

2020 HR TRENDS



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Foreword

If we've learned anything in the last few years about the future of work, it's that companies must become quicker to respond. With digitalisation, globalisation and new generations entering the workforce – along with many other challenges – the faster a company can evolve alongside shifting consumer and employee trends, the better equipped they are to survive, and more importantly thrive, in the long run.

In recent years, futurists have tried to predict what the workplace will look like in 5, 10, 20 years. How many jobs will technology replace? How many jobs will technology add? How will the skills gap and low unemployment affect organisations? What changes will multiple generations of employees bring to the workplace, and how can we retain employees and keep them engaged?

With competition fierce for the brightest talent, organisations that are at the forefront of a people-centric approach will be the ones to succeed. Attracting and engaging employees through active listening, employee recognition, improved internal communications, and development opportunities are all key to driving improved business performance.

I hope you enjoy the food for thought provided by some of the UK's most esteemed thought leaders



Jon Maddison
Managing Director, Achievers EMEA

Achievers



● Move with the tides

2020 marks not only a new year but also a new decade. When looking back, what will be the defining features and moments of this period? It's an interesting question to ponder – and one that should give HR professionals that extra bit of drive to develop more meaningful, ethical and energetic workplaces for its people.

For HRZone's 2020 trends round-up, we asked three thought leaders in the HR space, Perry Timms, Barry Flack and Jon Ingham, to use their speculative powers and business nous to come up with not only their predictions for the people profession in the near future, but also their opinions on the areas where we cannot afford to rest on our laurels.

Before we explore more deeply the shifts taking place both now and in the years to come, let's take a glimpse at just three messages that shine through:

- While 2019 may have been the year for employee experience, 2020 will be the year of 'energy'.
- Collaboration tools and knowledge-sharing products will be the key ingredients for thriving in a fast-paced, complex marketplace.
- HR strategy will shift away from solely focusing on the needs of the business and put people at the heart of its thinking.

I've purposely left these points vague in a bid to encourage you to read on...

But take note, while it's beneficial to pause at the beginning of a new year (and indeed a new decade) and relish in some hypothesising on what will be (or not be) for HR, we must not procrastinate in our efforts to move with the tides.



Becky Norman
Editor, HRZone



Three predictions for HR in 2020



Perry Timms
Founder and Chief Energy Officer,
PTHR

None of us has a crystal ball to tell us what will happen next year, but we can make some plans based on what we have learned to date and what we hope to achieve in 2020.

It is always at this time of year that we direct our attention towards 'what may be' or even what we wish it to be. I have seen predictions come and go. I've been around long enough to have seen the fascination with time travel, and it has revealed more about our collective idiocy than our predictive intelligence.

With political games, swings and uncertainty, who knows what a post-election 2020 UK will be like, let alone the rest of the world, commerce and HR more specifically.

I won't sit on the fence though. Here I will build on a few themes that will hopefully help those trying to place bets to focus on or exploit things in the near future.

Prediction one: g is for graft, not gig

Economic stuttering will continue and more unfulfilling, hard grafting will continue. Talk of automation is still some way off, even with the rise of bots. I think we may as well buckle down and accept more long-hours, low-reward roles until at least 2024/5.

We will see more people understanding the need to experiment with automation, and they won't wait for some big-box solution to just land in our workplace and automate automation. People will be working really hard for a while longer, as the automatons aren't here in big enough numbers yet to save us.

Prediction two: a is for autonomy, not agile

I'm a BIG fan of agility, and use it a lot. I'm also a believer in agile (mindset etc) as a form of utility in businesses and across all sectors. More important to that, however, is autonomy. I think we're standing on the edge of realising that over-management (often called micro-management) is a bureaucracy that has simply had its day.

We will see more liberation, empowerment, and a deployment of autonomous ways of working. Largely this is because we've added more and more to managers lots in terms of supervisory and project work.

We have to let some of that go because it chokes growth, innovation and diversity. We need managers to close the gaps between supercharged high performers and low-end stragglers with this much of good/not bad in between. A more equalising performance curve would see a more sustainable way of raising performance levels.



"Employee engagement will not be saved by the current trend towards employee experience.... Energy is the thing."



Instead of creating high performance bubbles around people, we should look at what a minor gain across most of our people-force could do. We also need to ditch our obsession with under-performance management.

Designing for autonomy will help this, giving people a more intrinsic stimulation to perform. It's their performance, so this kind of autonomy is about people standing in a more mature space and adopting more ownership of problem solving, learning, developing, designing and deploying adaptive working principles and practices.

Like the consumer is an audience of one, so is the employee. Their needs and energy should be theirs to deploy in the interests of the company.



Prediction three: e is for energy, not engagement

Employee engagement (and now even experience) are follies HR has created and they haven't moved the dial enough. Instead of measuring fluctuating moods, attitudes and almost Pavlovian responses, we should look at energy levels. This is not just because our moral compass says that it's ethical to know about our own and our employees' energy, but because that's the key to sustainable performance.

Have someone's energy in the right place, and even if their attitude is a bit suspect, they'll probably perform and have good relationships with customers, partners and colleagues. You can, of course, check their attitude and direct their energy towards wanting to shift that for the better.

Energy is crucial not only for our performance, but our entire wellbeing. If we are flagging mentally, it will affect our work. It's simple physics but also subject to those unique human factors, spirit and soul. We can be physically exhausted, but a spark of inspiration surges us on with hitherto undiscovered reserves of energy.

HR's interest in human energy (and what depletes it, recharges it, and directs it) should start to become more important as it's the evolution of the (well-meaning but underwhelming) wellbeing agenda. Employee engagement will not be saved by the current trend towards employee experience (something that may well exist, but be at the behest of varying degrees of control by management systems and managers themselves).

So energy is the thing. We all have it, we all need it and we all waste it. I don't think anyone can manage time, but they can manage their energy (source, replenish, utilisation etc).

The year ahead

I'll leave my predictions there, with just these three things: graft, autonomy and energy. They may be too vague for some and not broad enough for others. I won't get drawn on what percentage of work I believe will become a digital algorithmic script. Nor will I get drawn on how much the multi-generational workforce will impact on creativity and productivity. Spoiler: it won't.

Understanding that we've all got to continue grafting, but can expect more autonomy and should pay attention to our energy will help us deal with the known and unknown challenges ahead.





HR technology:

why you can no longer ignore
the deficit in 2020



Barry Flack

HR tech advisor and people
consultant

HR, as a profession, is too obsessed with predicting the future at the expense of acting now – especially when it comes to investing in new technology. The arrival of a new year is the perfect time for organisations to take stock, and look at what they can do better in 2020.

Whilst it can be argued that HR technology doesn't move quickly enough to satisfy the endless stream of conferences our profession indulges in, the 'future of work' narrative also gives the wrongful impression that tomorrow never comes.



“We know that there is a temptation to remain wedded to the past. It’s comforting, it’s part of the historic fabric of the organisation and it seems unthinkable to replace it or even challenge its very existence – but challenge we must.”



I appreciate that we’ve grown up with a love/hate relationship with HR technology. Too often it fails to deliver on the overinflated promises from vendors and it can also be high on functionality that is overly HR-centric or doesn’t seem to deliver on how work is increasingly being delivered in today’s digital age.

If you’ve been content to delay any investment, or you’ve been limited in the appetite to spend accordingly by an overwhelmed board, or perhaps your organisation has an addiction to some misplaced faith in old 20th century HR relics, then here’s what you’re in danger of having missed.

Experimenting with data

There are some organisations that have flipped away from an obsessive focus on data collection and storage, to utilising that data for good business practices. Long gone are the initial experiments focused on small and tangible business results. Organisations are now developing real core capability.

We’re now seeing an infusion of data science skill sets, partnerships with other parts of the business value chain, and a shift in enquiry towards the questions that matter most to the organisation, rather than decks of dead data reflecting last month’s attrition levels.

Flipping the old HR rituals and focusing on experience

We know that there is a temptation to remain wedded to the past. It’s comforting, it’s part of the historic fabric of the organisation and it seems unthinkable to replace it or even challenge its very existence – but challenge we must. All over the competitive landscape are businesses that have made the switch and they are reaping the rewards in both productive time and dialling up their employee experience.

There are those that have binned the old performance appraisal model for continuous performance discussions, those who create onboarding experiences linked to learning at the point of need, as well as recruitment and employee responses on an anytime, any device product set. Those doing this successfully realise that at the heart of it is the need to improve the employee experience, removing the boring, repetitive and rules-oriented tasks from humans and instead giving them to the machines to take care of.



Business models for agility

The old paradigm, where organisations employ only permanent members of staff, is about as useful as a chocolate teapot in today's talent market. The companies that are racing ahead are those that have stretched their organisational mindsets to a wide, distributed model.

They've binned the curse of presenteeism and are working with the developing platform economy to seek out skills. They realise that collaboration tools, knowledge-sharing products and expertise-finding capabilities will help them react faster to the complexity of today's market.

Augmentation and productivity

Can HR technology make you five pounds thinner or six inches taller? No! Equally ridiculous are some of the claims being made about artificial intelligence in HR technology.

Those who have already embraced the new capability of datasets now have several years of training the data behind them, which means they're already ahead when it comes to getting rid of in-built bias from day one.

There is no system that offers the option to 'plug in and play' on day one, but you can avoid the old correlation and causation pitfall by ensuring that your inbuilt algorithms are refined, checked and worked upon regularly.

If you're happily sitting on millions of pieces of structured, semi-structured and unstructured datasets gathering dust, however, then of course you are cutting off your nose to spite your face.

Re-imagining business priorities

In summary, you can happily sit back and embrace the seasonal obsession with 2020 HR technology trends.

Alternatively, you can use the arrival of the seminal 2020 calendar year to begin taking your own technology stack seriously. You could re-imagine questions that matter to your business, challenge old established rituals you know make no sense, cleanse your data and experiment.

You can put employee experience at the heart of your designs, and you can reframe your organisational model in a way that recognises the value of micro working, crowdsourcing or any variety of outsourced gig platform (without the exploitation).

In short, you can stop obsessing about the future of (insert whatever frame) and develop a technology strategy for your business, with a roadmap and priority set that prepares you for the complexity of the market ahead.

The HR technology market is leaving too many of our businesses and HR functions behind, so make 2020 the last time you leave it to chance. You can no longer ignore the HR technology deficit.



HR strategy in the 2020s:

transitioning to a people-centric approach in the decade ahead



Jon Ingham

Independent consultant, trainer,
keynote speaker and analyst

As we head into a new decade, we may assume that technology will be where the focus lies. But there is a huge shift taking place towards people-centric strategy, which HR professionals cannot afford to ignore.

We can often link particular ideas with a specific decade. For example, BritPop and Cool Britannia with the 1990s. In business and people management terms I would suggest that decade was about the rise of human resources, with the shift from Personnel to HR, the Ulrich model, and McKinsey's War for Talent report, reinforcing the importance of aligning people with strategic business needs.

I would also link the 2000s to social media and the growing use of more conversational approaches throughout the employee lifecycle. And most recently, the 2010s with digital transformation, with HR teams increasingly questioning everything we do and how disruptive technologies might enable these things to be done in completely different ways.

So as we approach 2020, it is useful to speculate on what the 2020s may hold for us too. For me, whilst technology is clearly going to continue to dominate our focus, the real key to the decade is going to be strategic HR.

In a sense, therefore, the next decade will be a direct result of the last three, combining the strategic importance of people with how people can now be enabled differently through social approaches and digital tools.

Creating a people-centric HR strategy

Strategic HR clearly is not new, but I would argue that it is still not well understood or, at least, not well executed. Many HR people still talk about HR being a support function, and there is little understanding of what would be different if we were to truly be a strategic contributor instead. And most HR plans, even when called 'strategies' are just lists of activities with little attention paid to the impacts they are going to provide. And in a 2020 business grappling with new people challenges and digital opportunities that is no longer going to be enough.

So strategic HR needs to become more common and effective, but its focus also needs to shift. We now need to put the people working for our organisations, not just the commercial activities of our businesses, at the centre of our HR strategies and plans.



This is about creating new strategic value through what we do in HR. Not just supporting the business by aligning HR activities with the business, but enabling the business to be more strategically successful by enabling new people and organisational capabilities.

This need for people-centric approaches is not that new either. However, the zeitgeist around this has strengthened considerably over the past five to 10 years. Indeed, I would almost argue that if you still think you need to build your HR strategy mainly around the needs of your business, you have not been paying enough attention!



“HR has a huge opportunity to educate its colleagues about how culture can be developed to help shape the way that organisations work.”



Ten signs of a shift towards people-centric HR strategy

Here are nine key markers of this new approach:

1. Human-centred design / design thinking

Rather than just asking people what they need, or assuming we know what they need, organisations are now paying much more interest in how the people they interact with actually behave.

Together with insights from neuroscience and behavioural economics this has made business leaders much more aware of the need for people-first approaches and empathic behaviours.

2. Employee experience

The main output of the above trend in many organisations has been to seek to balance focus on process design with an interest in experience, particularly through the use of personas and journey maps.

We still usually need processes to scale our activities but the energy for this activity has shifted dramatically towards employees over the past few years.

3. The digital workplace

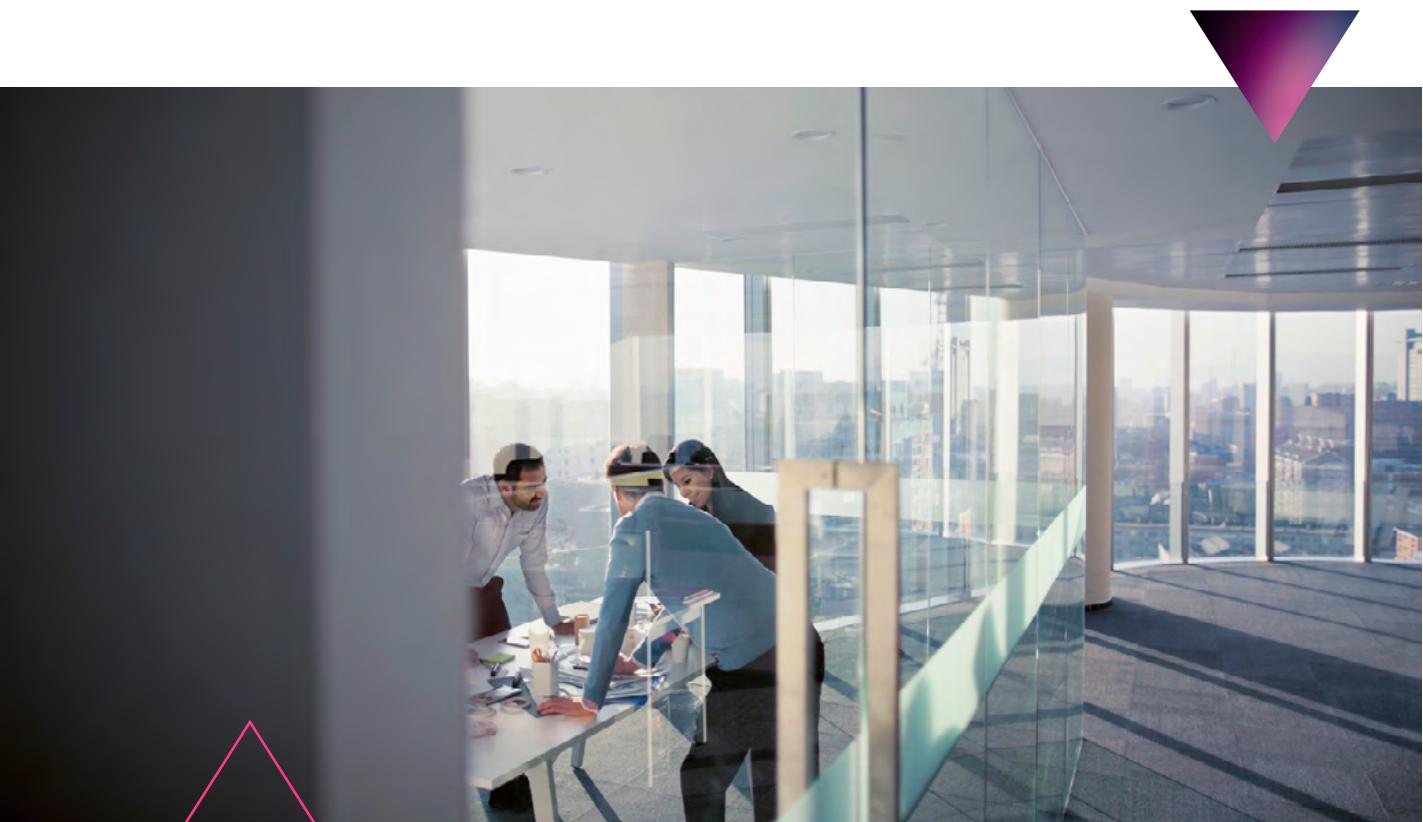
The increasing importance of the digital workplace should now be a major area of focus for most HR teams.

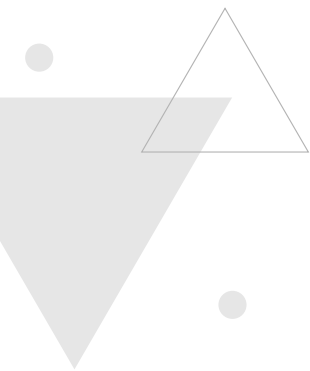
However, unlike most earlier technological requirements, use of the digital workplace is almost completely discretionary and this is forcing not just HR but also IT and other areas to think more about experience design and working with their people to enable higher levels of adoption.

4. Workplace design

Even though people often work virtually, the physical workplace is also becoming much more important, if only to ensure people have somewhere to connect and collaborate when they do visit the office.

But our colleagues in Property and Facilities have realised that doing this effectively also starts with understanding and engaging people, not with items of the workplace. The shift is possibly seen most clearly in the rebranding of the British Institute of Facilities Management (BIFM) as the Institute of Workplace and Facilities Management (IWFM) last year. This change was made to reflect the joint responsibility of FM, IT and HR for the performance of people, enabled by technology and the workspace, within or away from the office.





5. Community management

HR may enable individual performance but increasingly we need to focus on the performance of groups. And we can only do this effectively in conjunction with colleagues in community management who know how to bring people together, cultivate deep and meaningful relationships, and prioritise sharing, learning and co-creating together.

6. Agility

People are also working more extensively in horizontal, cross-functional teams, especially through the rapid uptake of agile ways of working, requiring people to take accountability for their own work and to manage this themselves. Many companies using agile are also still figuring out how to scale up this approach across the entire organisation.

7. Self-organisation

Self-organisation also exists outside of agile as a trend in its own right, particularly with the inspiration of Frederick Laloux's book, '[Reinventing Organizations](#)', as well as the case studies shared by Corporate Rebels. Partly through the availability of artificial intelligence based self-coaching tools, it is now much more feasible for teams and whole organisations to manage their own performance, and HR should be seriously interested in these opportunities.



"2020 has got to be the year we start making more of a fuss about the strategic contribution that people, and therefore HR, can provide."



8. Purpose and meaning

Business leaders are generally much more knowledgeable about the importance of meaning, purpose, values and culture. HR has a huge opportunity here to educate its colleagues about how culture can be developed to help shape the way that organisations work.

9. Multiple stakeholders

The US Business Roundtable redefined the role of the company towards serving the needs of multiple stakeholders. This recent commitment provides a new access point to start important conversations about the role of people in business. Possibly a similar opportunity exists in the UK in responding to the Financial Reporting Council's requirements on assessing organisational culture.

10. Humanocracy

Innovation professor [Gary Hamel's](#) new book on humanocracy is due out in January 2020. This seeks to help organisations do away with bureaucratic management and to develop environments that are fit for people to do their work in.

And who knows how they can do that? Through HR. (This book could be a worthwhile late Christmas present for your CEO?)

People-centric HR in 2020

Given all the above shifts, can we, or our business leaders, still believe that business is possible without strategic, people-centric HR? 2020 has got to be the year we start making more of a fuss about the strategic contribution that people, and therefore HR, can provide. I, at least, am looking forward to it.



About the authors



Perry Timms

Perry Timms is an international speaker, advisor and award-winning writer on the future of work, HR & learning. Perry's first book "Transformational HR" was an Amazon.com Top 30 HR seller shortly after its release, and his second book - "The Energised Workplace" - exploring Human Energy & Organisation Design is due in April 2020.

Perry's work in progressive thinking in HR and the workplace of the future was recognised on HR Magazine's HR's Most Influential Thinkers List as 9th most influential in 2019.

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Barry Flack

Barry Flack has been involved in business change for 25 years, working in senior HR and talent roles with such organisations as BT, O2, Barclays, UBS, Lebara Mobile and Primark to name a few.

More recently, through his own consultancy and various partnerships with VC and PE houses, he is on a mission to help large and small organisations grow, transform and adapt to the changing world of work.

His experience ranges from scaling successful start-ups in hyper growth, to reinventing the way we attract and retain talent across the globe.

A prolific speaker and writer on the Changing World of Work, he was recently recognised as one of the top 30 Global Influencers in HR Tech.

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Jon Ingham

An independent consultant, trainer, keynote speaker and analyst, Jon Ingham specialises in helping companies apply academic research, new technology and innovation to the way they generate competitive advantage through their people. Offering support across the full breadth of people management and organization development, he

responds to the increasingly profound transformations underway in the world of work.

Jon is frequently listed as a key influencer in HR and is celebrated by HR Most Influential 2019 as a Mover and Shaker in the field of people strategy.

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