

Ad

**Harvard
Business
Review**

[Subscribe](#) [Sign In](#)

Employee Retention

What Your Future Employees Want Most

by Tim Minahan

May 31, 2021



The past year has accelerated digital transformation across sectors. Along with a universal recognition that resilient employees are the true lifeblood of a company came an understanding that a company's workforce is crucial to business recovery. This has prompted organizations to completely rethink how they attract, retain, and manage their talent.

My organization, Citrix, wanted to understand what the current attitudes of both HR managers and knowledge workers are with regard to their future workforce. We conducted a study, which we dubbed the Talent Accelerator, as part of Citrix's Work 2035 project, a year-long examination of global work patterns and plans designed to understand how work will change, and the role that technology will play in enabling people to perform at their best. The Talent Accelerator study combines research from more than 2,000 knowledge workers and 500 HR directors in large, established corporations and mid-market businesses with at least 500 employees based in the United States. When the study was commissioned, both groups of professionals were working under permanent contracts and were currently or had recently been working from home as a result of Covid-19 restrictions.

Research Findings on the Future of Talent Management

When it comes to what talent management in the future might look like, our study pointed to three defining priorities among knowledge workers:

1. Employees overwhelmingly expect flexible options.

According to the study, 88% of knowledge workers say that when searching for a new position, they will look for one that offers complete flexibility in their hours and location. Also 83% predict that in response to the global skilled talent shortage, companies will leverage flexible work models to reach out to suitable candidates no matter where they live — yet, only 66% of HR directors feel the same. What's more:

- 76% of the workers polled believe that employees will be more likely to prioritize lifestyle (family and personal interests) over proximity to work, and will pursue jobs in locations where they can focus on both — even if it means taking a pay cut.
- 83% of employees think that workers will be more likely to move out of cities and other urban locations if they can work remotely for a majority of the time, creating new work hubs in rural areas.

In order to position themselves to win in the future, companies will need to meet employees where they are.

2. Employees want to re-imagine how productivity is measured.

In the future, companies will need to rethink how they measure productivity because traditional metrics — and views that real work can't get done outside the office — will no longer cut it. According to the study, today's employees want to be measured on the value they deliver, not the volume. And they expect to be given the space and trust they need to do their very best work, wherever they happen to be.

- 86% of employees said they would prefer to work for a company that prioritizes outcomes over output. What does this mean? New employees want to work for a company that cares less about the qualified work output they are able to produce, and more about the impact they can deliver to the business in a holistic sense.
- But there is a gap here, with just 69% of HR directors saying that their company currently operates in this way, and only half of HR directors saying that their organization would be more productive as a whole if employees felt that their employer/senior management team trusted them to get the job done without monitoring their progress.

Forward-thinking companies will focus on closing this gap, and will design people-centric experiences that give employees the space they need to unlock their full potential and deliver transformative results.

3. Employees want to work with a diverse team.

One thing on which both employees and managers seem to agree?

Employees want to work for a company that prioritizes diversity.

- 86% of employees and 66% of HR directors assert that a diverse workforce will become even more important as roles, skills, and company requirements change over time.
- Honest, accessible metrics around your diversity progress and remaining gaps are critical to ensuring that efforts to build a diverse team are measurable, targeted, and impactful.

Takeaway for Leaders

What should the major takeaways be for business leaders when it comes to the implications of these findings?

1. See the forest through the trees.

Without the restriction of location, business leaders must look at their recruiting from a broader lens and expand the potential to attract employees who can boost an organization's creativity and productivity.

They might, for instance, dip into untapped pools of talent such as the “home force” and bring back parents who've put their careers on hold to care for children, or people who left jobs to tend to aging relatives. It could also mean looking to Baby Boomers who've retired, but who still want to work a few hours per week. And it could mean enlisting more part-time, contract, and gig workers — who make up a larger percentage of the workforce than ever — to take on more hours. And, of course, it means looking for global talent that may reside anywhere.

2. Prioritize learning and development.

New business models sparked by the pandemic and changes in customer preferences and needs have given rise to new roles and opportunities for companies — and their employees — to grow. Upskilling and reskilling will be critical factor in capitalizing on them. As the study found:

- 82% of employees and 62% of HR directors believe that workers will need to hone their current skills or acquire new ones at least once a year in order to maintain competitive advantage in a global job market.
- HR directors believe that ensuring that an organization has the latest collaborative technology in place to enable agile learning is the most important factor in recruiting and retaining the best talent, and 88% of employees confirm this notion, saying that they look for this when searching for a new position.

It bears repeating: Organizations will need to prioritize reskilling and upskilling to attract and retain the talent they need to make their businesses grow. Those that do will not only boost the motivation of their existing workers, but will gain the attention of the brightest new recruits and position themselves to emerge from the pandemic not just where they were, but in a stronger, better position to move forward.

The last year has forever changed the way employees view and approach work, but one thing holds true: Businesses that want to attract and retain the talent they need to move forward must understand the top priorities of their future workforce. They must embrace new, flexible work models and cultivate a workforce that can design their own careers. In doing so, they will not only boost the motivation and engagement of their existing workers, but will gain the attention of the brightest new recruits and take their business to new heights.

Tim Minahan is an executive vice president of business strategy at Citrix, where he has a proactive role in helping to drive focused strategic initiatives and the company's overall business strategy. In addition, he leads operations for the company's vision of securely delivering the world's most important apps and data to enable people and businesses to work better.
