white paper

8 work trends to watch in 2019.
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The U.S. workforce is so dependent on digital technology today that many jobs cannot be performed without an internet connection. Workers who’ve been around and have lived through the analog to digital transition often marvel at the pace of change. But it’s no surprise to the newest employees, on the labor market, who have grown up in an age of always-on communication. These employees expect the workplace to offer a high level of digital sophistication. And for employers, that’s a challenge as well as an opportunity.

In particular, there are three areas — digital relevancy, digital orientation and digital leadership — where employers will feel the digital impact in 2019.

digital relevancy

Simply put, employers that fail to remain digitally relevant will cease to appeal to top talent. Yet, keeping up with technology can be daunting, especially when so many tools and platforms seem to offer similar solutions.

“Technology has altered nearly every aspect of business operations today, causing many business leaders to question how to keep up with the unprecedented pace of digital transformation,” says Alan Stukalsky, chief digital officer of Randstad North America. Stukalsky notes that savvy companies today are collaborating with third-party partners to get the technology needed in order to succeed. “The days of businesses building their own proprietary technologies are a thing of the past. Picking the right partner is key to making smart technology decisions and investments.”
digital orientation

Social media is another challenge demanding the attention of employers. Many managers say the proliferation and immediacy of social media has changed the expectations of younger workers in a number of ways, such as their desire for frequent feedback and how they approach strategic decision-making.

“Corporate leaders and managers must prepare for the influx of digital natives who are adept at quickly finding information, rapidly completing tasks and then moving on,” says Jim Link, chief human resources officer of Randstad North America. “These workers have a digital orientation that frames how they approach communication, gather information and solve problems.”

Link suggests the time is right for employers to introduce programs to help lead employees toward decompression. This is especially important for younger teams. “Decompression is not the opposite of action,” he explains. “At its best, decompression helps train employees to take a moment to think and look at the big picture, instead of immediately jumping into short-term actions.”

digital leadership

Companies must not only strive for digital leadership, but also develop leaders who can meet business objectives and adapt to the constantly changing nature of digital technologies.

“Best-in-class leaders are always looking at technology and other disruptors in their business,” says Traci Fiate, chief executive officer of professional and commercial staffing at Randstad US. To build forward-thinking leadership teams, Fiate believes companies should identify key players who have the agility and ability to do things differently.

“The pace at which things change is faster than I’ve ever seen,” adds Fiate. “Successful leaders today must continuously shift how they think, how they do business and how they perceive past successes. If you simply repeat what made you successful in the past, you will eventually stall and fail.”
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— Traci Fiatte, chief executive officer of professional and commercial staffing at Randstad US
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there will be a continued shift in how, when, where and why work gets done.

Today’s blueprint of where, when and how work gets done looks very different than it did even a few years ago. As millennials and the incoming Gen Z workforce become a larger presence in the workplace, their desire for nontraditional work experiences is going to increasingly force employers to adapt.

“Initially this shift was slow moving,” explains Jodi Chavez, group president of Randstad Professionals, Randstad Life Sciences and Tatum. “But across most industries, companies have started to adapt to a more agile work environment — and offering greater workplace flexibility has become commonplace.”

Chavez notes these changes extend to everything from relaxed dress codes to blended work hours. “It’s now common for employees to engage with social media during work hours and do work during ‘off’ hours,” says Chavez. “To stay competitive and attract top talent in 2019 and beyond, companies must offer workplace flexibility.”

In fact, greater flexibility is an emerging trend across many different types of work environments. Greg Dyer, president of Randstad’s U.S. commercial staffing business, predicts it won’t be long before the process by which companies fill shift hours will look radically different. “Just look at call centers,” says Greg. “In the past, employers determined the number of people needed for a particular shift and were reluctant to approve change requests. Now, we see employees self-selecting their shifts. At the same time, companies are becoming more flexible in their hiring processes.”

working for the greater good

To stay competitive in 2019, employers will need to focus on not only the “how” of work, but also the “why.” “Hiring managers must recognize that emerging and mid-career employees today crave opportunities to act as agents of change,” explains Dan Davenport, president and general manager of RiseSmart. “The desire to have a meaningful work life is not new;” Davenport continues. “What is new is workers are seeking opportunities that provide a sense of purpose and give meaning to their lives.” As an example, Davenport points out employees today tend to prefer working with mission-driven organizations that have strong cultures and are committed to corporate social responsibility. Going forward, companies that take the time to clearly identify and reinforce their employees’ contributions, and link them to a broader mission in the world, will have an advantage in the competition for top talent.
According to recent research, 82 percent of employees say lifelong learning is important to them, but nearly 40 percent report their employers don’t provide upskilling opportunities. “The idea of sitting in the same job for two years with little movement forward is foreign to much of today’s workforce,” says Chavez. “The consensus is that when companies don’t offer meaningful opportunities for learning and progression, employees take matters into their own hands and move on.”

Graig Paglieri, president of Randstad Technologies and Randstad Engineering, predicts relevant and timely upskilling opportunities will become a major retention strategy for companies in 2019 and beyond. “Employers have opportunities to provide on-demand training when people need it, not just on set schedules or through workshops,” he says. Paglieri also believes when companies proactively make these training options available, employees tend to be more engaged.

career coaches: a bold retention strategy

Davenport predicts customized career coaching will increasingly be viewed as an effective way for companies to build highly motivated teams. “In the past,” says Davenport, “organizations rejected the notion of personalized employee coaching due to the perceived high cost or limited availability of services.” Today, however, that’s no longer the case. “Companies can now deliver highly effective career development programs in short, micro-learning bursts where employees initially engage with a coach and then return when it’s time to define the next set of goals,” he says.

Personal coaching resonates especially well with younger workers, many of whom expect to receive frequent direction and feedback. “Coaching is obviously valuable for people who are changing jobs or careers, but it can also be extremely valuable to workers who want to keep learning or find opportunities to advance within the organization,” says Davenport. He suggests employers provide structured coaching to help workers grow and develop, because that can keep them from seeking opportunities elsewhere in the event they aren’t rapidly promoted.
It’s difficult to overstate the extent to which diversity and inclusion (D&I) initiatives are related to other salient workplace trends. Audra Jenkins, chief diversity and inclusion officer at Randstad North America, advises employers to pay close attention. “Divisiveness around many issues has not been this pronounced since the 1960s,” says Jenkins. “Businesses must focus on inclusion and belonging for a number of reasons — not least of which is the simple fact that we, as a society, are becoming much more diverse.”

Jenkins has the following guiding principle for companies trying to create strong D&I cultures: “It’s imperative everyone is in on the D&I conversation; otherwise, your programs won’t succeed. Just having the D&I or HR team check boxes on a form never works. But when CEOs and other executive leaders are held accountable on this topic, companies excel on D&I.”

diversity and brand building
Looking ahead, it doesn’t seem the focus on diversity and inclusiveness at most organizations today is likely to subside any time soon. “Effective employer brands resonate with all people,” explains Kristin Kelley, chief marketing officer of Randstad North America. “And D&I has become a larger piece of the message, more than it was even two years ago.”

Kelley emphasizes a positive D&I image is especially critical in today’s tight talent market. “Employers must understand their D&I reputation starts with internal initiatives, rolls up to marketing messaging, influences external brand perception and finally impacts talent attraction and the candidate experience,” says Kelley.

Besides, studies show that more diverse companies also tend to be better-performing companies. “Companies with workforces that are diverse in terms of age, background, gender, race and sexual orientation have a breadth of understanding that ultimately leads to better decision making,” says Fiatte.

diversity in technology
Including women in the digital revolution remains the focus of many diversity initiatives. And some of those efforts are starting to pay off. For instance, broad-based initiatives to introduce more girls to STEM careers are helping to build a growing pipeline of female candidates with key science, technology, engineering and math skills.

However, Jenkins cautions that one of the biggest diversity challenges facing organizations is how to find replacement jobs for women affected by automation, such as roles related to data collection and processing. “Automation threatens to eliminate hundreds of thousands of jobs, a disproportionate percentage of which are currently held by women,” says Jenkins. “Organizations that are not prepared for the shift will fail a substantial portion of their workforce.”
Emerging technologies like AI are both a source of hope and concern for employers and employees alike.

“There has been so much anticipation about what AI can do that expectations are often very different than reality,” explains Stukalsky. He points out that, while machines are well equipped to take over repetitive tasks and activities that can be expressed in a clear, rule-based format, there will always be need for people in the workplace, working alongside technology. “Humans are critical for activities requiring creativity, emotion and judgement,” says Stukalsky.

Certainly, AI tools today are impacting many aspects of the HR function, from recruiting and hiring to onboarding, employee engagement, retention and offboarding.

“Organizations can realize substantial benefit from AI tools, such as Wade & Wendy and Allyo, which help with screenings, background and reference checks, onboarding and other highly manual tasks,” says Stukalsky. At the same time, humans remain superior in a number of key areas, including processing open job requisitions, conducting behavioral interviews and developing brand and marketing activities in support of talent attraction, engagement and retention goals, according to Stukalsky.

Rebecca Henderson, chief executive officer of Randstad Sourceright, says that AI and predictive analytics are rapidly transforming the talent acquisition process. For example, some companies have deployed recruitment bots that are able to quickly identify the right match for certain open positions and use instant communication to pre-qualify candidates and immediately respond to inquiries.

“By leveraging technology to gain workforce insights and handle repetitive tasks,” says Henderson, “forward-thinking organizations are enabling human recruiters to deliver even greater value. In return, those organizations are better positioned to succeed in what matters most: unfettered access to in-demand talent.”
In the future, the traditional staffing model comprising a mix of permanent and part-time workers will likely give way to a more agile workforce model comprising temporary, contract, consultant and freelance contributors. “The skilled labor market is so tight,” says Link, “that some employers are creating agile teams for survival purposes.”

Link also predicts employers will soon add a third employee category: the AI worker.

“Very few companies today look at technology as part of their workforce,” says Link. “But agile and AI are the fastest growing workforce segments, and they’re already outpacing and outgrowing the traditional model of employment.” As AI becomes more prevalent, Link cautions it’s important to remember “the work isn’t going away — it’s just changing.”

data throughout the enterprise

In today’s data-rich work environments, teams must be able to see historic and predictive information side by side in order to make informed decisions. “If you can’t compare future-looking data against historical information,” explains Fiatte, “you’re making a half-informed decision.” But, she acknowledges, many organization find it challenging to access and review information at the pace required for today’s decision-making processes.

She adds that properly leveraging predictive data is particularly important for large-scale, publicly held enterprises. “These companies need to be spot-on when using predictive data because those predictions matter quarter to quarter.”

What’s more, traditional marketing roles increasingly rely on data accumulation and analysis. “Marketing today is a data-driven function,” says Kelley. “Successful marketers never initiate a project without metric goals.”

And that means data insights are foundational to marketing strategies. “People who can pull data and crunch numbers have the insight to shift strategy and create desired outcomes,” says Kelley. “The IT employee of the past is the marketing employee of the future.”
When job requisitions stay open too long, employers spend too much time and money on recruitment, and overburdened teams become less effective. And when hiring teams drag their feet, top candidates often seek opportunities elsewhere. But according to Scott Gutz, chief executive officer of Monster, there’s another option: Think differently about what makes for a quality candidate, focusing more on potential. Gutz suggests filtering applicants to ensure they meet the minimum requirements for the role, then searching for the best possible fit based on more flexible criteria. “In a tight labor market, you can’t only consider candidates who meet every single requirement,” says Gutz. “You also need to consider candidates who might not meet every single one of the requirements, but have high potential for impact.”

Gutz advises that the scarcity of talent provides an excellent opportunity for companies to determine if they are over-screening candidates. “To remain competitive and reduce time to hire, HR and hiring managers should think about the entire recruiting and onboarding process and evaluate the value of non-essential items,” says Gutz. He also emphasizes the importance of hiring for soft skills and training for hard skills. “This is the time to separate must-have and nice-to-have credentials, and to integrate training as part of the hiring process,” says Gutz. For retailers and companies in industries with seasonal hiring needs, there’s also an opportunity to rethink hiring processes in order to retain more employees over the long term. “For shift positions,” explains Dyer, “we now see more candidates choosing when they want to work. As a result of flexible scheduling, we are able to retain skilled workers longer, cutting down on attendance issues. It’s a win-win for both the candidate and the client.” He adds that some organizations today are even offering shorter shifts in order to accommodate employee expectations around flexible work schedules.

lifting wages and rewarding retention

For years, wages have remained stagnant, but that trend appears to be changing. “Even though the talent market has been tight for some time, wages haven’t started increasing until now,” says Fiatte. “This change indicates that money is back on the table. If salary had been an issue with prior candidates, employers can give those individuals a second chance by revisiting the salary question and better matching their financial requirements.”

Historically employers financially reward employee performance. But Dyer suggests the idea of rewarding retention as well. “If you put seasonal hires through a three-week training and they don’t stay, you’ve just incurred a huge cost.” He notes that some companies include incentives in their retention plans to encourage workers to stay throughout, and sometimes beyond, the peak season.
“Think differently about what makes for a quality candidate, focusing more on potential.”

— Scott Gutz, chief executive officer of Monster
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company culture will influence the quality of job applicants.

What does a healthy workplace look like? For starters, it’s a community in which all team members feel that they belong and are valued. These values are integral to creating positive workplace cultures, which is a big draw for candidates evaluating different job opportunities.

“It’s important to understand that the strength of your internal community influences how outsiders perceive your company, and these perceptions directly impact your future recruiting efforts,” says Moritz Kothe, chief executive officer of kununu. “Word-of-mouth recommendations and online reviews by current and former employees create immediate impressions — they can quickly tilt a candidate’s perception of whether or not they’d be welcome on your team.”

So Kothe says it’s important for companies to share external messaging with candidates that accurately line up with the way employees really feel. And he adds there are internal benefits to doing so. “Employers that provide outsiders with an honest and authentic picture of life inside the organization demonstrate to internal teams that their feedback is valued,” says Kothe. “By regularly implementing employee suggestions, forward-thinking organizations strengthen the community experience for all.”

the employee relationship economy

Today, shifting employee expectations, new technologies and increasing globalization have given rise to an employee relationship economy, according to Davenport. And he says that in this new ecosystem, the employer–employee relationship doesn’t end when people leave the organization.

“Former employees can go on to become your customers, competitors, reviewers, references — or even boomerang employees and brand ambassadors,” says Davenport. “That’s why HR leaders have shifted their focus to providing career support to employees at every stage of their journeys within and outside of the company. That includes career development, redeployment, creative retirement and outplacement services.”

employee resource groups

Jenkins sees the popularity of employee and business resource groups as highly effective mechanisms for fostering community across organizations. “These types of groups include members who share similar personal attributes as well as allies who are supportive of their mission and goals,” she says. “Because these commonalities aren’t necessarily tied to workplace roles or responsibilities, resource groups create opportunities for people from across an organization to build relationships in ways they might not otherwise.”
As with so many areas of today’s workplace, internal employee review and promotion processes are undergoing considerable changes. In particular, the popularity of annual reviews are being replaced by models that provide continuous, ongoing feedback to employees.

And some organizations are abandoning annual performance reviews and employee satisfaction surveys altogether, turning instead to monthly “pulse” surveys and real-time conversations as key feedback mechanisms. These approaches, which encourage more frequent interaction between employees and managers, can boost engagement and help companies improve employee retention.

The transition doesn’t come without challenges, however. If an organization foregoes formal review processes that require manager documentation, it’s more difficult to award merit increases because of a lack of visibility into an individual’s performance as well as little insight into whether the ongoing development conversations actually happened.

modern approaches to employee growth

Chavez sees more companies implementing blended-hybrid promotional ladders. In place of a formal review discussion, these models constantly feed employees with new challenges and provide salary raises accordingly. This helps make jobs more fluid. “The goal with the hybrid model is to take employees and stretch them a little bit at a time,” says Chavez.

Fiatte advocates a similar approach. “To help workers grow quickly and noticeably,” she explains, “you can create a process flow for an entire position. Then you can separate the bigger role into bite-sized chunks that can be tackled over a period of time.” She explains that by breaking down the role into specific tasks, employees can rapidly advance to the next layer of responsibility. This phased approach can also facilitate upskilling, because employees are constantly learning something new.

rewarding employees for customer-centric behaviors

Customer retention is critical to any company’s growth strategy. In other words, it pays to put customers first — which is why many companies are actively rewarding employees for doing so.

“Social media and online reviews have the potential to expose every customer interaction, and internal teams must understand their customer-facing activities define the company — today, as well as in the future,” says Kelley. She suggests employee performance measurements include metrics related to customer centricity. “Organizations that reward and promote based on excellent customer satisfaction are also investing in employee engagement and retention.”

In healthcare, similarly, the rise of value-based healthcare means organizations must strive for more customer-centric approaches. Abigail Tremble, president of Randstad Healthcare, notes that when teams view processes and protocols through the lens of value, they contribute to the larger goal of reducing healthcare expenditures. “In contrast to fee-for-service healthcare, value-based care incentivizes teams to provide the best care for the least cost,” says Tremble. “As such, every team’s performance must be evaluated on the basis of the outcomes it produces.”
key takeaways

With the economy still going strong, unemployment at historic lows and talent scarcity a stark reality, employers must take action today to continue to stay ahead tomorrow. But, as this report makes clear, the good news is there are plenty of opportunities for companies to strengthen their brands in order to better retain employees and attract the talent they need — in 2019 and beyond.
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