The future of work

- Skills & technology
- Leadership
- Diversity

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HR professionals need to foresee and adapt challenges as new questions will be raised and new answers will be needed to support our organisations, says EAPM president Lucas van Wees.

At 3.4 per cent, Malta currently has one of the lowest unemployment rates in Europe. A first reading would see this as very positive - but in HR matters, what challenges does such a low unemployment rate bring?

This faces every company with major challenges in terms of recruitment, development and retention. Fortunately we do know from research that the economic conditions of employment are not always the most important ones for new hires to accept an employment offer - development opportunities and the perceived connection with the new manager are also important.

Nowadays, the purpose and degrees of freedom in the job are also important factors to apply for a company, most certainly when it concerns millennials.

From a country perspective, it plays out to develop an intelligent approach on demographics, migration policies, child and health care, lifelong learning and how to deal with retirement ages for future pensioners.

"Educational institutions have a major role to play, as we can see in the ongoing debate around lifelong learning."

Ultimately company strategies are in the heart of the matter. It boils down to questions in sourcing. Should we in-source or outsource a service or product portfolio, onshore or offshore, people-dependent or less dependent with respect to digitalising and automating employee and customer processes?

In Europe, what are currently the skills in demand - and how is this demand being met?

This varies from country to country but overall we observe a massive need for technical and digital savvy staff. There’s also a huge demand for staff in hospitality, care for elderly, teachers and staff for building projects. In some countries this has led to a migration - such as from the Baltic states and Poland. In Poland, this has been partly compensated by workers from the Ukraine.

At the higher education, some of Europe’s most attractive countries have benefitted through their education systems. For instance in the Netherlands we’ve seen a huge increase of international students. Once graduated, some of them remain and become part of the Dutch workforce.

What will be the jobs of the future - and how are educational institutions preparing today’s workforce?

A number of studies have been investigating this and have predicted that around 47 per cent of the current workforce in the US will be impacted by the convergence of major technological developments. Later studies have indicated this will not go that fast - the amount of impacted workers will be less and it varies from country to country depending on its capabilities to deal with social and technological change.

A major challenge will be if the economic distribution of increased productivity will be divided in such a way among people that it will enhance social cohesion and trust in societies. This ‘political’ question will be a huge factor as to what extent people are willing to accept changes, such as in their work and in their workplace.

Educational institutions have a major role to play in this as we can see in the ongoing debate around lifelong learning. Many of them though are conservative and face challenges in updating their curricula to be compliant with current business and technological challenges. The ones who succeed in doing this are seeing a huge amount of students and are able to attract talent and full teaching staff. What seems to be a golden formula is to create smart areas or regions in an intelligent interplay by government, companies and knowledge institutes such as universities and research centres.

The theme for this year’s FHRD conference is ‘HR Transformation: Unravelling the Future’. How would you interpret this theme?

We all work in a certain context dealing with our geographical place in the world. Given this, HR professionals need to play a role in being relevant and credible, while keeping an eye on the impact of their contributions to the global workplace.

Technology, demographics and geopolitical events will have an ongoing impact on shaping and forming the workplace and people management. HR professionals will need to foresee and adapt to these challenges as new questions will be raised and new answers will be needed to support our organisations. Therefore, this perfectly fits with the theme of FHRD’s conference.

What is the role of the European Association for People Management?

The EAPM was established in 1982 and has become the largest confederal umbrella for HR professionals around the globe. So far we’ve 31 national associations as members representing 250,000 HR professionals all over Europe. We take the perspective from the Council of Europe which has defined Europe as a continent with 47 countries. At this point, in time Georgia, Armenia, Ukraine and the Czech Republic have also requested EAPM membership which will bring our base to 35 members.

As EAPM president I’m also on the WFPMA board, the World Federation of Personnel Management Associations. The WFPMA represents 600,000 HR professional from 90 national associations worldwide. The EAPM organises a European congress every two years. The recent ones were held in Lisbon in October 2017 and in Bled, Slovenia in Spring 2019. Our 30th EAPM European congress will be in 2021 in Vilnius, Lithuania.

The World HR congress also takes place every two years - the last one was in Chicago in June 2018 with some 25,000 participants, and next one will be in July 2020 in Colombo, Sri Lanka.

We believe it’s EAPM who makes a difference in terms of HR. Europe and the HR profession needs a platform in which we can share our national and international best and next practices. Our national associations are also in demand to help to further professionalise and communicate their own added value to their members. Finally, Europe has its own perspective on HR and people management, based on its history and unique place in the world. This needs to be voiced in Europe and around the world. This is why there are good reasons for EAPM’s existence.

How is the role of the EAPM represented in Malta?

FHRD has been a long standing member of EAPM. Over the years, we have build strong ties and have established a fruitful relationship. Through EAPM and the WFPMA Malta is connected to a network of 90 HR national associations and can reach out to almost a million HR professional around the globe.

Within EAPM we’ve created and realised a number of initiatives which benefits our national associations and its members. Among others we’ve organised our very first International HR Day on May 20 all over Europe, celebrating the relevance of our HR profession and the importance of people management in a wider context.

We’re building a European Framework on HR which can benefit associations who are working with HR certification and standardisation, we’re creating a European speaker database, we’re relaunching our European Journal on Human Resource Development. This journal will focus on practice, policy and research.

Curiously, we’re creating a global advisory and editorial board.

If you want to know more about EAPM, please visit EAPM.org. FHRD represents Malta at the EAPM.

Lucas van Wees is president of the European Association for People Management and member of the Dutch HR Association (NVP). He is a board member of the Dutch Employers Federation, supervisory board member of the NEFF University of Applied Sciences and chairman of the Foundation of the Dutch Magazine on HRM. He has worked for Philips, Shell, KPN in HR, managerial and commercial roles and since 2001 as VP HR commercial and global of KLM, responsible for all worldwide HR matters and particularly involved in the post Merger integration in France. In 2016, he became the director HRM of the University of Amsterdam (UvA), the largest university in the Netherlands.
The future of work

Powerful new forms of automation and tech advances in numerous sectors are fundamentally reshaping our world, including HR.

With the Fourth Industrial Revolution advancing, the topic of the day among organisations, business owners, professionals and employees, is: What is the future of work really all about? The reality is that the future of work is fluid. Changes in the way people are taking on the challenges of their jobs and responsibilities, are happening at a very fast pace and HR is having to catch up on this. Insights gleaned from the World Economic Forum Report (2018) indicate that all the aforementioned stakeholders asking this question are actually crucial in creating inherent opportunities for economic prosperity, societal progress and individual flourishing in this new world of work.

Powerful new forms of automation and tech advances in numerous sectors are fundamentally reshaping our world. The question is what will happen to jobs with the ever-increasing introduction of robotics, computer algorithms and artificial intelligence, which are evidently increasing productivity and improving lives.

McKinsey Global Institute Research estimates that up to 30 per cent of the hours worked globally could be automated by 2030 depending on the speed of adoption. This will result in a decline in traditional roles such as operating machinery, preparing fast food, collecting and processing data. On the other hand, jobs that involve managing people, care work, applying expertise, require empathy and so forth will increase as these are harder to automate. In addition to this, McKinsey also estimate that globally, healthcare-related jobs such as doctors, nurses and health care technicians could grow to a maximum of 85 million by 2030. The reason for this is that the ageing population of economically active people aged 65 and over is projected to increase by one third (UKCES).

Research conducted by the Institute for the Future (IFTF) points out that these technologies enabled by significant advances in software, will underpin the formation of an era of new human machine partnerships in 2030. This partnership, as explained by IFTF will result in employees becoming digital conductors who are required to absorb new information and apply it as fast as possible (in-the-moment learning) and whose work will consist of a wide range of skills across various job-related fields.

The workforce skills model developed by McKinsey Global Institute, categorises five skill sets namely: physical and manual skills; basic cognitive skills; higher cognitive skills; social and economic skills; and technological skills. The latter will see a substantial growth in demand as organisations deploy technologies with time spent on advanced technological skills forecasted to increase by 50 per cent in the US and by 41 per cent in Europe by 2030.

Concurrently we will also see a rise in the demand for social and economic skills with the demand for entrepreneurship and initiative taking to be the fastest growing with a 33 per cent increase in the US and a 32 per cent rise in Europe. The demand for cognitive skills in 2030 will also see a shift from basic to higher ones such as creativity, critical thinking, decision making and complex information processing. All of this will result in fierce competition for talent bringing higher wages and benefits for the highly skilled, whilst wages for other cohorts may decline or stagnate.

Taking into consideration the research conducted by McKinsey and IFTF one can conclude that while enough new work can be generated for everyone there are serious challenges in how HR professionals will manage this transition and in so doing ensure that they step up their effort to train and retrain, redeploy, hire and contract employees in the skills required for the future. Furthermore, the onus is also shifting onto employees who need to acquire knowledge that it is crucial to keep on learning, re-skilling and be self-motivated to keep learning.

The challenge is not only specific for HR practitioners, but also to other stakeholders such as educational institutions, industry associations, employment agencies and government policy makers, who all must play their part to help overcome the potential skills mismatch of the future.
For more than a decade, FHRD has been organising Malta’s annual HR conference. The event started from a small seminar, becoming over the years a fully-fledged conference and expo area, with past speakers coming from the likes of Google, IBM and Philips. This year will be no different with the event hosting 500 plus participants from a wide range of organisations making it an unparalleled opportunity for HR professionals to network. In addition, more than 25 exhibitors will be showcasing their products and services on the day.

The 2019 edition will address what the organisation of the future looks like and reshaping of the HR function to support organisations going through this transformative change.

This year’s theme has been selected as now is the time to act as the HR function is at a crossroads in this evolution with ageing legacy systems and processes and is pivotal to meeting the needs of tomorrow’s workforce. With Malta’s economic growth and influx of foreign companies it is essential for HR professionals to be proactive in adapting to this transformative change. This year’s conference will address the salient points of how the HR function needs to position itself more strategically, adopting a more integrated model and ultimately creating an innovative employee experience, resulting in organisations being more productive and competitive.
Dan Strode, global director of HR culture and strategy at Santander Group, will be opening the event with a keynote on Santander’s transformation in response to the future of work with insights to the Santander way of doing things packed with practical examples spanning from 32 different countries with more than 200,000 colleagues and showcasing mini case studies on how to prepare for the future of work, now.

The afternoon keynote – focusing on how to unleash the power of your teams through their network – will be delivered by Sven Joseph, senior manager in HR at Cisco. It will also be packed with practical examples on how Cisco is shifting its HR focus from individuals and leaders to teams and teams of teams and focusing on how the next generation organisational network analysis, digitalisation and cutting edge technology lead Cisco HR to the next level to fully unleash the power of teams through the intelligent human network.

Each keynote speech will be followed with interactive workshops, all tackling issues related to the future of work. The morning workshops will tap into how coaching, skills disruption and automation are impacting the future of work. Baton & Baton will focus on current HR challenges and how pioneering technology, science and psychology can democratise coaching all in the pursuit of accelerating the growth and transformation of individuals and teams to power the organisation of the future.

Mid-way through the event a panel discussion on CEOs’ expectations of HR will take place. This year’s panelists will be Nikhil Patil from GO plc, Andrew Beane from HSBC, Sara Grech from Engel & Volkers Sara Grech and Paulianne Nwoko from Apex Group. During the live panel they will be exploring the perceptions of local CEOs vis-à-vis the HR function, their expectations from HR and conclude with insightful learnings and take aways for the conference delegates.

FHRD would like to thank conference partners Castille, Hilton Malta, Mapfre MSV Life plc, Outdoor Living Malta – The Team Building Specialists, PWC, Shireburn Indigo, Studioseven and Times of Malta for their commitment. The event is scheduled for Wednesday, October 23, at the Hilton Conference Centre.

WWW.FHRD.ORG/2019CONF
In a world of tech advances and disruption, HR professionals need to respond and modernise, says Matthew Naudi.

Although no clairvoyance will tell us what tomorrow will bring, the future of work is full of opportunities, yet brings significant challenges.

In a climate of technological disruptiveness, rising employee expectations, multi-generational and diverse workforces, changing social trends and the surge in the importance of people and data analytics, what is certain is that the business landscape as we know it, is changing fast.

And as the world bulldozes towards a fully digital economy, employers are today being faced with unparalleled challenges to transform business processes in order to remain competitive and address the dynamic career demands of their human capital.

The exponential growth of economic activity over a relatively short period of time – especially through the explosion of technological and disruptive advances affecting all business sectors – is leading to traditional business models becoming outdated and out of touch with the current and future needs and demands of organisations.

In this light, HR professionals must realise that unless they overcome their legacy issues and move away from archaic HR models, their organisations will suffer and, their relevance is put into question.

Many HR professionals champion change within their organisations but it is the time for the HR professionals themselves to embrace change and understand the need to be more agile. However, some seem to stumble over the prospect of changing the way they operate.

HR is at a crossroads and HR leaders need to act now to avoid the risk of the HR function ending up as a mere transactional and administrative one. The digitalisation and technological disruption happening around us are bringing on new phenomena, ultimately challenging the traditional concept that employees are an organisation’s biggest asset.

Although this might all sound like a bit far fetched and straight out of a sci-fi book, it is obvious that HR professionals within this scenario need to upskill and adapt in order to ensure that they are equipped to take on these challenges and to make certain that the HR function is in a position to take the lead in transforming the business.

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Redefining people management through technology

Whatever the size of your team, or the nature of your business, HR teams have no small feat ahead of them in today’s employment market.

With more than 35 years supporting HR departments and more than 75,000 employees using Shireburn’s platform, the company understands the challenges of people management.

Shireburn believes in technology that can work to reduce much of the administration that HR teams get caught up in, streamlining processes and investing in automation, freeing up time to allow the organisation to focus on what really matters – its people. Here’s how.

Indigo Suite is an award-winning and cloud-based people management platform for payroll, leave, attendance management and more. Consolidation is key, as employee details, payroll calculations, leave balances and attendance data are all merged into one solution, drastically reducing the amount of time spent manipulating data and risking error.

Not only can HR access Indigo Suite from absolutely anywhere, but so can the rest of the organisation. Employees can apply for leave remotely via an employee portal and their managers can approve on the fly.

There’s no room for error with payroll. The biggest nightmare for any HR executive is to be embarrassed by payroll blunders and lose the staff’s trust. Payroll needs to be accurate, every time. And Shireburn gets it. The company invests time and personnel in ensuring its systems are up-to-date with all legislative changes, and back this up with quality assurance and support teams who understand just how precise the payroll system needs to be.

Individuals need to be empowered and given the tools to be able to manage parts of their own profile within the company, with online leave applications, payslips and P60s that are ready for download, amongst other features.

In addition to an online leave application and approval process, staff can check their own leave balances, and view a shared calendar so they know who’s available each day.

Indigo sees to the attendance management needs of various organisations. From simple setups like an office environment, to more complex requirements of hotels with shifts and rosters, Indigo provides all the facilities to be able to track employee attendance and clocking with direct integration to payroll.

One of the latest additions is a mobile app that allows staff to clock in and out of work using the one device that’s always with them - their phone. This is great news for companies who find the investment in clocking devices to be too costly, or for those who have remote staff, as employees can make use of their phones to clock in, triggering a GPS verification, which can be authenticated via passcode, fingerprint or face ID.

Once you’ve taken the decision to improve and automate your people management processes, the Shireburn team can guide you through a number of quick and easy setup and migration options and ensure that your business operations go uninterrupted throughout.

As partners of the FHRD Annual Conference, Shireburn looks forward to welcoming you. Visit the Shireburn stand in the exhibition hall and talk to one of the Shireburn experts, or e-mail info@shireburn.com.

(Content provided by Shireburn)
Recruitment and talent retention are among the biggest challenges HR managers are facing today. Across all industries and skill levels, finding the right candidate to fill new positions has become increasingly difficult, let alone retaining that person for longer than two years. Training people for their next job rather than the job they were recruited for is becoming all too common.

Within this scenario, offering new recruits and current employees an attractive working environment is crucial. Employee Assistance Programmes (EAP) are a viable option as part of a wider employee package. Such programmes have benefits for employers like reducing absenteeism, staff turnover and healthcare costs while at the same time increasing productivity and engagement. This results in a happier, more productive workforce and an increased return on your business.

As of 2019, ICAS International, the global well-being division of UK and international health insurers AXA PPP healthcare, will now be providing their global EAP in Malta, introduced locally by Atlas Healthcare Insurance Agency. ICAS services will be offered to clients’ HR and people-management teams. Through ICAS, employers in Malta will be offered unlimited 24/7 access to master’s level clinicians, in addition to local legal and financial helplines and local face-to-face counselling. The service also offers access to an extensive online support and information portal including videos and podcasts. The service also includes the same support for family members. Another unique aspect of the programme is that it also includes 24/7 telephone support and online resources for the company’s HR and line managers, which in today’s working environment, can provide invaluable assistance.

ICAS has been established and experienced in designing, implementing and operating employee assistance (EAP), counselling and wellbeing programmes and related services for over 30 years, initially in the UK and then globally, since 1987. ICAS is represented worldwide through a network of high-quality provider partnerships and affiliate providers in 126 countries. ICAS follows strict guidelines on ethics and data protection. Your employees can be reassured that they will remain anonymous if they make use of the service.

Atlas Healthcare is authorised under the Insurance Distribution Act to act as enrolled insurance agents. The EAP is not an insurance product but is provided as a product ancillary to insurance. It is an assistance service exclusively provided by AXA ICAS Limited and Atlas Healthcare has no direct or indirect involvement in the provision of the service.

(Content provided by Atlas Healthcare)
The challenges faced by human resource managers has certainly seen an evolution in the past decade. As businesses become more data driven, HR staff have had to rethink their approaches to several challenges that are faced in the office on a daily basis.

One such problem includes the engagement of employees within the workplace. Despite various communicative technologies that have emerged in past years, the ability to encourage employees to engage themselves within the workplace has remained a large part of an HR team’s responsibility. At least one out of every three employees do not feel engaged in their own workplace, leading to medium businesses facing thousands in costs related to disengaged workers.

Brightspark assists HR professionals through functionalities such as the easy implementation of Recognition Badges and simpler communication processes among colleagues, ensuring that employees feel connected, while also receiving the proper merits for their contributions to the workplace.

HR staff are also tasked with handling large amounts of employee data required to fulfill most HR processes. However, this often becomes a challenge, especially given the recent emergence of the General Data Protection Regulation, which has forced HR professionals to take extra precaution when handling this sensitive data.

Brightspark simplifies the process of handling large amounts of sensitive data. Through a comprehensive document manager, HR executives can now access key information such as work permits, contracts and medical records quickly and easily. As a cloud-based platform, this also ensures that this data can be accessed at any time, any where and on any device, all with GDPR-compliant encryption.

Employee growth is another factor that often adds pressure on HR professionals. Now more than ever younger employees often hold a greater sense of priority towards career advancement. This in turn, increases the importance in HR managers handling workplace training and the planning of courses.

Brightspark’s Evolve module makes quick work of training schedules, ensuring that employees get the opportunities to improve their skillsets as desired, allowing for the encouragement of a truly growth-oriented workplace.

Tackle modern-day HR problems with modern solutions. Ignite team performance with Brightspark. For more information e-mail info@mybrightspark.com or visit www.mybrightspark.com.

(Content provided by Brightspark)
Upskilling for the digital world has to be part of an organisation’s ecosystem, says Claudine Attard

The world is going through a technological revolution and this is leading to increasing disparity, disrupting jobs and businesses, and threatening the stability of our institutions. Automation, primarily in the form of robotics and artificial intelligence, brings with it the promise of improved productivity and higher profits – but at what cost to employment and, by extension, to society? What responsibility do organisations have to upskill employees who otherwise would be displaced by technology? "Upskilling for the digital world can offer an organisation? PwC’s research shows that one in three jobs is likely to be severely disrupted or to disappear in the next decade because of technological change. This could affect almost half of all low-skilled jobs and a third of semi-skilled jobs.

The World Economic Forum estimates that it will cost $24,600 per head to upskill displaced US workers, but when set against the alternatives – severance payments for workers who are let go and the cost of finding new workers with in-demand skills, amongst other things – upskilling is the more attractive option.

Skills mismatches have a direct impact on a nation’s GDP, tax revenues and social safety net bill. Organisations are less productive, and trade generates less tax. This is why upskilling programmes are being explored by governments as well as corporations.

The Luxembourg Digital Skills Bridge, which provides technical and financial assistance to upskill employees in companies facing disruption, is a good example of a highly targeted approach. Similarly, a handful of corporations have made significant investments in educational initiatives in their communities. For instance, PwC network has just embarked on its new programme ‘New World. New Skills’ whereby over the next four years it is upskilling each of its 276,000 people, but the commitment is much broader – reaching other workers, those currently excluded from the workforce, and the next generation. This will be done by investing $3bn in upskilling – primarily in training employees, and also in developing and sharing technologies to support clients and communities. So far, these are isolated examples. Any sustainable approach to upskilling will need broader engagement and collaboration between the private and public sectors.

Business strategies must not only focus on the implications of digital transformations on their operations, but must also have a rigorous people strategy. This is to ensure that upskilling is embedded in the corporate culture throughout this new era of work. Business leaders must work closely with HR leaders to ensure that the organisation’s people are well positioned to cope with what lies ahead.

Upskilling for the digital world does not start and end with training – it has to be part of an ecosystem which incorporates the following activities.

“First, an organisation needs to set its business strategy which defines what it’s going to look like in the future. PwC’s Future of the Workforce framework (FHRD) rates the following activities.

An organisation needs to set its business strategy which defines what it’s going to look like in the future.

PwC’s research shows that one in three jobs is likely to be severely disrupted or to disappear in the next decade because of technological change.

Claudine Attard is senior manager, People and Organisational Consulting, PwC Malta and is a board member of the Foundation for Human Resources Development (FHRD).
**Graduate employability skills**

An educational system is meant to provide a steady supply of flexible and opportunistic generalists willing to sharpen or resharpen a skill, in line with perceived labour market opportunities, says Anne Marie Thake.

There has been an increased focus on graduate employability skills in developed economies due to globalization, international technologies and the economy. Employability skills are considered important in enabling graduates to effectively apply disciplinary knowledge in the workplace. The meaning of what it is for employees to be employable is increasingly difficult to determine as the pace of economic innovation increases.

"All economies are having to deal with complex and overlapping technologies. Employers demand innovations that have serious consequences on employment, skill needs, training processes and labour market institutions" (Cressy, 2018). Changes in the labour market, the increased production of robotics and the application of artificial intelligence, digitalization and the use of algorithms imply that the changes experienced in the coming decades will be extensive and far reaching.

Changes in the labour market and higher education have taken centre stage. Universities are urged to produce ‘employable’ graduates as opposed to employees. They are under pressure to equip graduates with more than academic skills traditionally presented by a subject discipline and a degree. Private organisations urge them to develop the soft skills needed in many types of employment. While a ‘job for life culture’ has become extinct, employability skills have become imperative. Graduate employability is high on the Government’s agenda, because it is perceived that enhancing qualifications and skills of the workforce is a way to increase prosperity and wealth. This is a challenge because degrees, oriented towards students who are communicative, demonstrative and entrepreneurial. The knowledge economy has led one to believe that there are more opportunities than before and that better credentials are viewed as the currency of opportunity leading to good jobs and higher rewards. Education has been totally commodified and rendered into more certification rather than a holistic education. It seems to be a cultural expectation that students must read for a degree in Malta so as not to be perceived differently or permanently impoverished.

The increased demand for higher education has led to a greater student intake at the University. It has also become an increasingly difficult task to fill vacancies arising from skill shortages and skills gaps. "We would employ more people if only we could find them," one employer stated. Employers claim that in view of this, they cannot expand their businesses. Instead, they have employed foreign workers to try and address the shortages. It is an illusion that the Government can plan what skills we need for the next decade. Today’s world is continuously changing and it is a challenge for us to live with and continuously sharpen skills. Skills gaps are a sign of a vibrant and evolving economy.

Employees prefer to employ MCAST graduates because of their immediate response and work readiness. However, other employers prefer graduates for the long term. If an employer offers a job that requires certain types of mechanical, electronic, routine-based activities and fixed hours, an MCAST graduate tends to be better suited. For innovating companies, employees need to be flexible, forward looking and able to think out of the box. It is evident that some areas offer better chances of jobs that are related to the field of study than others. The rate of students finding work in their areas is high among graduates in ICT, science, pharmacy, chemistry, accounting, medicine, engineering and education. Students, who choose accountancy, finance or mathematics and statistics, are more marketable. Nonetheless, employers are concerned there are not only enough graduates in particular segments of the labour market but certain employability skills are not cultivated, among them communication, team-building and entrepreneurial skills. It is imperative to seek employers’ views by economic sector in order to map out the industry and soft skills that are required in each field.

Dr Anne Marie Thake is a lecturer at the University of Malta. She authored the book Graduate Employability Skills in Malta (Kite Group). She is a board member of the Foundation for Human Resources Development (FHRD).

*Skills gaps are a sign of a vibrant and evolving economy*
Embracing workforce diversity provides both material and intangible benefits, says Michelle Fenech Seguna.

In recent years, workplace cultural diversity has increased – what were the contributing factors to this? The modern workforce is made up of people of different genders, generations, educational backgrounds, ethnicity, religions, and nationalities. Today, this diverse composition is widespread in local workplaces as well. Economic globalisation has been the main driving force pushing cultural diversity in the workplace.

Over the past recent years employers in Malta have been facing a severe lack of labour supply. Employers are in constant, fierce competition to attract and retain talent. The shortage in local labour supply has pushed the drive towards foreign labour. Figures from JobsPlus show that 27 per cent of the current labour workforce in Malta is composed of foreigners, the largest cohort of foreign workers worldwide. JobsPlus estimates that the number of foreign workers in Malta will hit 70,000 by year 2020.

What challenges as well as opportunities does such diversity bring to the workplace?

Such widespread cultural diversity offers both opportunities and challenges to organisations. One of the advantages is innovation – where everyone in a company is from the same background, they are likely to have similar thoughts and ideas. In order to remain competitive, companies need new ideas and concepts. A heterogeneous workforce promotes creativity, bringing fresh perspectives for dealing with problem solving and possibly new insights that can enable innovation, giving the organisation a competitive edge.

Interestingly, job seekers today are aware of the importance of a diverse workforce and want to be part of a company that will value and appreciate their difference. A typical question that I get nowadays from my interviewees is how diverse our workforce is in terms of nationality – the younger workforce, particularly Gen Ys and Millennials consider working alongside multiple nationalities as an attractive opportunity.

Growth is another advantage. Companies that embrace a diversified workforce, position themselves stronger in terms of building relationships with people from different cultures. Diverse employees can advise the companies about the best strategies to use to gain new customer bases. Employees who speak different languages and are aware of the cultural norms of international markets, which can be vital to a company’s growth. At The Westin Dragonara Resort, which is managed by Marriott International, we take the opportunity to gain further insights and build stronger relationships with people from different cultures by building on the knowledge and networks that our own associates bring.

Looking at the challenges, these include language and communication barriers, typical in companies with a diverse workforce. At times employees and managers face difficulties in getting their message across, leading to miscommunication and productivity loss. Communication barriers can also hinder growth opportunities, leaving some employees in a lower position.

Conflict occurs when prejudice, lack of respect, and racism are allowed to emer- ge. Intolerant attitudes can turn into animosity and open conflict if companies do not take prompt corrective action to show that any type of discrimination is not tolerated.

In addition, a commitment to diversity demonstrates that a company values fairness and equality. These characteristics have a positive effect on its reputation with clients and other stakeholders. A company that openly recruits the best candidates for a job, irrespective of which group they are in, gains customer loyalty and a good reputation.

How should an HR department handle racism at the workplace? Human resources functions are encouraged to promote and apply an anti-harassment policy, which reinforces the culture of zero-tolerance towards harassment of any kind, be it racism or anything else. Nevertheless, promoting a culture of unity is not the sole responsibility of HR departments. Alongside HR, senior leaders at the company play a crucial role in also promoting and applying the values of respect and unity amongst employees. Furthermore, when any conflicting situations arise, timely and appropriate intervention is crucial. If antagonism is left to fester it creates an unhealthy work environment.

In which ways does your HR department encourage inclusivity? The Westin Dragonara Resort is managed by Marriott International and values the differences of its associates as a strategic business priority. Marriott International is recognised as having one of the most diverse and inclusive workforces. In fact, Marriott has been recently named one of the World’s Best Multinational Workplaces by Great Place to Work, the world’s largest annual study of workplace excellence.

Marriott International has invested in several learning and development programmes to assist all associates in understanding their role in creating an inclusive environment, making others feel welcomed and valued, and operating with a global mind-set. An array of tools are available at Marriott to further assist our associates to work well together to support a more efficient and productive workplace environment. These tools and resources include online training programmes such as Harassment Prevention in the Global Workplace which equip our associates with knowledge on this subject.

Marriott’s respect for all campaign is dedicated to creating a culture of inclusion. Every associate is committed to uphold the TakeCare values by treating associates, guests, and business partners with respect and dignity. Senior leaders are also encouraged to come up with various activities and events that promote culture diversity and inclusion among the workforce.

Michelle Fenech Seguna is director of human resources at the Westin Dragonara Resort, Malta and is vice president of the Foundation for Human Resources Development (FHRD).
news

Leading provider of bespoke management and leadership training

Do you want to know the secret to operating a successful business? Not just successful but something that’s constantly improving and flourishing? How do you move from being just functional to becoming a powerhouse?

MadeYou is in the business of making your business better. MadeYou is one of Malta’s leading training and leadership development companies, that operates with the belief that learning happens through engagement and experience. All MadeYou sessions and workshops are highly interactive to ensure that learning outcomes stick and can be put into practice in the real world. MadeYou is passionate about helping clients develop their people and drive their businesses. Years of experience in senior operational management give MadeYou a vital advantage that will translate into tangible results.

Everything is tailor-made to your business’ specifications and values. MadeYou will work with you to design a custom programme that delivers on your desired outcomes. MadeYou’s approach includes: Gallup Clifton StrengthsFinder psychometric assessment to identify key strengths in individual delegates; 360-degree feedback survey to help develop a healthy feedback culture in the business; one-to-one coaching that focuses on development and business goals; fun and business-focused team building events that will bond teams and generate ideas from your workforce; and tailored training programmes to develop your talent, your up and coming managers, and your seasoned management team.

MadeYou began three years ago, under the leadership of co-founders Luke Todd and Kelly McSherry. Their goal was to create a portal with which to share their prowess in operational management with other European enterprises. Since then MadeYou has had the privilege to work with some of the most progressive brands in Malta and Europe such as GO, Gaming Innovation Group (GiG) and Nestle.

If you’d like to work with MadeYou, or learn more about their services, visit madeyou.eu or visit the MadeYou stall at the FHRD conference at the Hilton conference centre on October 23.

(Content provided by MadeYou)

Employee benefit packages

The recent launch of Sovereign Insurance Services (Europe) in Malta together with the grant of an occupational pension licence to Sovereign Trust International (Malta) means that Sovereign is now perfectly placed to provide a full range of employee benefit packages to both the local and international markets.

Losing a key member of staff can be a huge blow for any business. But how much does it actually cost? Studies show that the costs of recruitment and training are typically equivalent to six to nine months of annual salary, while an average of 28 weeks productivity is lost while new employees get up to speed.

That’s just the financial cost. You’ll also be losing many other attributes that are much harder to value. Not just the employee’s technical ability, experience and leadership, but their contacts, relationships and goodwill.

Regardless of circumstances, the absence of a key member of personnel can also have a knock on effect on morale and efficiency, as well as putting extra pressure on other staff.

This all means that employee retention is not just a hot topic for HR departments. It is also a key factor for the finance department and a major influence on the all important bottom line.

So what can you do to retain your staff? Employee benefit packages are a vital consideration for any employer that wishes to attract and retain the best talent, as well as to maintain a loyal and committed workforce.

Sovereign can provide a full range of employee benefits for your business, from private medical insurance and life assurance, though to highly effective pensions and savings provision. These will make your firm a more attractive place to work and, just as importantly, a much harder place to leave.

Sovereign will work with your company to design an employee benefit plan to meet your specific requirements.

For further information call the Sovereign team on +350 200 76173 or e-mail employeebenefits@sovereigngroup.com.

(Content provided by Sovereign)

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Great leadership engages the whole organisation and gears it towards success, says Christine Coleiro.

In an increasingly collaborative work environment, does leadership still matter? Leadership is not about elaborate speeches – it is about setting an ambitious but realistic vision, building trust and empowering the teams to execute the strategy. Research shows how great leadership engages the whole organisation and gears it towards success. So yes, leadership is still relevant and will remain relevant.

The leadership team cannot be separated from the organisation’s goals as these change in tempo with the changes at local and global level. In this fast changing world, basic leadership skills of good judgement, great communication, good technical knowledge, inter- and intra-personal skills and confidence are important but the overarching skill a leader needs to have is adaptability. The dexterity to which a leader adapts to change defines organisational success.

This requires leaders to be continually in learning and development mode and to see that this filters down to all the levels of the organisation.

“The more comfortable you are with your mentor, the more likely you are to share your deepest concerns and to attain the greatest value”

Leadership – nature or nurture? Natural leadership traits like integrity, high regard for ethical values, taking responsibility, decisiveness and following something through play a role in leadership – but there are more parts to the puzzle which need to be fostered in its development. It is ideal to have the leadership seed but research has shown that leadership can be improved.

Leadership is not only about effective problem solving, achieving results or about being honest, committed, disciplined, open to feedback and emotionally intelligent - it is about the learning ability and agility with which a leader matures to be motivational and inspirational. Self-awareness is one of the cornerstones of such development.

What qualities define leadership today? The ability to foresee that which is not normally foreseeable and to assess how the various potentially game-changing aspects can be connected to each other even if traditionally such connections are unthought of. All this must be translated in an inspirational way and broken down in components to which the organisation can attach itself.

Apart from the obvious key leadership roles at the very top, each organisation needs to have a string of leadership roles cross-sectionally distributed. This will allow for leadership to permeate down and reach the organisation at all its levels facilitating meaningful networking and nurturing the search for excellence. Leadership becomes distributive; it will contribute to the vision being more holistic, shared, owned and fine tuned within that same process of achieving it.

Depending on the leadership role one has within an organisation, there will be varying degrees of entrepreneurial, tenacity and relentlessness.

Does a leader need a mentor? Throughout my career I always found a lot of value in having a mentor. I feel that having someone objective and honest commenting on what I am experiencing has made a difference to my career. It has encouraged me to explore risk without fearing it, to expand my horizon, to network and most of all to realise my potential. Without my mentors I would not have achieved what I have. This is not just my story – it is the experience of a number of leaders across various sectors.

When one is leading, the importance of having a mentor is heightened because a mentor provides the sense of purpose and scaffolds you through the availability of appropriate resources, parallel learning and development opportunities and motivational inputs which encourage ownership.

What are the key roles where leadership is essential? While each and every role one may need to assume in life, private or otherwise, requires its dose of leadership at the individual level, there are roles which are synonymous to leadership. While the former requires mostly a sense of self-motivation, initiative and disposition to act in a way which adds value in the short to medium term at best, the latter requires the ability to rise high and serve as a drone for the organisation, for the business unit, for the team. Such key leadership roles would need to translate the view from beyond to a vision and a mission.

The emergence of leadership cannot be left to chance.

Does a business develop leadership capacity? Every organisation at some stage has leadership gaps. The development of leadership capacity requires appropriate and ongoing efforts towards succession planning – and this goes well beyond gap filling in cases of emergencies. In building a solid succession plan, resources need to be invested in identifying future leaders and in encouraging such qualities in key employees who would need to be ready to take on leading roles at the right time.

Over the years, I have seen a number of leaders emerge, but this can’t be left to chance. Leaders need to be earmarked and placed in crucial parts of the organisation and at the helm of different projects and teams.

Leadership programmes which include coaching or mentoring and cross fertilisation of ideas between departments, companies and industries are crucial. Such training needs to also include attending conferences and seminars which challenge pre-conceived ideas to break boundaries. We need to bear in mind that the leaders of tomorrow will need a different skills set to what we are used to today. Embracing technology in all this is key. Learning and development has taken a different twist and have moved from traditional face to face, to web classes and use online learning. Using a blended learning approach which encapsulates traditional and more innovative learning methods is key to motivate and incite learning at all ages.

Once one is showing readiness to take over, the ambitious expectations would need to be managed. Some might benefit from lateral moves before moving to the role they were groomed for.

Let’s re-energise our organisations by nurturing current and future leaders through development, a sense of purpose and alignment to be equipped to sail the seas as the waves change course and the currents direction.

Christine Coleiro is group chief HR officer at FIMBank plc and is a board member of the Foundation for Human Resources Development (FHRD).
Technology should be harnessed to connect people to high quality education and jobs, says Caroline Buhagiar Klass.

Locally, what skills are currently most in demand?

Nowadays, skills shortage is being felt across different industries, so there is no specific one that is more prominent than others. In a full employment market where supply is not meeting the demand, the situation becomes more challenging. According to the latest report from Cedefop EU (2018), the fastest growing sectors are IT and professional services. This is creating a lot of job opportunities within a limited pool of employees, which in turn translates into a shortage.

Are such needs in line with the rest of Europe?

According to Talent Search EU, in Europe the most defined needs are linked to healthcare and ICT. This is somewhat similar in part to Malta. During a recent discussion on CNBC, they listed some of the most in demand skills this year. These are digital marketing, industrial design, competitive strategies, customer service systems, software testing, data science, computer graphics and corporate communications.

"This threatens to become even wider as Industry 4.0 transforms business and jobs faster than workers can adapt"

However there is not enough data that can provide a holistic picture of specific skill shortage by country. At best today we can say that some sectors are finding it more challenging to find the people with the skills they need. Job opportunities continue to be issued.

Are these needs being met – and if yes, how?

Today, we are aware that such needs are not always met because we have a shortage in human resources. A lot of work is being carried out both in EU and Malta to ensure we can fill these needs. Currently the statistical information on skill and qualification requirements for occupations is fragmented and difficult to compare across European countries, and usually not detailed enough to reflect the specific characteristics of a given occupation.

How is the education system preparing tomorrow’s workforce?

First we need to understand where we are heading with respect to jobs that we do not know of today. Around the world, we are already seeing existing mismatch between youth skills and employer needs — this threatens to become even wider as Industry 4.0 transforms business and jobs faster than workers can adapt.

Two thirds of five-year-olds today will, in 15 years’ time, find themselves in jobs that do not even exist today. The jobs that do exist won’t necessarily be located where the job seekers live. Technology has allowed us to connect the far reaches of globe and enable business to flourish. But if that technology cannot be harnessed to connect people to high quality education and jobs, then the repercussions could be experienced broadly. Greater income inequality, increased unemployment in specific countries or geographical area, growing dependence on government, and more mass migrations are a few of the most pressing challenges that we may face if we do not plan to train adequately the next generation of workers for the digitally driven economy.

The education system is doing its utmost to prepare the workforce of the future. A lot of dialogue is ongoing between the education institutions and the business community. There is clear understanding that these bodies need to work closely together if we are to tackle it effectively. Learning agility and speed of execution will be key to ensure Malta is well placed to address the skills needed by tomorrow’s workforce. A lot is already being done but we need to do more and have a holistic human capital plan for our country.

What skills will the workforce of the future need?

According to the Human Capital Management Trends report 2019, it was noted that the investment in HR technologies known as HRIS systems has tripled since 2017. Some of these technologies are powered by artificial intelligence and automation which have disrupted the way we manage HR.

AI and machine learning are opening the door to a whole new world of possibility for the human capital space and we need to be prepared for it as it can be overwhelming if we are not equipped to maximise its potential. Just to give an example, when recruiting new hires, we all know that it is a time-consuming and costly process, but thanks to automation and AI it’s getting easier to find skilled people who are a great fit for the company.

From automated résumé screeners to robot interviewers, a wave of technical solutions for recruiting has hit the market mainly in the US, Asia and some countries in Europe.

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Finding, nurturing and keeping talent

Mark Bugeja outlines the do’s and don’ts of employer retention.

Finding and retaining talented employees is a fundamental part of any successful business. Gallup’s research shows that engagement is highly related to positive business outcomes (Carter, 2018). Currently, employee retention is one of the most critical issues as the labour market continues to tighten up. Reason being, the demand for human capital is far greater than the supply and this has created a global shortage in terms of war for talent.

Forward thinking companies think about employee retention long before a new employee commences work. Why? Because they start with the end in mind. Companies that take a fresh look at their tactics stand to gain more competitive advantages in order to retain their best talent. Superior talent is up to eight times more productive than the average ones (Keller & Meaney, 2017).

The issue then is, what are the do’s and don’ts that organisations should contemplate or avoid in order to maximise engagement?

The do’s

As already mentioned, start with retention in mind when recruiting. Train, and get your managers on board during the recruitment process. Give them the tools to screen resumes to gain more competitive advantages in order to retain their best talent. Superior talent is up to eight times more productive than the average ones (Keller & Meaney, 2017).

Hire for attitude, train for skill. At my workplace, we’re not afraid to hire people with no experience, as long as these candidates show from the beginning that they possess a positive attitude towards learning and development. Recruiting such personnel is part of our retention strategy, in return we cultivate their passion and applaud their achievements.

Each onboarding process should be set up for success from the beginning. Aim to develop a process where new hires will learn about the job, the company culture and how they can contribute and thrive.

Empower your employees and make them feel more in control and trusted. Some controls are always needed but when you empower them, they are more likely to relish their work and will become more engaged. Engaged people want a chance to succeed. They want to put their skills to good use and build upon those skills. Speak to your employees about their desired career path and look for ways to help them along. Where advancements are not possible, look for sideways moves that permit employees to attain different growth experiences.

Reward your employees. There are numerous ways to make your employees appreciated. From employee-of-the-month recognitions to cash bonus for performance. Be creative based on your industry but always acknowledge them. It could be two free cinema tickets for coming up with a good recommendation. Most importantly make it a habit.

Work-life balance. Train people to avoid to be busy being busy. Burnout is real and a healthy work life balance is essential, and the management need to understand its importance. Provide your employees with telecommuting or flexible schedules – they will surely appreciate that.

Creating an effective retention strategy should be high on every organisation’s agenda

Create an environment of trust by being transparent and authentic. This can be achieved by being open and honest with your employees. Once you achieve your employees’ trust, they will reciprocate by being open with their managers. Through active listening, managers will receive ideas and perspectives that deserves to be heard which will undoubtedly improve the working relationship. This will limit the possibility of the employees sourcing other opportunities elsewhere.

The don’ts

Don’t recruit people just because they have the capabilities to perform – recruit the people who have the right attitude which fits into your company culture. The problem is not that talented people can’t do the job requested, it’s that your company might be too fast-paced and cooperative. At the end of the day, the new hire would not fail because they were unskilful, but they flop because they didn’t fit into your company culture.

Don’t devour employees’ time with undervalued duties. Ensure that each job is valuable by limiting insignificant and unimportant tasks which could damage morale. Some of these low value tasks include regular reports that no one reads or duties that deliver results which are worth less than the time spent to make them.

Don’t promote people solely because they are very good at what they do but promote people who are either born to be leaders or can be developed into good leaders. For example, brilliant salespeople have the skill to sell ice to Eskimos but that doesn’t mean they are good to become sales managers, to lead a group of salespeople. Reason being that salespeople tend to focus solely on their sales targets, and how they are going to increase their income whereas they might have issues to concentrate on the bigger picture. They might be good to handle their own problems, but good leaders are those who can help their subordinates excel and feel part of a successful team.

Each employee is unique, the manager with best retention performs work with each employee as an individual, adapting tasks, feedback and motivation according to the individual worker.

Avoid surprises. For instance, personal or departmental goals should not come as a revelation. Through regular communications, your employees should have a clear understanding of the role they play in achieving their objectives.

If you want to go the extra mile

A great technique for employee retention is the stay interview. Exit interviews are a good source to see better alternatives for the future but it might be too little, too late to keep a talented person who has just resigned. On the other hand, the stay interview asks why employees remain with you and the benefits are plentiful, claims Richard Finnegan, author of The Stay Interview. This exercise provides insights leaders can use to motivate and retain the particular employee, not just a group.

Granted, hiring for attitude is an appealing term. This can be achieved by mapping out the type of personality you need working in the particular position. There are various online mapping tools which can help organisations to see if the new hire will work well with the rest of the team. Additionally, by having your manager involved in the hiring process who will work closely with the candidate will help to target your candidate persona and through observation and the right questions will get a better understanding if they will be the right fit.

For those who do not have an employee engagement survey at their workplace, I would strongly recommend introducing one. The future of work is still human and as an organisation we need to achieve objectives together. It is a great way to find out what is on their minds because it gives employees a voice and therefore better understand how you people really feel. Besides that, it empowers managers to further engage with their teams and help people and organisations to thrive.

Every time a talented employee walks out the door, people notice. Creating an effective retention strategy should be high on every organisation’s agenda. Remember, your efforts should start on a new hire’s first day on the job. This will help you keep your staff morale high and turnover low while securing your organisation’s success.

Mark Bugeja is Head of Human Resources at Nectar and is a board member of the Foundation for Human Resources Development (FHRD).
news

Connecting the best people to the best jobs

Egg was launched in 2017 with a vision to reinvent the recruitment space in Malta – to match the best jobs with the best people. Egg aim to bring a new dimension into the recruitment industry – the importance of cultural fit. Databases, processes and KPIs were dominating a space where passion, empathy and personality should have been given more importance.

With years of collective experience in the industry establishing the country’s number one job board and having seen the good, the bad and the ugly of the sector, Egg Recruitment was created – a personable, professional and honest recruitment agency which employs a human-centred approach to work. Egg Recruitment strive to find top quality candidates that are the right fit for clients. Egg Recruitment staff start by immersing themselves within clients’ businesses to make sure they develop a deep understanding of their company culture while helping to define what great looks like to them. Egg Recruitment then use their unrivalled networks and channels to reach thousands of candidates in Malta and Gozo. Finally, they conduct multiple in-depth interviews until the right individuals that match their requirements are found.

Egg Recruitment staff strive to find jobs that candidates will thrive in. They understand that searching for a job can be quite stressful and emotionally demanding which is why Egg Recruitment are here to help. With their extensive network of clients, they are in the best position to find you a job that you will hopefully love and excel in. They listen carefully, understanding that every person is an individual and that a CV only tells one part of their story. After signing up to Egg, you will have access to a team of expert recruiters ready to support you every step of the way. Egg Recruitment love meeting the great talent in Malta, so whether you just need advice or would like them to find a role for you, Egg Recruitment are only a phone call away.

(Contributed by Egg Recruitment)

Why employers should consider voluntary occupational pension schemes

Various studies show that while most of the working population is worried that they will not have enough money to provide an adequate standard of living in retirement, very few actually take steps to address this. Employers today have the possibility of supporting their employees take action towards a better future by setting up a voluntary occupational pension scheme.

How do occupational pensions work?

Contributions towards occupational pensions can be made by the employer, the employee or both through payroll, and remain invested until the benefits are taken. Under current legislation, at retirement, members can take up to 30 per cent of their pension pot as a tax-free lump sum, with the balance providing them with a pension income. In the meantime, any contributions employees make would be eligible to a tax credit of 25 per cent of whatever they save, up to a maximum of €500 each year.

Workplace pensions will not guarantee that the employee will retain their current level of income but will ensure that no one leaving the workforce will have to survive on just the basic state pension, meaning a more comfortable level of disposable income in later life.

Such schemes have various advantages for the employer. An occupational pension plan normally results in better employee retention, commitment and satisfaction. Many employees value employers that proactively help them achieve a better retirement lifestyle. Employers may choose who is eligible and how, and contribute according to their strategy.

Notably, employers can also benefit financially, with tax credits of 25 per cent of their contributions up to €500 per year per employee (unused credits can be carried forward). Furthermore, their pension contributions are tax deductible up to €2,000 per year. Effectively, an employer’s net outlay could be as low as 40 per cent of the contribution which they actually make.

The Mapfre MSV Life WorkSave Pension Scheme is designed to offer employers a simple and flexible way of offering workplace pensions to their employees. Mapfre MSV Life representatives are there to help you establish and manage your pension scheme. For further information e-mail corporate@msvlife.com or contact an Mapfre MSV Life intermediary.

Tax treatment depends on the individual circumstances. Tax legislation and the amount of rebate may change in the future. The Mapfre MSV Life Workplace Pension Scheme is provided and underwritten by Mapfre MSV Life p.l.c. Mapfre MSV Life p.l.c. (C-15722) is authorised by the Malta Financial Services Authority to carry on long-term business under the Insurance Business Act, Cap 403 of the Laws of Malta. Mapfre MSV Life p.l.c. is regulated by the MFAA.

(Contributed by Mapfre MSV Life)
Are local HR functions prepared for the future world of work?

Results of 2019 Malta HR Pulse Survey

The world of work is constantly evolving. Fast-paced changes in technology and workforce expectations are revolutionising the way we work. The HR function has a critical role to play in preparing its people for the future and providing insights on how to manage the digital transformation of organisations.

For this reason, this year’s fifth edition of the Malta HR Pulse survey focused on the HR transformation and the re-shaping of the role of the HR function in the future world of work.

The results of the survey indicate that the majority of organisations are transforming their HR function so as to keep up with changes in the world of work. Having said this, respondents continue to highlight poor implementation of HR practices by management (54 per cent), insufficient resources within the HR department (53 per cent) and lack of ability to capture and analyse data within HR (43 per cent) as the top three barriers negatively impacting the performance of the HR function.

When asked about the top HR priorities in the next 12 months, retention of talent (51 per cent), managing employee engagement (45 per cent) and enhancing people experience (40 per cent) were the most popular responses. Although these HR issues appear to be recurring, we do see new issues that the HR function needs to prepare for.

In fact, the latest issues impacting the HR function are widespread varying from the synergies between humans and machines to the quest for purpose and flexibility.

The variety of these issues has resulted in the need for HR functions to adopt new roles. This year’s survey in fact gained insight into these varying roles of the HR function, referred to as talent cultivator, digital accelerator, business promoter and flexible navigator, to unravel the future of HR.

**Digital accelerator**

While 90 per cent of global C-suite executives agree that their organisation pays attention to people's needs when introducing new technology, only about 53 per cent of staff agree. This means HR functions must collaborate with IT to accelerate for the digital age hence taking on the role of digital accelerator. HR should be at the forefront of moves towards greater automation and AI, rather than simply responding to changes in technology. Organisations should: develop and demonstrate HR's awareness and understanding of technology and bring HR and business leaders together on the issues; ensure HR is trained to use data analytics to predict and monitor skills gaps in the workforce; and make sure HR has a strong influence on the process of mapping automatable tasks.

Upon examining results from this year’s survey, it is evident that HR’s role of digital accelerator still requires further efforts locally. The survey delves into the level of the HR function’s involvement in digital transformation activities related to people and its use of technology within the function.

**Flexible navigator**

Flexible navigator refers to HR’s role of responding to business-led transformation. The HR function plays a critical role in any transformation undertaken by the organisation to support particularly on change management. HR must be involved throughout the whole change process, including identifying the need for change, identifying the impact on people, developing people, and communicating the changes to be implemented, the implementation and benefits realisation. Part of this role is considering future scenarios that could impact key areas of the organisation.

This year’s survey results outline the most frequent future scenarios developed by the HR function and delve into strategies that have been redesigned by the HR function in recent years. Additionally, results also shed light on whether HR’s involvement has remained focussed on typical HR functions or whether the function has taken on more of a strategic role.

**Talent cultivator**

Seeing the HR function as a catalyst for talent encapsulates the function’s role of understanding and developing talent which is as critical as ever given the skills shifts playing out across different industries. As automation replaces workers in conducting certain tasks, it also creates new opportunities for the current workforce which require new sets of competencies. With 73 per cent of organisations at a global level stating that identifying and building future skills created by the impact of technology is important, it is vital that HR leaders understand and develop talent through reskilling and upskilling initiatives for their workforce.

When analysing the situation locally, many are aware of the importance of upskilling and reskilling their workforce. However, more efforts are still required to convert this awareness into a current, fully-fledged strategy and implementation. Survey results also highlight a shift in the number of hours of training offered to employees as well as provide evidence that upskilling goes beyond enhancing digital skills.

**Business promoter**

Today’s world of work is bound to bring about a sense of urgency and anxiety in many, given the significance and pace of these changes. In fact, managing stress and preventing burnout are amongst the top five global people challenges in PwC’s recent global study. This emphasises another role of HR, that of promoting well-being and enhancing people experience to maximise business value. This role is referred to as business promoter.

Local results clearly show that a high percentage of local organisations are investing in well-being initiatives, with work environment and social well-being initiatives being more popular than physical activity and mental health awareness initiatives. The survey delves into the most popular well-being initiatives and others that have little uptake amongst local organisations.

About the survey

The Malta HR Pulse Survey is a joint annual exercise carried out by PwC Malta and the Foundation for Human Resources Development (FHRD). The initiative aims to gather the thoughts and views of Malta’s HR leaders and top executives on the key HR challenges that organisations are facing, as well as priorities for people management in the year ahead.

Detailed results of the survey will be presented during this year’s FHRD conference, HR Transformation – Unravelling the Future, being held on Wednesday, October 23.
Living in today's world, many would agree that life has become a race against time. Between juggling work, family life and active personal and social activities, not to mention a good night’s sleep to start all over again, the hours in a day seem to be lacking.

This scenario is considerably tougher for parents, especially working mothers with younger children. One of the issues is the competing demands on their time. Young children who are enrolled in childcare or kindergarten tend to line up with a work schedule. However, children who are in their school years generally have a schedule which does not align with working hours, due to school hours.

So what are the options for working mothers and single parents? I'm sure that many would think of flexible working arrangements – but how does this work?

There are a number of flexible options employers may decide to introduce: reduced hours, job-sharing, part-time work, and teleworking on a full-time, partial or occasional basis.

A work-from-home arrangement can be the solution parents are looking for, especially coupled with a flexible schedule. The latter is important in this scenario, since one can work around their child’s necessities and get work done in a manner that serves one’s schedule. These arrangements are becoming more accessible, especially thanks to technology.

The introduction of the free childcare scheme, an initiative launched by the Maltese Government in 2014, provides free childcare services to parents and guardians pursuing a career or further education. This has certainly aided mothers to return to work after their maternity leave, especially if their job requires them to be present and cannot be done on a flexible basis.

There is a trend nowadays among mothers, especially with young children, to be creative and come up with flexible money-making solutions and investing in their own business. In this manner, they can spend valuable time raising a family while still contributing to wards family finances and society as a whole.

However, as the next generation enters the workforce, flexibility will become even more important because it isn’t just millennial women or parents who care for their own child’s needs. Employers can already focus on the quality of work being delivered rather than the hours put in: set targets for each task given to an employee and keep an open communication tool that verifies tasks are being handled. It is now recognised that flexibility helps increase productivity, efficiency and commitment to the company. Therefore, the focus needs to be on allowing employees to work in a manner that is most suited to their needs.

Moreover, employers should be given the right tools for success while working from alternate locations.

Most people don’t want to spend their whole lives at work. Many want to spend time with their children, loved ones, friends or partaking in their hobbies.

“Having a flexible schedule improves employee retention, motivation and productivity”

On the other hand, what are the benefits for employers to introduce flexible working measures?

Providing parents with flexible working arrangements will enable them to have a serene work-life balance. It encourages better interaction with their children and be actively involved in family events. Indirectly, this might be an employer’s corporate social responsibility measure. Having a flexible schedule improves employee retention, motivation and productivity as well as better management of own resources.

Employers need to move away from the stereotypical consideration of male and female employees. Male employees who have a family might also prefer to have a flexible work schedule.

Employers considering to introduce a flexible workplace can ask for feedback from staff in order to know their individual needs and discuss their wants. This will help devise the creation of the optimal flexible work policy, understanding that there will likely be a broad range of requests.

They can also consider alternate work location options: allowing an employee to work from a remote area will improve work-life balance and decrease commuting expenses and frustrations of having to spend time in traffic. It also promotes a greener corporate culture.

Employers can either introduce, expand or partake in these flexible work arrangements: reduced hours, job-sharing, part-time work, teleworking, working from home and remote work location options: allowing an employee to work from a remote area will improve work-life balance.

Therefore, allowing them the ability to have their lives not solely revolve around work is an investment in your employees and your business. Women and working mothers are not any less ambitious than their male counterparts, however they are many times forced to make decisions that revolve around their family requirements. The bottom line is if there is an employee who is worth keeping, a company should find a way to support and keep them, even if it means having a more flexible approach to the work schedule.
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