driven with simple logic responses – this will enable AI to take over the human when it comes to HR admin.'* This could lead to employees and people managers feeling dissatisfied with HR services and people teams. To combat this, a human review of processes and outcomes needs to take place and align with the needs of stakeholders.

**What senior leaders thought...**

It is unclear exactly how technology advances will evolve people professionals' roles – this will depend on the culture around technology and pace of digital adoption within our organisations. However, one thing that is clear is the need for HR to understand its internal brand perception and how they can add value in this space.

### Developing data and tech skills throughout the organisation

> *There is currently an underlying assumption of digital and tech skills which many of the workforce don't have.*

People professionals recognised that all employees need basic technology skills to feel confident when working more digitally. This applies to the entire workforce, including senior leaders, to ensure skills are relevant to drive changes in technology and data. Currently the perception is one that assumes a basic level of competency among the workforce and a lack of appreciation for the broad spectrum of experience and confidence when it comes to technology in the workplace.

Business partnering and aligning strategic goals across business areas was acknowledged as a key area where the profession can add value. Where other areas of the business are best placed to drive digital and technology initiatives, the profession should position itself as a credible business partner.

### Developing digital and data analytics skills within the people function

> *Closing the skills gap around technology and analytics will be key, as well as highlighting how our use of technology itself is adding value.*

People professionals having the skills to use and interpret data to better inform business decisions is a key area of development.

This means taking a strategic role in digital transformation, and using data and analytics to inform people decisions and demonstrate the profession's value to the rest of the business:

> *Data is the key to you understanding your business, its performance and your impact. Data should be approached objectively. Differing types of data should be sought and used to understand issues and the impact of solutions. A test and learn approach should be taken with curiosity applied to data rather than data used to prove or disprove a position or view.*

In turn, this will help ensure the people function is closely aligned to the business goals and bottom line:

> *HR's value will be seen in a bigger picture, when clearly and visibly contributing to the business performance and financial success.*

> *The need for us to anticipate future need will become more prevalent. Making strong business decisions rather than just reacting to the current situation or risks. If HR wishes to make valuable contributions to boards, we need to demonstrate business savvy by using data to identify future trends and complete horizon-scanning that extends beyond pure HR interests.*

Our *People Profession Survey 2020* highlighted a significant demand for the utilisation of people data and analytics within businesses – 89% of organisations plan to use data and analytics. However, it was also identified as an area of skill development, with 37% of in-house HR professionals saying their organisation collects and uses very basic HR data, with fewer than one in ten (6%) drawing on more advanced analytics techniques. It's also important that analytics are used for the right purpose, managing ethical concerns around the reliability of AI techniques:

> *AI is only as unbiased as the data it is trained on. It seems to me that HR may need to see the bigger picture and bring in the human and in many cases common sense to challenge the fairness of people decisions being based on algorithms or AI.*

**What senior leaders thought...**

> *HR has to ask the right questions – not to know the answer, but to challenge.*

Senior leaders perceive people data skills to be a gap in HR's capability and credibility: *'Data isn't something that naturally sits with HR – this needs to change.'* Simply landing a report was perceived as insufficient – people professionals need to go beyond that and interpret data using their people and business expertise: *'It's not enough to bring the numbers – you need to bring the commercial mindset and value-add.'*

Senior leaders call on the profession to role-model curiosity, challenge traditional thinking and drive action with the support of data insights. To do this, the profession needs to be better at interpreting data, not just reporting the findings (that is, what does this insight tell us about our people and how does it inform business solutions and decisions?). Additionally, senior leaders talked about people professionals taking an evidence-based approach in their practice: *'HR need to define their problem before solving it, use different sources of data and take ownership.'* Being evidence-based is a core professional value within the new Profession Map.[28]

### Managing resistance to adopt digitalised ways of working and learning

> *To avoid disengagement, we need to carefully manage resistance.*

Participants echoed that the profession will need to embrace digital change and move away from traditional methods of working to keep pace with the digitalisation of the workplace. Additionally, it was noted that the profession can no longer solely rely on face-to-face meetings, interviews and training methods. People professionals need to be firmly embedded in the digital strategy of organisations in order to ensure that the needs of certain teams – the likes of talent management, recruitment and L&D – are considered

when moving to new digital platforms. On-demand learning, creating digital people solutions and initiatives, and delivering learning through digitalised platforms were all frequently discussed L&D areas:

> *Learning and development used to happen through one-to-one or one-to-many delivery, or self-study; this may have been expert-to-learner or peer-to-peer learning. In essence this has not changed, but we now have a vast array of tools in which these activities now operate. The approaches are similar but you may need to apply your existing skills differently.*

Other participants noted that we will need an even greater focus on learning and skill development in the wake of digital technology, to ensure that displaced workers have new skills, and workers have the right skills to work with technology; *'How many humans will remain in many of the jobs that they currently occupy? Jobs will reconfigure and people will need to retrain continually to keep up – if they are still needed.'* Having agile, reactive and just-in-time learning offerings is essential to support this development. This focus will need to extend beyond the organisation level – if displaced workers need to completely reskill, more time and funding will need to be devoted to learning and training at a government policy level to avoid high levels of unemployment.

> *We will also be facing some reshape in the context of people skills vs skills demands. Automation will bring changes; some roles won't be needed anymore when other roles appear on a job market. There will be changes in skills gaps on a market as well as high numbers of skills not so relevant to the new circumstances, so this will be very important to reshape thinking and to focus on talent development and reskilling people.*

### Collaboration of expertise across the business for successful transformations

A debate emerged throughout the hackathon regarding the ongoing relationship with IT teams, given the shifts in digital transformation and advancing technology that are causing the profession to pivot substantially. There were two possible future ways of working identified here:

1. Creating a business partnership between HR and IT – to ensure people considerations are at the forefront and heart of any digital transformation and introduction of new technology plans. The thinking here was that it was within HR's remit to ask the right questions and challenge IT to think considerably deeper about the impact on people: *'Understand how to enable efficiency through technology and be involved in the procurement process.'*
2. Siloed HR and IT – if the profession is resistant to digital changes or fails to challenge and influence in this space, IT would come out on top and the functions become less connected, 'leading HR to its downfall'. Additionally, data, technology and automation would still evolve at pace, flouting people needs and employee experience.

**What senior leaders thought...**

It will take a collaboration of expertise to make effective digital transformation happen. One senior leader used the recent global pandemic as an example of this:

> *COVID has shown examples where HR, IT and operations have worked effectively together to make initiatives happen in a very short space of time – there was a clear common goal. Can we learn from this and continue to drive this more collaborative way of working?*

### Digital transformations cannot outweigh the human elements of work

*The acceleration of technology provides amazing opportunities; however, we need to make sure that our current and future colleagues are competent communicators in order to really get the best out of each other.*

Hackathon participants highlighted the importance of developing and championing human soft skills – such as empathy, moral reasoning and ethical considerations – to shape organisations, people management practices and employee experience of work: *'Digital and technology will continue to be a huge part of our evolution. We need to consider what makes us uniquely human in shaping the employment experience.'* People professionals felt that digitalisation of the workplace will only strengthen the need for softer skills as core competencies within the profession.

**What senior leaders thought...**

Digital transformation initiatives need to be balanced. The people professional will need to drive the human connection element and consideration of people needs: *'We still need to recognise the importance of people: is it how people want to work?'*

### Looking ahead: what action should the people profession take to thrive in 2030 and beyond?

**Develop digital skills for a digital world**

- We must address the skills gaps and assumption that all employees have a basic level of technology and digital skills. Our research suggests that the spectrum of digital skills is varied and broad across businesses. The challenge for the profession is ensuring a basic level of competency and confidence across the workforce.
- People analytic skills and interpretation of data has been noted as a consistent development area for the profession. The profession can demonstrate value-add by ensuring they are a credible commercial partner and bringing the people expertise and insight when it comes to using data to drive decision-making.

**Bring people expertise to digital transformation to add real value**

- The profession can lead on managing resistance by engaging with their people throughout digital change programmes, to foster a digital readiness culture and involve employees as key stakeholders in the transformation process.
- Challenge other business areas to consider the impact of digital transformation on people and their work. The profession has a responsibility to keep people needs and issues at the front and centre of digital transformation.
- Address ethical considerations when handling data and implementing new technology and digital programmes. For example, who has access to and is responsible for personal data? Is data securely stored and protected?

**Build reputation in digital transformation**

- As well as having the right digital skills, people professionals need to build their in-house reputation as a team with business acumen and a credible business partner that works collaboratively and asks the right people questions.

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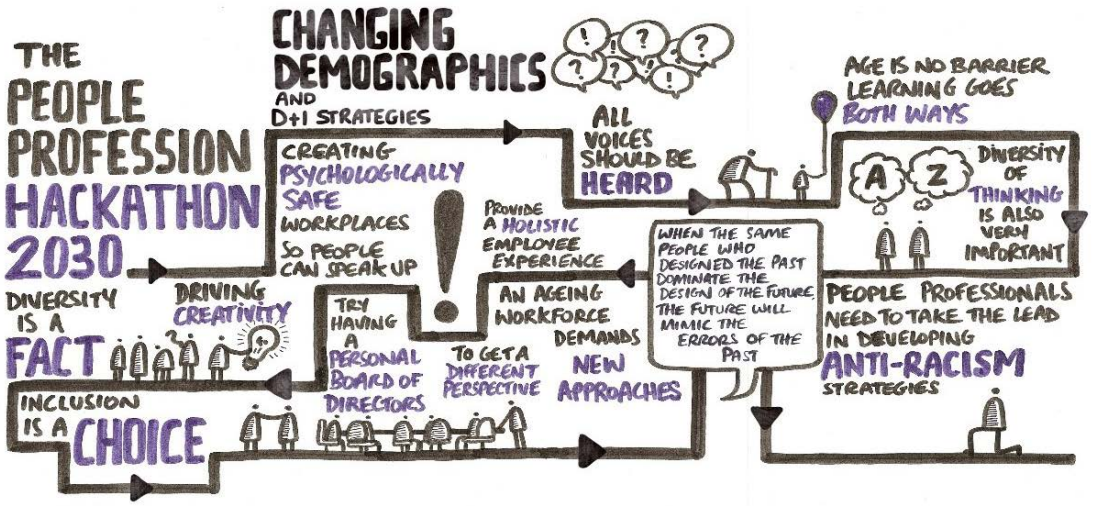
### C. Changing demographics and D&I strategy




*If we ensured that every interaction, every initiative, every decision was checked against how it contributed to making people feel valued, safe, that they belonged, had strong connections, and were empowered to project their own, authentic and unique self, then we would be achieving more than we do at present.*

#### What do we mean by changing demographics and D&I strategy?

Recent events have shone a light on inequality in our society and workplaces. Challenging discrimination in all its forms, and being actively anti-racist is imperative for the people profession – now, and in the future. The people profession needs to support a shift in thinking around inclusion, individuality and the value of diversity.

This is all the more important in the wake of political and societal change in the next decade. A changing world means the demographics of our workplaces are also shifting. Ageing workforces are just one example of this. People management practices need to support all employees to thrive and take an individualised approach to do this.

#### Hackathon participant perspectives

Many hackathon participants noted that diversity and inclusion (D&I) strategy and changing demographics are far from new topics. The importance of creating diverse and inclusive workplaces was clearly articulated:

*For our organisations to prosper and the people we represent and support within them to be engaged, we have to be reflective of the society we serve.*

Participants identified that keeping up with the pace of change in society, and understanding demographic shifts, and the drivers of these shifts (for example, Brexit), will be key future challenges. The agility and confidence of the people profession to lead on D&I was also called out. We explore how these challenges will impact the people profession below, looking at D&I strategies and changing demographics in turn.

#### Diversity and inclusion strategy

*The uncertainty lies in what demographic change is going to look like in the future. Will there be more movement of people post-COVID-19 and Brexit – or less? The complexity*

*of diversity and inclusion is just increasing... again, we need to be on the pace with these changes. And ambiguity abounds when it comes to diversity and inclusion – and we need to learn to embrace this, be confident with it and lead the debate on it.*

*We know from history that this agenda can be one of the most volatile in terms of challenging social norms and social structures. But these challenges are coming along thicker and faster. Not long ago it was #MeToo – now it is Black Lives Matter. These will be around for a while – but others will follow soon – possibly in the areas of disability and religion. And we need to be agile and confident enough to deal with them.*

A focus on inclusion as part of future D&I strategies was widely discussed, with people professionals highlighting that a change in thinking about D&I is required. Ultimately, all employees need to work in a supportive, engaging environment that welcomes individual perspectives:

*If an employee doesn't have a supportive working environment in which the individual can add value based on their uniqueness, the person can become less motivated over time. On the other hand, if uniqueness in the form of a different approach towards problem-solving is welcomed, that can bring fresh ideas, innovative products, services and solutions.*

A key learning for the people profession is the importance of defining and driving improvements and debate on the complexities of diversity, inclusion and equality within the context of the organisation's culture.

**What senior leaders thought...**

This focus on inclusion and working environments was echoed in senior leader roundtables. As one HR director (HRD) said, *'Our role has always been to maximise employee experience. That's what inclusion is about – letting people be their best at work.'*

Focusing on creating this supportive environment, and the basic components of good-quality jobs that all employees need – a desire to feel valued, to be safe at work and to contribute to society – was suggested.

This broader approach is recognised in research. For example, one research paper[29] explores the potential issues with using traditional categorical definitions of diversity, which oversimplify people's lived experience and are counterproductive to ensuring individuals have a positive experience at work. Instead, the research argues that the people professionals need to look at current organisational norms and adopt an approach to diversity and inclusion that embraces complexity and questioning, rather than 'fitting in'.

However, it was still acknowledged that talking about and supporting diversity was critical, as there are specific barriers to equality faced by different groups – and targeted action is needed to address these.

Finally, a focus on leadership and culture is required as part of D&I strategies – recognising that a change in workplace culture and ways of working is often required alongside various D&I initiatives. Leadership and culture was seen as integral to this:

*I have already raised developing managerial approaches and leadership styles and culture as key issues to the success of organisations in the future – evidence shows that organisations who change how they work and diversify their leaders and employees are more successful financially and are more attractive to potential employees.*

### Changing demographics

As the world of work changes, organisations may need to consider and cater for a wider range of people than before, for example in a multigenerational workforce: *'the focus of people professionals will therefore expand to manage a much broader population, as an "extended workforce".'*

This could create a number of challenges, such as technology readiness, succession planning and knowledge management, with people management practices needing to adapt accordingly.

> *In addition, where we see the older generation adjust to retirement through flexible working, is enough being done for succession planning combined with the training of new recruits?*
>
> *How will we ensure that the invaluable skills held by our ageing workforce are passed onto younger workers? Will phased retirements and job-sharing become more standard and accepted?*
>
> *As technology moves forward, will our ageing workforce be supported to adapt? We are naturally resistant to change as humans, and organisations will need to recognise this to ensure they can move forward and remain productive.*

There was also discussion about the impact of changing employee expectations – namely whether younger generations expect more from their employers, and the potential impact of this on line management, leadership and the role the people profession plays in supporting leaders under pressure. Managing these expectations was also a concern:

> *Why is this becoming more challenging? Not only are employees more aware of their rights but... new generations are not bound by the concepts of loyalty and tend to have a greater feeling of entitlement. Both of the latter are having massive consequences for any organisation that ignores them.*

Overall, it was felt that having more generations in our workforce than ever before could create additional complexity for the people profession.

However, it's important to note that generational differences are sometimes overstated. For example, it's often thought that younger generations feel more entitled – which creates a set of challenges for organisations. But some academic research highlights that this is in relation to society more broadly – in other words, pushing for wider societal change rather than individual changes. Younger generations may have more bandwidth to advocate this in organisations for various reasons – such as having more leisure time – but this was likely the same case for generations before them (Brant and Castro 2019[30]).

### Inequalities in a changing labour market

Changing demographics are influenced by other external trends that we also need to consider when exploring the future of the profession. Later in this report, we discuss the changing employment relationship – and the potential for increased contingent, gig economy work.

This change could be an opportunity for different, more flexible ways of working – however, it could also reduce job security – especially for younger workers if economic downturn creates fewer job opportunities.

Changes to skills demand could also widen inequality, with those with 'in-demand' skills having more choice within the job market and greater power to demand more secure working, and better services:

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*Those fortunate enough to have the choice will, however, need more personalised services, leading to more low-skilled and low-paid jobs. It was suggested... that the jobs in the middle can be offshored or mechanised. You've got the two ends, but the middle has disappeared.*

In the UK this change in skills and the labour market could also create particular challenges for young people entering work, who struggle to gain the skills and experience they need to progress and access good-quality jobs:

*Britain's economy has shifted more towards low-skilled jobs and less towards high-skilled ones than other European nations. We therefore need to be equipping ourselves and our young people who are currently heading out into this environment with the skills, knowledge and support that we will all require to be on the right side of this glass.*

### What senior leaders thought...

To create inclusion, and diversity, there needs to be a general level of shared responsibility within the organisational culture. D&I is not something that HR should 'deal with' in a reactive way. Instead, we need more collective responsibility and to ensure inclusion is a long-term strategy that is a golden thread through all activities.

A balancing act between fairness and equal treatment is required. For some, fairness means treating all employees exactly the same. Traditionally, HR policies and processes are designed for this. But, as COVID-19 has demonstrated, you can't create a policy or process to cover all eventualities, circumstances and individual needs – more trust and discretion is required from line managers.

Building on what had been touched on in the hackathon, the people profession must avoid being weighed down by policies and consider how we can influence wider societal thinking. The ultimate goal of D&I strategies should be enabling access to jobs and ensuring everyone can be the best they can be. However, stigma and prejudice stand in the way.

Finally, the value of the people profession will be to equip managers with the right skills to lead inclusively, and broker conversations about diversity and inclusion. This will be all the more important going forward into economic downturn, when investment might be diverted from D&I.

Another area of focus should be to improve access to and progression within the people profession itself.

## Looking ahead: what action should the people profession take to thrive in 2030 and beyond?

**Use expertise on people and people management practices to develop effective D&I strategy**

- It's clear we need to consider how we adapt current ways of working and people management practices to progress D&I. This could include moving towards the use of a principle- rather than policy-led approach to inclusion to support individual need. People professionals can create value by creating organisational consensus on these principles and supporting line managers to lead inclusively.
- The people profession will also need to influence senior leaders and the wider organisation to champion equality, especially in times of economic downturn when investment in diversity and inclusion may fall.

**Ensure people teams have the resources to drive D&I**

- While D&I is not something 'done' by people teams alone, the people profession does have a key role to play in progressing D&I. That said, people teams should be given the resources to lead conversations on D&I, evaluate and adapt people management practices to be more inclusive, and support managers to lead inclusively.

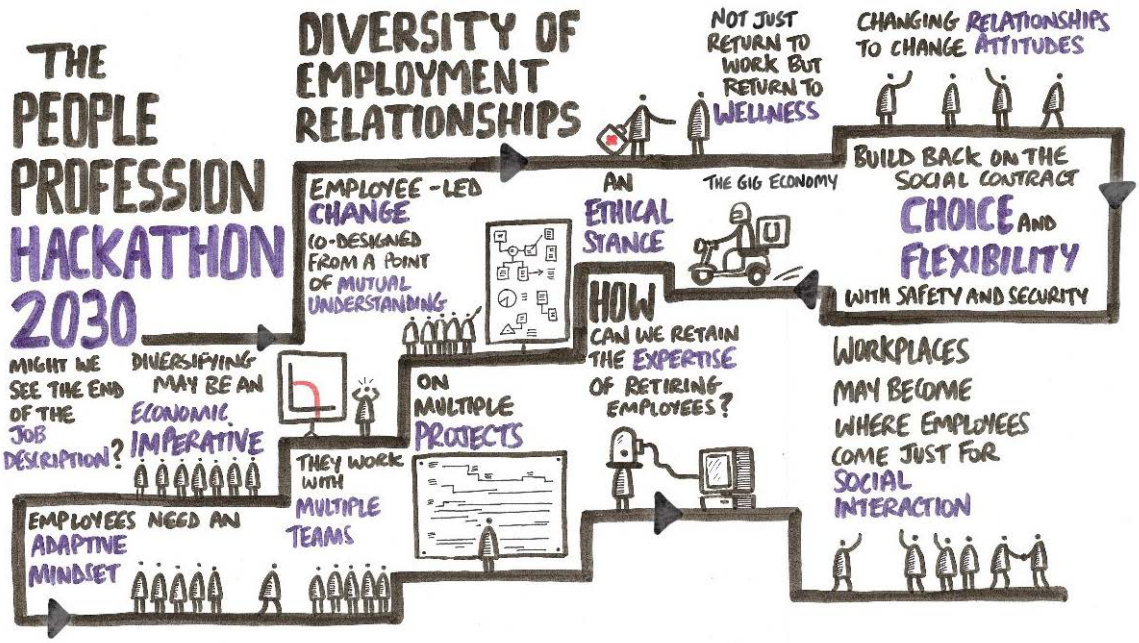
**Be curious and continually update knowledge on D&I**

- People professionals will need to be equipped with up-to-date knowledge and understanding of D&I to define and drive improvements within the context of the organisation's culture. As social constructs of gender, ethnicity, disability, and so on, are evolving, people professionals will need to feel confident to champion diversity and shape people practices accordingly.
- We will need to have professional courage and confidence to challenge where changes aren't being made or current practice is outdated.
- The profession will need to take an evidence-based approach, especially when it comes to forecasting and understanding demographic shifts. For example, are generational differences in employee expectations significant enough to adapt our people management practices, or are other considerations more important?

**Look outwards to understand the systemic barriers to D&I**

- Linked to the skills and capabilities around up-to-date knowledge, people professionals will need to consider how to challenge existing and emerging biases – for example, biases that may develop as globalisation impacts businesses and our workforce demographics (for example cultural, language and accent biases).
- There is also a strategic role to play in raising awareness around disproportional biases towards certain groups of workers as trends impact employment and work outside immediate organisational contexts

### D. Diversifying employment relationships



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*There are many challenges to working with this complex mix of people who 'are' the organisation. How do we treat people who are in different contractual relationships with the organisation fairly? How do we ensure that these people are able to work effectively together and, depending upon their role, all 'represent' the organisation effectively to customers? How do we support L&D to enable all 'our' people to work productively and effectively on our behalf?*

### What do we mean by changing demographics and D&I strategy?

Our *Best to Good Practice HR: Developing principles for the profession* report[31] found diversity of employment relationships to be a prominent trend influencing the world of work and this was also very much reflected throughout the hackathon. External drivers like Brexit, the instable economic environment and consumer demands have fundamentally shifted the idea of the 'typical employment relationship'. Most recently, COVID-19 has profoundly shifted the working paradigm in many ways, including the impact on the labour market and employers' responses (CIPD 2020).[32] Additionally, changing employee expectations suggest that employees want a more personalised, flexible employment relationship with their employer. Aside from this, technological factors influencing where and how we can work could mean a rise in portfolio working or working for multiple employers becoming the new norm. The diversification of employment relationships raises interesting questions about how organisations will manage employee engagement and culture and purpose moving forward. People practices must also accommodate changes in development and learning investment where one employer is no longer the norm.

Hackathon participants felt that people professionals will need to take charge and enable the evolving employment relationships, leading the way in terms of what the different employment journeys look like and how best to support atypical career paths. It will also be down to people professionals to understand the ethical and moral implications of managing different tiers of employment concurrently, ensuring fairness and recognising valuable and quality employment relationships for both the employee and employer:

> *I feel we are going to face more challenges. I think remote working is just the start of employees taking a stand, and although I advocate for valued employees and equality, I think HR may need to adapt again to manage increased demand.*

Championing better work and working lives is the CIPD's core purpose, but it is also a rationale that is shared widely across disciplines (for example, see *Good Work: The Taylor review of modern working practices*[33]).

This highlights that while people professionals may be key influencers in the space of enabling good work and job quality throughout their workforces, it is also a shared responsibility and wider agenda for businesses. The CIPD's *Good Work Index*[34] provides an annual snapshot of job quality across the UK labour market.

### Hackathon participants' perspectives

**Power imbalances between stakeholders: who holds the power?**
Conflicting views and discussions debated which stakeholder has more influence and power in driving the employment market. On one hand, some viewed employees to hold the power to influence business working relationships, but others noted that this

is dependent on what skills are in demand and the precariousness of the labour market, meaning employers still call the shots. For example:

> *Today the employment market is driven by employers, especially for gig workers. I foresee a shift in this marketplace for freelancers by 2030, where professionals will get to pick and choose from various clients based on their reviews and employment experience scores given by other gig workers.*

While changing employment relationships could be perceived positively to allow for greater flexibility for workers, it also raises questions about job security and potential inequalities due to power imbalances between the organisation and its workforce and between different employee groups.

Some workers, with in-demand skills, would be in a better position to negotiate on their terms of work, whereas those with less in-demand skills may be forced into work that is unstable and low-skilled with fluctuating working patterns, demanding workloads and unfair pay, with few employee benefits:

> *Individuals with the skill and knowledge will be in demand, and when demand outstrips supply it will push up wages or create an environment where you can negotiate your own T&Cs. Those fortunate enough to have the choice will need more personalised services, leading to more low-skilled and low-paid jobs. Jobs in the middle can be offshored or mechanised – you've got the two ends, but the middle has disappeared.*

> *For some, the perceived security of a full-time job may still be a big reason not to explore some of these alternative forms of employment. This could create a new paradigm, where one can be employed part-time by several organisations at the same time.*

As well as adapting its approach, the profession will need to face up to new challenges brought about by wider changes to employment relationships, forced by external drivers – for example, an increased focus on inequality and advocating for gig and portfolio workers:

> *Much of our conversation on the value of the people profession is set in an organisation context. Yet, we've highlighted the trend towards changing employment relationships. We need to consider our role and impact in championing and giving voice to portfolio and gig workers, and reducing the risks of widening labour force inequality.*

> *Zero-hours contracts will never die out but they will be more ethically and morally used as there will always be a need for them.*

This also has implications for wider people management practices and learning more broadly as the traditional career model could change in the future: *'[It's] more likely people won't be having "a career for life" like in the past, but our whole work life and career will be built based on a number of different cross-sector and cross-functional experiences and skills.'*

**What senior leaders thought...**

In addition to the perceived misalignment of power and employee versus employer expectations, senior leaders debated whether flexible working should be seen as a privilege, offered at the employer's discretion, or as a right for employees. Some called for businesses to 'take a harder line' on this matter, particularly as flexible and homeworking rights can lead to inconsistencies and unfairness across the workforce (for example between office-based workers and operational workers as well as differences between junior and senior staff).

In order for changes to happen in employment relationships, like portfolio careers, legislation and infrastructure will also need to adapt beyond the people profession. Currently senior leaders believe this to be a slow process where businesses are operating at the 'edge of the law': *'If we are going to be more agile around careers, pensions legislation and contracts need to keep up.'*

### Aligning employment relationships with the business context

People professionals will create the most value in the future if they adapt practices to their business type and consider the demographics of its workforce: *'HR needs to adapt its approach to align with the type and size of business it services and also take into account the breakdown of staff/workers/contractors that are employees.'*

In part, employment relationships will also be influenced by organisational business models linked with internal change. For example, if we see more roles move to a 'gig economy' way of working, with a more transient workforce, the typical employment relationship – of working for one employer – will change. A rise in remote or flexible working, with different shift patterns, could also influence this:

> *I think there will also be a shift from a fixed working hours pattern (for example 9am–5pm) into task-oriented and project-oriented jobs, where the delivery itself will be more important than fixed hours of 'being attached to the desk'.*

### Moving to more permanent remote and homeworking employment relationships

Given the vast shift of adopting digital ways of working as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, participants recognise the impact this has had on employment relationships and the important role HR has had to play in partnering with the business to transition from office-based operations to homeworking arrangements. This has led to a delicate balancing act for leaders, who have sought to ensure their teams are given enough freedom to manage their home and working lives, while making sure they remain productive and effective in the new arrangements.

There is a general expectation that employees will request more flexibility and control over how and where they work, particularly that many will want to continue working more remotely in the future. Our recent COVID-19 employer survey suggests that regular homeworking is expected to rise to 37% following the pandemic – an expectation that has doubled throughout the crisis (18% pre-crisis, CIPD 2020[35]). Similarly, full-time homeworking expectations have also followed this trend, rising from 9% pre-crisis to 22%.

This will have a number of implications for people professionals and people managers and also raises questions about job quality, organisational culture and supporting

employee health and wellbeing. For example, how will organisations ensure employees are engaged and continue to feel a sense of belonging to the organisation when they are physically detached from the workplace? How do people professionals enable home and remote workers to remain productive and avoid the negative impacts of homeworking on employee health and wellbeing (for example mental ill-health and burnout, poor ergonomic health)?

**What senior leaders thought...**

*We have got to be the architects of the new world of work.*

Hybrid or blended ways of working will introduce new challenges for the profession and people management: *'When everyone is at home, it's easy – I'm getting nervous about the new world where it's blended.'* Senior leaders specifically noted challenges between teams with a mixture of homeworkers, office workers and blended workers (that is, promotional differences, inclusivity difficulties, tensions between workers who are more 'visible' and those who are mostly homeworking).

People managers will also need support from the profession when managing hybrid teams – for example, how to have difficult conversations virtually, performance management of virtual teams, running meetings across a hybrid team (that is, some face-to-face workers and homeworkers in one meeting).

A more immediate issue highlighted by senior leaders is the idea of the 'fractured post-COVID-19 workforce', whereby there are different opinions and motivations (or a lack thereof) to re-join the physical workplace. Leaders felt that the responsibility lies with people professionals to incentivise the workforce to return while alleviating health concerns and psychological fears around returning safely.

## Looking ahead: what action should the people profession take to thrive in 2030 and beyond?

**Develop line managers to work in a complex environment with multiple types of employment**

- Support line managers to develop their competencies when managing different parts of the workforce within one team. For example, supporting the people management of virtual teams – see our *Developing Effective Virtual Teams*[36] evidence review for evidence-based recommendations.

**Balance stakeholder needs and expectations**

- People professionals must balance employee expectations with operational capacity to develop acceptable and effective employment relationships. It will be down to people professionals to consider appropriate employment relationships that align with their business context, consumer/customer needs and the demographics of their workforce.
- Practitioners will need to feel confident having honest conversations to address inconsistencies, 'privileges' and tensions among the workforce to ensure fairness, equality, and good job quality. This will require strategic input and work with senior leaders.
- People professionals will need to be on the lookout for potential misalignment of power/control/leniency between employees and employers when it comes to working practices and relationships.

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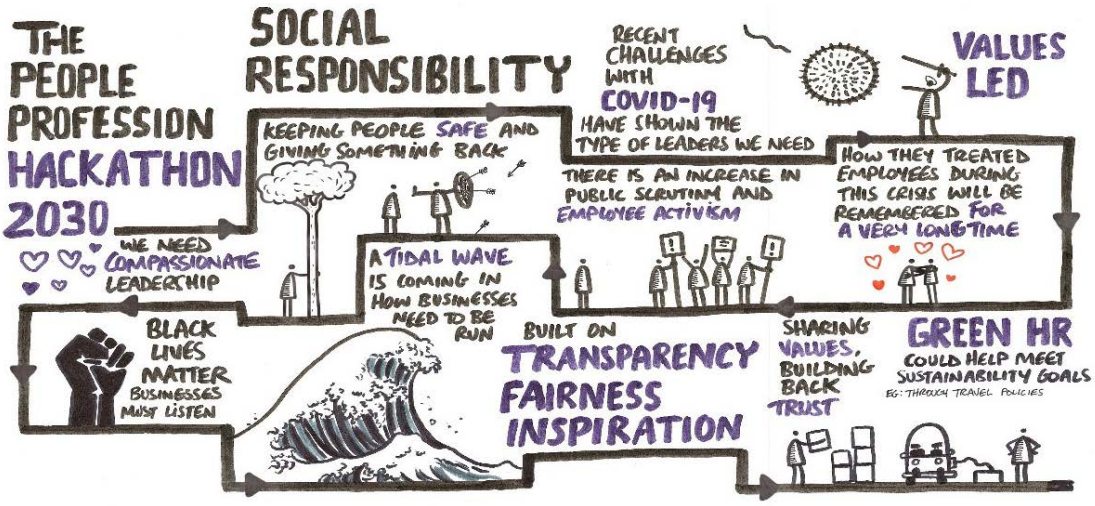
### E. Sustainability, purpose and responsible business




> *Are we in the business of adapting to whatever happens, or are we in the business of influencing what happens? I believe that most people genuinely care what happens in the world, but my question is about the boundaries of our roles as HR professionals. Climate change is a great example.*

#### What do we mean by sustainability, purpose and responsible business?

COVID-19 has shone a light on sustainability, ethics, inequality and in turn corporate social responsibility (CSR). A rise in demand for sustainable, ethical and responsible business practices is coming from regulators and investors, as well as employees. People professionals should be at the forefront of driving responsible business that creates value for all stakeholders, including employees.

Climate change and environmental impact were also identified as sustainable business issues – this appears to have risen up the people profession agenda in recent years. A report[37] examining hundreds of studies between 1993 and 2019 found that green management and actions taken on environmental responsibility had become one of the most popular areas of CSR and HRM, having previously been on the periphery.

#### COVID-19 as a catalyst for change

Unsustainable or unethical business practices are not new – but COVID-19 has demonstrated that while many businesses have stepped up and done the right thing, there are pockets of poor practice. Inequalities in our society have also been brought to the fore, which in turn could lead to longer-lasting change:

> *The system shocks presented by COVID-19, the causes of the BLM protests, awareness of issues like people trafficking and modern slavery, and international political instabilities and corruption, [could lead to] change and [a world] where we achieve at least the beginnings of mutual cooperation and respect, towards both people and the [environment].*

This theme emerged throughout the hackathon – on day 8, the discussion focused on a rethink of capitalism and the work being a force for good rather than purely shareholder gain:

> *Have we hit peak capitalism? Potentially. The pandemic has thrust sharply into perspective what life is all about and what we really value and need. And its continuation and reverberation will continue.*

We need to consider how the prioritisation of social responsibility and responsible business practices will impact society and workplaces, and therefore the role of the people profession, in 2030.

However, a focus on socially responsible business could be hindered by a sole focus on commercial gain. An interesting question was raised about the ethics and responsibilities of businesses as we look to the future: can ethical practice, ensuring the safety of the workforce and providing professional expertise to contribute positively to society be balanced with the need for commercial gain? Many organisations identify the former principles as some of their key values, yet often succumb to commercial pressure. It's a difficult balancing act that many attempt to conduct effectively.

Read more about senior leaders' perspectives on responsible business during times of crisis in our report *Responsible Business through Crisis: Senior leaders on trust and resilience during COVID-19*.

### Increasing demand for transparency

Given the increasing access to information and opinions about companies that we now have, there was acknowledgement of the role that the people profession can, and should, play to ensure businesses act in the best interest of their key stakeholders:

> *People demand transparency and accountability from (particularly) corporations, and the rise of the 'cancel culture' means that reputational damage could be catastrophic for brands.*

There is an opportunity, then, for the profession to influence this at the highest level, through challenging boards to consider wider environmental, social and corporate governance (ESG) issues:

> *Cynicism over fake news has bubbled over to an expectation of truth and honesty. Companies who 'bend the truth' are left for dust. Fairness and equality are absolute.*

Businesses may be under pressure from regulators to ensure they have sustainable business practices and benefit their local community, while employees expect more from their employers in terms of fair practices, transparency and equality. However, whether employee demands have an impact will depend on the power employees have.

### Purpose-/values-led business

There was also discussion through the roundtables and hackathon about the purpose of organisations, and work more broadly. Organisations need to be clear on their purpose – including how they act responsibly and sustainably – while recognising that purpose will evolve over time in line with external shifts.

As one participant noted, our workplaces sit within wider systems and can provide benefits for *'our ecosystem and planet; our societies and communities; our identity and sense of belonging'.*

There has been an increase in employee demand to work for an employer that has a purpose and values that align with their own. Some participants suggested employees no longer simply look for a job – they look for somewhere they can feel proud to work, whose values they agree with:

> *It's no longer enough for companies to comply with legislation, to be successful we must be a force for good. Employees increasingly want their work to serve a higher purpose and to feel aligned with the values of their employer.*

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**What senior leaders thought...**

In our roundtables, senior leaders reflected on the responsibility of the people profession in leading change in business attitudes and the responsibility they take for their impact on the environment and society, calling it a 'winning hearts and minds situation'.

Others noted that it had *'moved from being an interesting subject to something fundamental'*, and an area that the people profession needs to champion:

> *We have a responsibility to the planet and opportunity post-COVID-19 to ask if we are happy doing what we're doing. It is a winning hearts and minds situation that we need to grasp and take forward as people professionals.*

Senior leaders noted that pressure to improve sustainability and responsibility often comes from regulators or investors (although not in all cases), rather than employees. Championing and raising the profile of sustainable and purpose-led business to employees and customers will be important in the next decade.

Collaboration with other departments will also be important for responsible business – for example, when examining supply chain and contractor relationships. Collaboration with other businesses to tackle issues at a broader level was also seen as important – becoming more outward-facing and strategic in approach to driving responsible and sustainable business.

Finally, wellbeing and wellness was seen as a key theme in responsible and sustainable business, as a thread that must run through all practices.

## Looking ahead: what action should the people profession take to thrive in 2030 and beyond?

**Adapt people functions to reflect a widening remit**

- People professionals could have a wider remit in the future, considering social responsibility, responsible business and sustainability.
- They could also be under pressure to protect corporate reputation, especially when it comes to employee attraction – although regulatory and investor interest will also be a key motivator to address sustainability.

**Take the lead in building responsible business practices**

- People professionals are perfectly placed to build responsible and sustainable business practices into organisations. This includes leading on organisational purpose and responsible people management practices, especially in diversity, inclusion and equality:

  *We can (for example) drive transparency and fairness in pay and reward, we can build inclusive cultures with diversity considerations mainstreamed through our policies and processes, we can demonstrate the return on investment in skills development in our local communities, we can develop leadership selection criteria which value compassion as a core leadership competence. People professionals will need to have a broad understanding of business drivers, be powerful influencers, and partner closely with other leaders across their organisations.*

**Take a strategic approach to responsible business**

- Senior leaders also noted that the profession could be more outward-facing in this area – working with other organisations to tackle local and social issues. As noted below, an organisation's culture spans beyond the organisation itself to consider its impact on, and responsibility to, local communities.

- We should weave social value and purpose through the entire employee lifecycle, from attraction to performance and engagement. Organisational purpose will need to evolve with societal and business shifts to ensure it is future-fit.

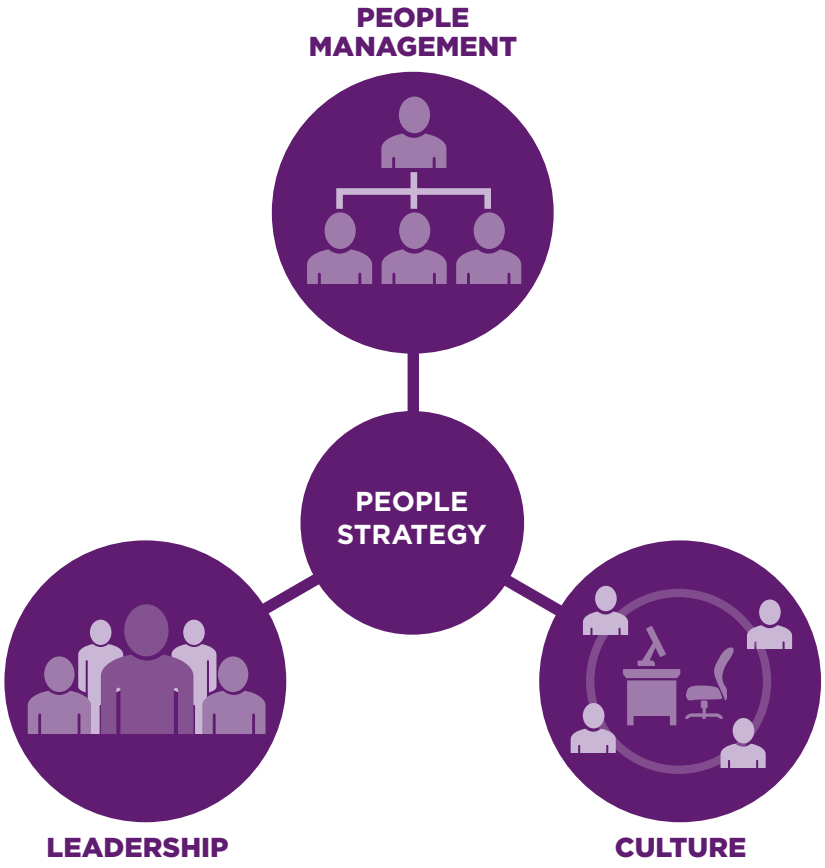
# 5 Reflections for people professionals

Throughout the hackathon and roundtables, there was a sense of confidence that people professionals will continue to add real value to their organisations in the next decade and beyond. Taking a lead on the organisational changes and practices needed to remain future-fit is a key part of this. As one hackathon participant noted: *'Rather than reacting to the demands of our environments and context as best we can, we should be influencing the entire direction that our organisations are taking to ensure a more sustainable and happy future for everyone.'*

The confidence to lead and influence requires the profession to have a strong understanding of what business and people challenges will crop up in the next decade. We can't predict the future, but we can equip the people profession to both respond to future challenges and plan strategically whatever comes next, in line with our professional purpose of championing better work and working lives. Below we offer some reflection points for people professionals to consider when thinking about the future of work, our workplaces and the role of the people profession within this.

## The organisation ecosystem

**Figure 3: The organisation ecosystem**



Other organisational factors (like people management, leadership and culture) are integral to people strategies. Throughout the hackathon and roundtables, people professionals identified that these factors can be enablers or barriers for current people practice, or future transformation, meaning we need to consider how these factors interplay with future trends.

**People management**

> *People managers are the rocks on which our greatest plans are dashed or the wind that fills the sails. They remain, for me, the greatest asset and ally to HR or its worst enemy.*

There were clear examples where people managers recognised the value of their people role, or where they did not, and instead prioritised operational needs over people:

> *I keep coming back to one core issue: how do we get operational managers to understand that the 'people leadership' part of the job is worth a lot more than 5% of their time? HR, and the services and solutions it provides, can only go so far in ensuring people are engaged, supported and developed, providing the base for organisations to thrive.*

> *Managers have a greater appreciation and understanding of their role – a greater responsibility for the people side.*

The latter quote shows a clear willingness from people managers to support their team and hone their people management skills – an area where people professionals can, and should, add value by developing and supporting managers. However, where managers are more resistant to focus on people needs, the profession will need to consider how they address gaps in ability and competency in people management skills.

Many of our trends highlight a thread of individualism, a sense that employees expect a flexible, tailored working relationship with their employer. Therefore, line managers will be increasingly expected to manage people as individuals – helping people achieve work–life balance, supporting people to be fulfilled in their roles and developing their skillsets in line with their professional interests. To best support managers, the people profession will need to develop a consistent approach to people management.

**Leadership**[38]

> *What are the leadership behaviours we need to be able to deliver our new models and purpose? You change culture by changing leadership behaviours, not by doing a cultural change programme.*

C-suite level leaders have the power to change the narrative of business and influence at pace, and this is most effectively done in consultation with the workforce to drive decision-making: *'[The executive board] don't have all the answers but we will work together with our people to get them the support they need.'* HRDs emphasised the importance of top–down messages, and role-modelling, honest communication and servant leadership behaviours (serving the organisation and its people) were perceived as vital leadership qualities over the coming years.

**Culture**

> *It's our duty to navigate the balance that is required and enable people to be adults. I want to have philosophies rather than policies – to be principles-based. It's about the frameworks and what you set as the norm. Our job is to help leaders mitigate the fact that there are inequalities.*

Shared responsibility is key. While people professionals may be the facilitator in developing culture and purpose, leaders, people managers and other specialists throughout the business have a responsibility to bring to life organisational values through their everyday working lives, instead of relying on policies to drive culture change. Senior leaders believe that having a value-led HR function that feels confident and 'safe to speak truth to power' will be definitive in driving actions that lead to a values-led organisation.

Senior leaders highlighted a greater focus on defining and building the wider organisational purpose among public sector organisations. HRDs discussed the idea that public sector businesses are compelled to go beyond the remit of the workplace to ensure they are truly purpose-led in their strategic approach, specifically the need to encompass the impact on the wider community and location of operations:

> *Purpose is absolutely key. The savings we have to make and the impact of COVID-19 means we have to repurpose as a sector. What are we here for? The air I breathe right now is purpose. Without it, we respond in a really non-strategic way – we salami-slice and we don't think long term.*

Culture appeared to be an integral part of our key trends. For example, the success of digital transformation programmes was said to be highly dependent on developing a culture where people are tech-ready as opposed to fearful and resistant of digital and tech transformations. Similarly, developing an effective D&I strategy entails leaders and middle managers having effective conversations with stakeholders, customers and consumers – listening to their changing requirements and perspectives on culture, discrimination, equality and inclusion.

### Learning and skills development

The shelf life of skills is said to be getting ever more short term – it is believed that skills now last for two to three years before workers need upskilling.[39] This suggests lifelong learning is a feature of the modern labour market. A key theme from the hackathon was the influence of key trends on learning and skills development – for example, how core and human transferable skills could be critical to ensure that individuals have the right capabilities to move between industries and roles as demand for types of work changes.

Additionally, learning in the modern workplace will need to keep pace with the adoption of technology, influencing how learning is delivered and digested:

> *Mobile learning that delivers bite-sized micro learning on a continuous basis is a great way to build these essential skills... in summary, exponentially changing training delivery modes, cross-skilling employees and providing learning continuously are some trends that I see will influence the world of work.*

Outside of the workplace, online statistics also support the idea that learning models and approaches are changing, whereby learners seek independent forms of learning and self-help. According to Google, online video watching related to learning more than doubled between July 2019 and July 2020.[40] Reflection on how learning and development in organisations needs to adapt to this is required.

The people profession needs to role-model continual learning in their own development. Hackathon participants frequently cited the following areas as capability gaps among the profession and people teams: agility, change management, courage to challenge, data and analytics skills and curiosity in exploration of data, ethical practice, and business acumen and commercial knowledge

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### The growing remit of the people profession

The remit of HR appears to be growing and shifting in line with external drivers. The profession has to juggle higher employee/employer expectations and manage multiple tensions and divides across the workplace as we enter a difficult period across the labour market – all while developing and defining a clear purpose that serves all stakeholders.

For HRDs this felt like a real shift of gear in terms of the growing remit of their role and their relationship with the executive and board level, highlighting an opportunity for the profession to step up and lead. On the flip side of this, the gap between the deputy HRD and HRD role is bigger than ever, particularly as HRD roles are moving towards a greater external focus with an increasing number of external partners.

### Horizon-scanning and awareness of external trends

There was plenty of discussion throughout our hackathon and roundtables on the trends that are taking place in our workplaces right now. There were calls for the profession to take a strategic approach to these trends and shape them rather than react to them. To do this, people professionals will need to consider what current trends mean for the future – if they are dialled up, or down. What is influencing these trends – are they an inevitable disruptor or can we manage them to our advantage?

There is also a need to think beyond our immediate context and consider what macro-level, external disruptors influence the world of work and therefore the people profession. This will help the profession develop a deeper understanding of the challenges facing businesses in the next decade and beyond, and where they can add the most value.

# 6 Where to next?

### The role of the people profession in shaping the future trends

Our hackathon and roundtable discussion highlighted that COVID-19 has truly proved the value of the people profession. We need to capitalise on this, and cement our value as experts in people, work and change.

Our ways of working have shifted considerably, and the profession will play a key role in shaping work in the context of the aforementioned trends. It's up to the profession to champion the voice of their people, so that people outcomes are beneficial rather than detrimental to people, as well as the organisation. For example:

- Consider the impact of digitalised working on wellbeing, engagement and productivity.
- Navigate the inequalities that arise between having a multi-tiered workforce (that is, part-time, zero-hours contracts and employees working for multiple organisations) and hybrid working teams (that is, home/remote workers and office/operational workers) and ensure that all workers continue to have purposeful, quality work.
- Influence the organisation to recognise the value of taking an employee-centric approach to these trends. That means listening to, and consulting with, employees to build a culture that places people at its heart.

### A future-focused approach

As we discussed earlier in the report, many of the themes highlighted in this research reflect contemporary challenges and have been on the mind of the profession for a number of years. It's important that we as the CIPD look beyond the medium-term challenges faced by the people profession and lead the way in this thinking.

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This report is a springboard for our future work on the people profession now and for the future. We're committed to setting the people profession up for sustainable success in the future of work. By providing research-driven and evidence-based content, guidance and thought leadership around drivers of changes in the world of work globally, we'll support people professionals to drive change at the heart of business so that work is good for all. To do this, we will:

- Continue to horizon-scan and build understanding of the macro drivers of change in the world of work with further research and engagement.
- Broaden our engagement outside the people profession to understand the viewpoints of those working in different disciplines and business functions.
- Engage with global business leaders and future thought leaders.
- Support learning and professional development in line with our research findings on the future world of work.

This will enable us to have a unique and holistic vision for the future, co-created by the people profession and external insights.

To stay up to date with our research journey, visit the latest insights hub on our People Profession site.

# 7 Methodology appendix

### Previous research

Our 2015 research *From Best to Good Practice HR: Developing the principles*[41] identified eight key trends that will influence the future world of work. These trends were used as a basis for discussion in week one of the hackathon.

Scoping interviews with senior people professionals were also conducted prior to the hackathon to identify key aspects of people practice that will evolve in the next decade – these themes informed the focus topics in week two of the hackathon.

### Hackathon sample

The hackathon event took place virtually between 10 and 21 August 2020 with a sample size of 521 active participants. The sample included participants from several regions, including the UK and Ireland, Europe, Asia Pacific, the Middle East and other regions. During the virtual event, the hackathon participants voted over 17,000 times, and submitted over 900 ideas with over 5,000 comments and discussion points.

The first week of the hackathon was used to explore eight macro trends identified in previous research[42] as a basis for our data collection with hackathon participants. Several key trends were identified (see analysis section below) and taken forward to week two, where hackathon participants generated ideas and debate on how these trends will influence people practices and the profession in 2030, with a focus on: skills and capabilities; people teams and functions; the value-add of the people profession; and employment in 2030.

### Analysis of hackathon data

Between week one and week two of the hackathon event, three researchers conducted brief content analysis of the data from the first four days of data collection. This involved thematically analysing the idea submissions for each of the days to determine the most frequently cited four trends influencing the world of work. The top four trends were then operationalised, as defined by the people profession community, and carried forward to the second week of data collection.

Once the hackathon event ended and data collection had ceased, the idea submissions from week two were formatted, cleaned, anonymised, and inputted into Nvivo (a qualitative analysis software). Given the amount of data collected, researchers used an auto coding function to code the data ready for analysis. To do this, researchers manually coded ten ideas for Nvivo to base the auto coding on. Once auto coding was performed, another ten codes were manually coded to check reliability[43] between the researchers' coding and Nvivo auto coding. Once all data was coded, researchers analysed all data thematically.

### Roundtables

The national roundtable events held prior to writing this report included 59 senior leaders of the people profession (including chief human resources officers (CHROs), chief people officers (CPOs) and directors of human resource/organisational development/talent management/people strategy) from a range of sectors and industries. Each roundtable lasted between 90 and 120 minutes and consisted of semi-structured questions based on the key trends as defined by the hackathon. Within each roundtable, researchers also conducted a deeper-dive focus into one of the trend or theme areas to ensure all aspects had a dedicated and narrowed focus with senior leaders. This enabled researchers to sense-check, quality-control and contextualise the outputs from the hackathon and explore any other emerging themes that were not surfaced from the hackathon analysis.

The roundtables were conducted between 2 and 24 September 2020 and held virtually with participants across the UK. At the time of writing, further roundtables were scheduled to take place with senior leaders from Ireland, Singapore and Dubai.

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16 It should be noted that the brief discussion of external drivers focuses on UK-based examples. A further and more thorough review of international external drivers of change is needed to develop our understanding of these drivers and their influence on workplaces in different regional contexts.

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42 Eight macro trends were identified as influential to the future world of work and emerged from a literature review conducted as part of our *From Best to Good Practice HR: Developing the principles* report. The trends were: utilisation of technology; workforce diversity; globalisation; diversity of employment relationship; industrial change; individualism; social responsibility; and quality of education.

43 Coding reliability was 80% between researchers' manually coding and Nvivo auto coding. The 20% difference in reliability was due to the higher accuracy and precision of the manual coding, for example, where Nvivo coding included less data text or failed to recognise specific wording associated to the codes. To ensure and optimise accuracy, data references were reviewed by researchers throughout analysis.

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Registered as a charity in England and Wales (1079797)
Scotland (SC045154) and Ireland (20100827)

Issued: November 2020 Reference: 8073 © CIPD 2020

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