



Catalyst

Talent to transform // Issue 6

**BRAND
NEW
DIGITAL
FORMAT**

THE 'DEXTERITY' ISSUE

**From talent
management
to talent
liberation**

**Re-imagining
work for
the future**

The rise of the remote worker

Developing dexterity for workforce resilience and innovation



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It's tempting to fall into the trap of making swift assumptions about how the world of work has changed, but the truth is that we may not yet know.

As much as we are craving optimism and stability, financial experts believe the volatility in today's markets will continue throughout this year and into next. The past six months have shown that things can change at a moment's notice, and we cannot overlook the fact that the pace of recovery will be different, depending on the industry in question and the local response to COVID-19.

Where volatility is the norm, dexterity is a requirement – an organisational adroitness that enables businesses to react quickly and appropriately to whatever the external world throws at them. Our in-depth feature (p7) debates what this might look like in practice, including examples from some of our clients and insights from experts in risk and resilience.

Liberating our talent

In business, the word 'dexterity' tends to be linked with 'digital' – describing “the ability and ambition to use technology for better business outcomes”, to quote Craig Roth, vice president of Gartner Research. In July's edition of *Catalyst*, we discussed immediate digital responses to COVID that look set to stay, and the need to pick up the pace of digital transformation, designing new people processes from a digital-first perspective.

However, dexterity is about much more than digital. Wider organisational dexterity involves reframing talent management as talent liberation, according to author and consultant Maggi Evans. She argues that if we cannot predict what will happen in the future, we must plan for a range of scenarios and ensure there is a diversity of skills within the organisation (p14).

In the short term, we will require adaptive talent strategies – “approaches with sufficient flexibility to enable us to respond to immediate needs, to scale up or down, to redeploy and refocus”. To prepare for the long term, we must start by considering the strategic aims of our organisation and possible scenarios for how it might evolve and grow.

Nurturing internal talent will be a large part of this. For instance, as part of its total talent strategy, Thermo Fisher Scientific has a dedicated internal talent team and mobility systems that have created an internal market for jobs and career development (see p9). Broadening the talent pool will also be necessary, with organisations embracing many types of worker.

A culture of learning

Dexterity encompasses mindsets, beliefs and behaviours; an example of a recent mindset shift is the acceptance of widespread remote working by organisations that, mere months ago, would have balked at the idea.

Meanwhile, leadership traits coming to the fore include empathy and compassion – a desire to invest in people's happiness as well as their productivity, and so build engagement that adds to resilience. Leading virtually, and in turbulent times, requires EQ as well as IQ.

Innovation thrives where people feel psychologically safe and are supported to be curious. Research by Harvard Business School (p12) shows that curiosity leads to enhanced creativity, collaboration and communication, and is a key driver of learning. A culture of learning must underpin any dexterity-led organisation in future.

As disruptive and damaging as COVID has been – and continues to be – it has also given us an unprecedented opportunity to reimagine and reinvent working. Built-in dexterity enables organisations to do this not once, but over and again, as circumstances fluctuate and change.

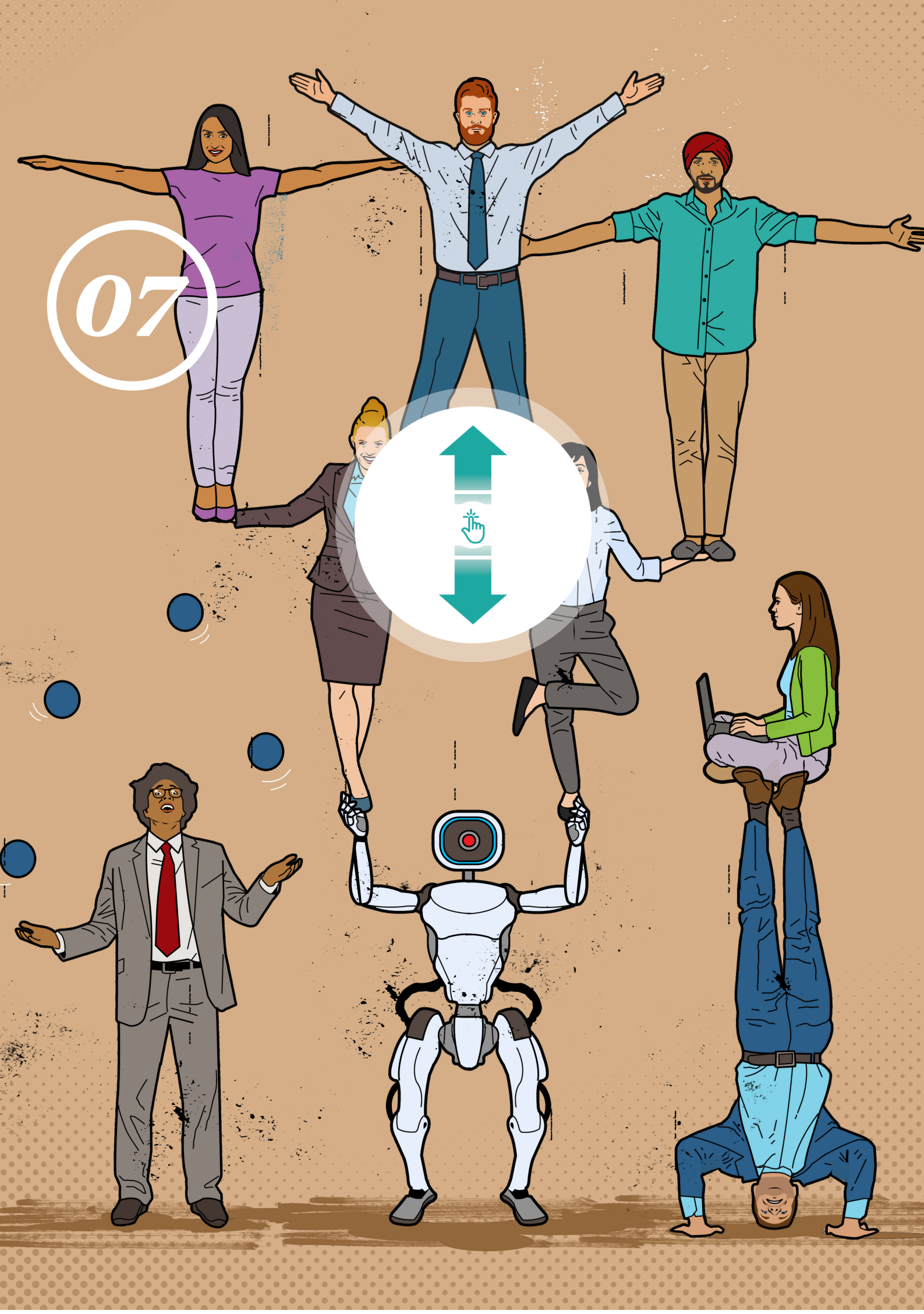
David Leigh
CEO, Alexander Mann Solutions

“

Where volatility is the norm, dexterity is a requirement – an organisational adroitness that enables businesses to react quickly and appropriately

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CONTENTS



07

06

Opinion: Saïd Business School

How to re-align your talent in the face of disruption

07

The big feature: Work reimagined

What does it take to build workforce dexterity for the future?

08

Viewpoint: Alexander Mann Solutions

Why the time is now for the CHRO

10

Client story: Thermo Fisher Scientific

How a 'total talent' approach is key to long-term success

11

Viewpoint: Alexander Mann Solutions

What does the rise of the remote worker mean for employer brand?

13

Opinion: Harvard Business School

Why we must invest in curiosity to thrive

15

Opinion: Maggi Evans

Reframing talent management as talent liberation





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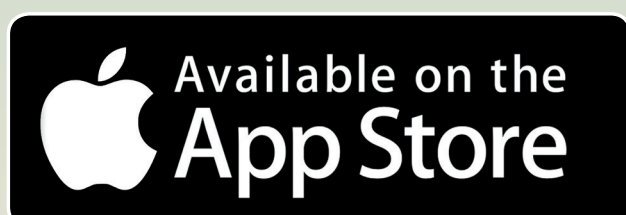
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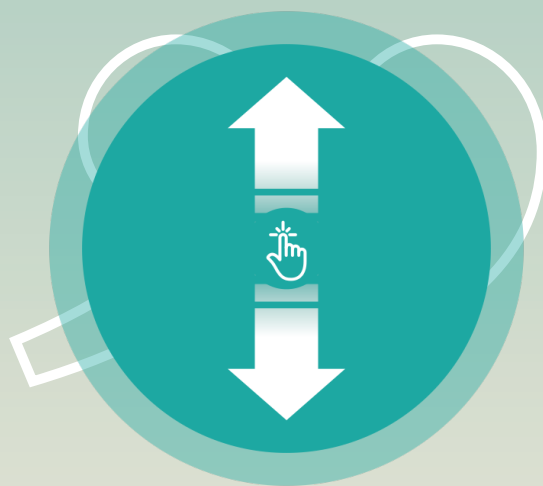


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*The past few
months have been
the biggest ever
world experiment
in changing
workplace
practices*

***Alain Proietti,
Novo Nordisk***



JUMP TO PAGE 7



TO READ THE ARTICLE

How to realign your talent



Jonathan Trevor

For your organisation to thrive in the face of disruption, bold realignment will be necessary, writes Saïd Business School's Jonathan Trevor.

Out of the disruption stemming from the global COVID-19 pandemic comes a rare opportunity for established businesses: to change the fundamentals of their enterprise for the better, and in ways that might not ordinarily be possible or palatable. Whether your organisation is a commercial, public-sector or social enterprise (or a hybrid of all three), the question to ask is “what should be different (potentially radically) about it and its talent to ensure it is equipped to succeed in the long term?”

All leaders should adopt a strategic approach to aligning their organisation over the short and long term. Strategic alignment is where all elements of an enterprise – including its business strategy and its people – are arranged (and rearranged) in such a way as to support the fulfilment of its purpose.

These and other elements form an enterprise value chain, which is only as strong as its weakest link. While a business's purpose is its enduring ‘north star’, other links in the value chain are dynamic and should change in step with the external environment, especially in times of disruption.

***Misalignment
between an
enterprise's business
strategy and its
talent limits its
performance***

Considerations for talent leaders

There is no universal, one-size-fits-all prescription for effective talent management. When realigning their organisation for the long term, talent leaders should be guided by their unique circumstances, plus the two fundamental principles of vertical and horizontal alignment.

1 Vertical alignment. Vertical alignment refers to the degree to which the enterprise's valuable organisational resources and functions, including talent management, support its business strategy. For instance, what are the talent requirements (in the form of employee behaviour, skills and knowledge) of your business strategy over the next five to 10 years?

Strategies maximising economies of scale (selling as much product as possible at the least possible cost of operation) require very different employee attributes to, for example, a strategy emphasising customer responsiveness and customisation (even personalisation) of products and services.

Efficiency-based strategies typically require high levels of routine, close teamwork, intense productivity and error-reducing behaviour. By contrast, customer-centric strategies require people who are nimble enough to respond to different or changing customer preferences, who show a tolerance for ambiguity and who are self-starters, able to show initiative. Misalignment between an enterprise's business strategy and its talent limits its performance. How are you trying to respond to the demands of customers and stand apart from competitors? What is the ideal form and function of your talent?

2 Horizontal alignment. Horizontal alignment refers to the degree to which an organisation's talent – its core human capital – is integrated with other valuable resources. For instance, how well is your talent strategy integrated with your technology strategy?

Beyond the automation of routine tasks, advanced artificial intelligence will be used, increasingly, to augment complex non-routine and cognitive tasks that were previously solely performed by humans. Different functional strategies and capabilities – from HR (human capital) to real estate (physical capital) and operations (organisational capital) to informational technology (technological capital) should complement each other as much as possible. Together, they support the development of a business's core capabilities, allowing it to implement its strategy effectively.

However, in reality, functional strategies often collide due to fragmented working, cross-functional ‘turf wars’, competing assumptions and the absence of shared strategic direction. The result is to introduce harmful misalignment into the engine room of your enterprise. How well aligned are your corporate functions? How well does your talent strategy support your organisation's technology strategy and vice versa?

Be bold

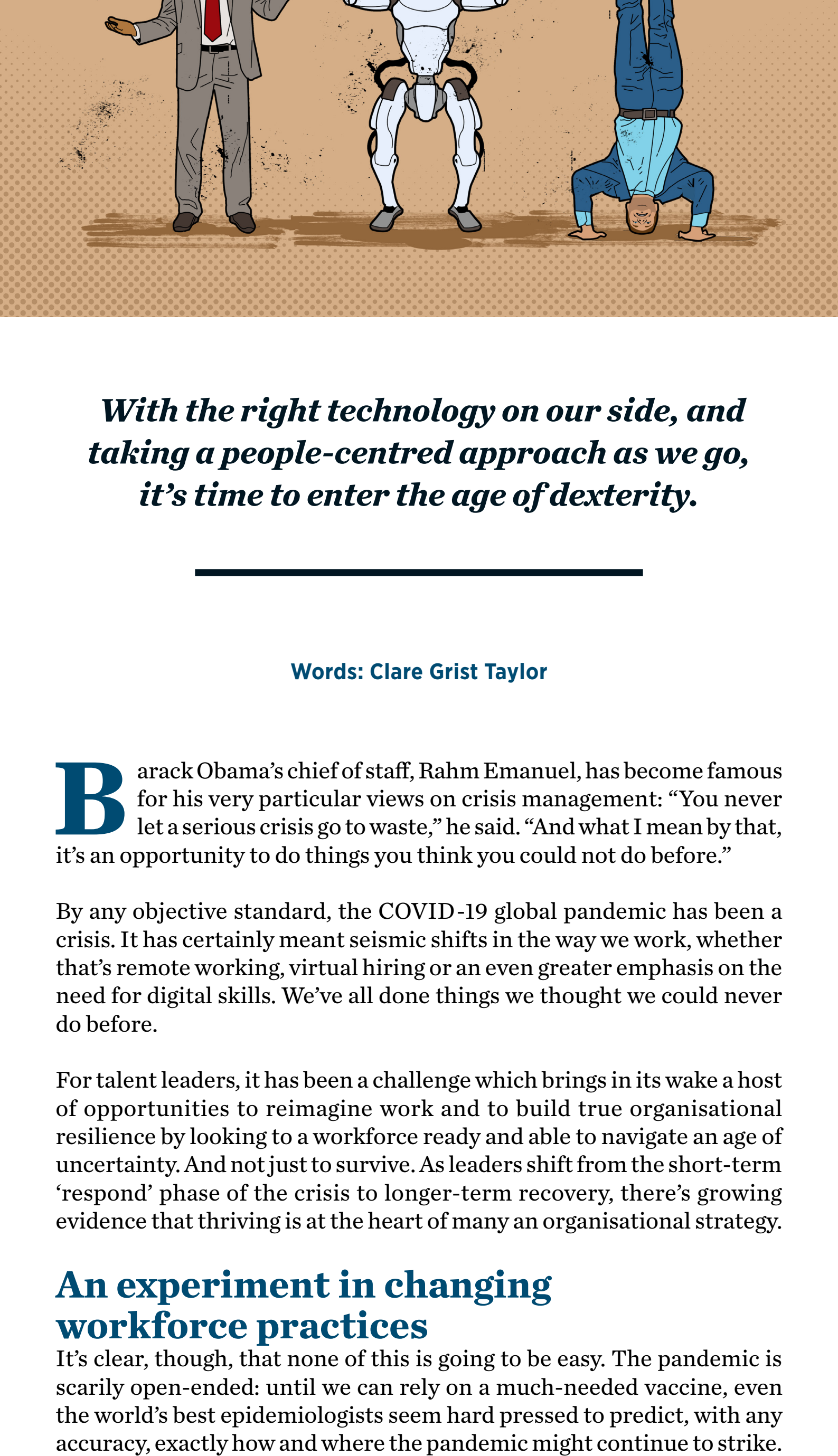
Of course, diversified enterprises with multiple lines of business may require more than one talent strategy. Each needs to be vertically and horizontally aligned to be fit for purpose. Talent leaders should segment their human capital – their talent – to the same degree as their colleagues in marketing segment their customers.

Times of upheaval often result in significant change and in new ways of doing things. Some organisations will always emerge from severe disruption stronger than others; some will even emerge stronger than they were previously. Where they do, it will be because their leaders have embraced change and envisioned how to realign their enterprise to enable it to thrive in the future.

Dr Jonathan Trevor advises leaders in all sectors and is an associate professor of management practice at the University of Oxford's Saïd Business School and author of *Align: A Leadership Blueprint for Aligning Enterprise Purpose, Strategy and Organization*.

WORK REIMAGINED:

building workforce dexterity for the future



With the right technology on our side, and taking a people-centred approach as we go, it's time to enter the age of dexterity.

Words: Clare Grist Taylor

Barak Obama's chief of staff, Rahm Emanuel, has become famous for his very particular views on crisis management: "You never let a serious crisis go to waste," he said. "And what I mean by that, it's an opportunity to do things you think you could not do before."

By any objective standard, the COVID-19 global pandemic has been a crisis. It has certainly meant seismic shifts in the way we work, whether that's remote working, virtual hiring or an even greater emphasis on the need for digital skills. We've all done things we thought we could never do before.

For talent leaders, it has been a challenge which brings in its wake a host of opportunities to reimagine work and to build true organisational resilience by looking to a workforce ready and able to navigate an age of uncertainty. And not just to survive. As leaders shift from the short-term 'respond' phase of the crisis to longer-term recovery, there's growing evidence that thriving is at the heart of many an organisational strategy.

An experiment in changing workforce practices

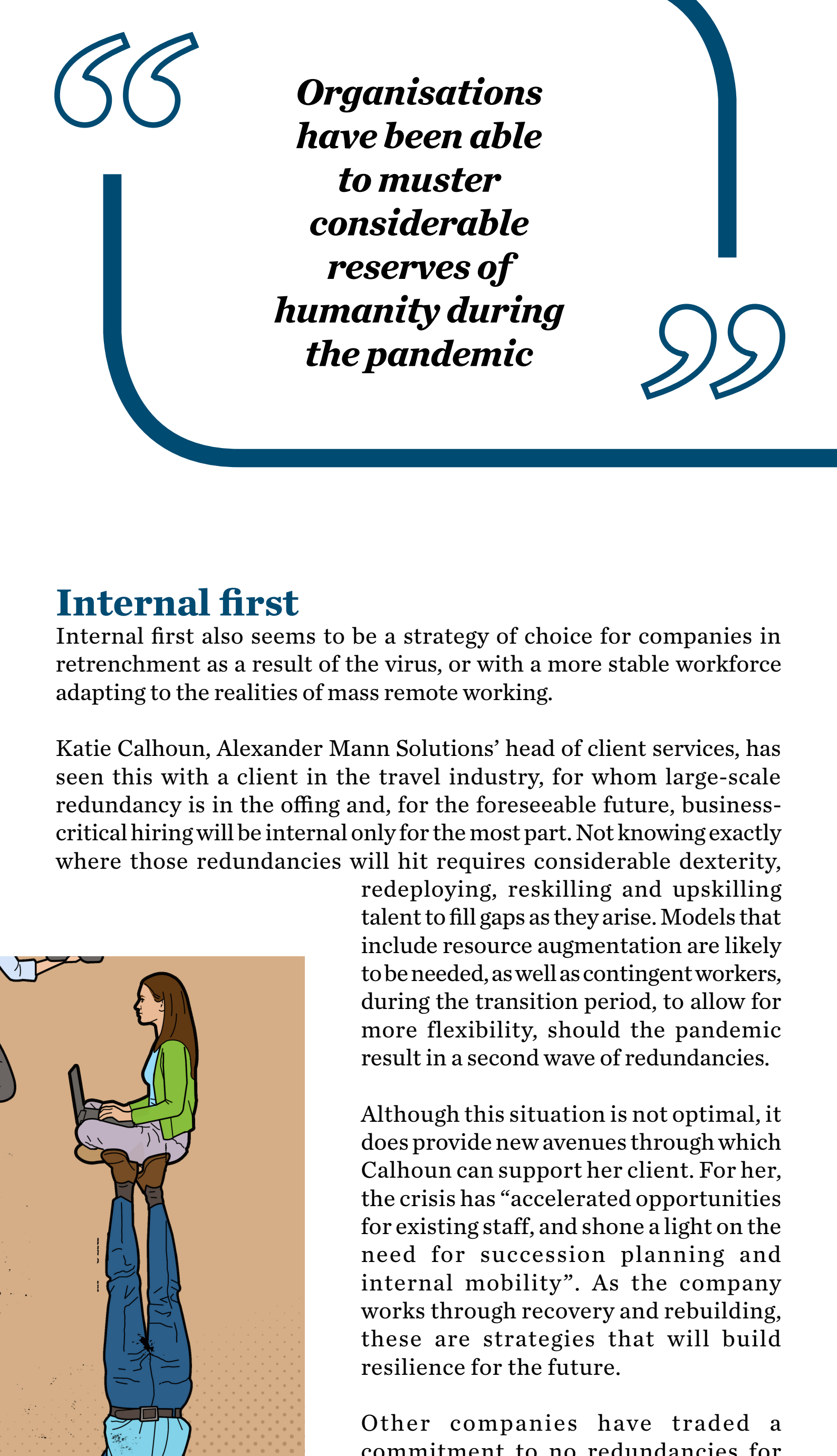
It's clear, though, that none of this is going to be easy. The pandemic is scarcely open-ended: until we can rely on a much-needed vaccine, even the world's best epidemiologists seem hard pressed to predict, with any accuracy, exactly how and where the pandemic might continue to strike. We're simultaneously more than aware that the economic, social and cultural impacts of the virus are already significant and dramatic. And these impacts are being felt in different ways in different sectors. Compare, for example, the talent challenges of the travel and tourism industry with the continuing growth of a thriving pharma and life sciences sector.

Alain Proietti, talent lead at Danish healthcare company Novo Nordisk, speaks for many when he describes the past few months as "the biggest ever world experiment in changing workplace practices". It's a view mirrored by a recent article from Ravi Jesuthasan and colleagues published in *Harvard Business Review*, who emphasise that the pandemic's impact is "fundamentally altering what work is performed and how we perform it".

And this is not just a matter of those heroic clothing and fashion companies who turned their hands to producing personal protective equipment (PPE). It's about nothing less than an extraordinary opportunity to rethink work, deploying work, skills and talent more flexibly than ever before.

I'm seeing a real move away from a culture of people needing to change employer to progress their careers

Could it be that the crisis has provided the impetus for us to reimagine talent beyond the job description and traditional hierarchies, structures and workplaces? The gauntlet has been thrown down: the resilience we need in this unprecedented age of uncertainty can only come from making the most of the talent available to us – however and wherever it comes from. With the right tech on our side, and taking a people-centred approach as we go, it's time to enter the age of dexterity.



Dexterity: the new agile

As COVID-19 hit, David Denyer, a professor at Cranfield School of Management, brought 20 years' worth of research into risk and resilience to bear in an article that asks how organisations can improve their chances of weathering a "high-velocity crisis". Denyer identifies two sets of opposing approaches that leaders tend to adopt in crisis situations: defensive vs progressive and consistent vs flexible.

He argues that successful organisational resilience strategies require leaders to adopt elements of all four approaches, with the balance shifting as the crisis develops. But they must avoid at all costs the "threat-rigidity effect" – the tendency to retrench into defensive mode so far that their organisations lose their capability to adapt to new opportunities. "Waiting out the storm" is not a viable option.

There's plenty of evidence that the talent community is tackling this challenge head on, building on response-phase crisis management by embracing progressive, flexible strategies to build longer-term resilience.

Graeme Marshall, head of talent acquisition at energy tech company Baker Hughes, has a neat shorthand for the strategic workforce planning which underpins so much of the dexterity agenda: his company "buys, borrows and grows" talent as the demands of the business change.

With 'buying' less on the agenda as the business has retrenched, COVID has provided the opportunity to take stock, to create the internal fitness they know they're going to need when the time comes to scale up again. On the 'borrow' side, Marshall's contingent workforce programme lead creates the policies, manages the data and runs a cross-functional steering committee which brings together all relevant departments – HR, sourcing and procurement, legal – to compete in the contingent market. Redeployment has always been a reality for a company based on shifting product lines across regions and projects, and the learning team has deployed a suite of new tools to keep skills up to date, to keep the 'grow' side of the equation in balance.

Add in the realisation that remote working is a very real option for teams that need physical meeting space rather than permanent offices, and that the pandemic has had the perhaps unexpected effect of breaking down traditional hierarchies, with senior executives travelling less and engaging with staff more, and the groundwork for a flexible future looks to be in place.

For Noel Brown, senior director for global talent attraction and acquisition at Thermo Fisher Scientific, the crisis has been an evolution rather than a revolution, maximising the company's total talent philosophy at a time when key areas of the business – on the frontline of testing, personal protective equipment, and the development and production of vaccines, antivirals and treatments – have been rapidly expanding (see p9).

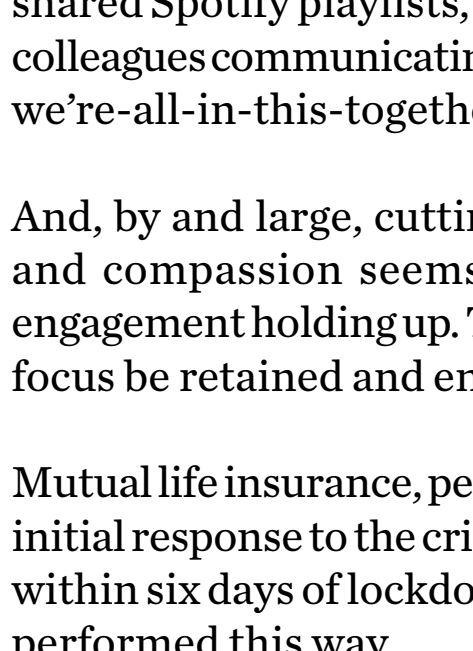
Internal talent has been their starting point. Brown has a dedicated internal talent team and mobility systems that have created an internal market for jobs and career development.

Organisations have been able to muster considerable reserves of humanity during the pandemic

Internal first

Internal first also seems to be a strategy of choice for companies in retrenchment as a result of the virus, or with a more stable workforce adapting to the realities of mass remote working.

Katie Calhoun, Alexander Mann Solutions' head of client services, has seen this with a client in the travel industry, for whom large-scale redundancy is in the offing and, for the foreseeable future, business-critical hiring will be internal only for the most part. Not knowing exactly where those redundancies will hit requires considerable dexterity,



redeploying, reskilling and upskilling talent to fill gaps as they arise. Models that include resource augmentation are likely to be needed, as well as contingent workers, during the transition period, to allow for more flexibility, should the pandemic result in a second wave of redundancies.

Although this situation is not optimal, it does provide new avenues through which Calhoun can support her client. For her, the crisis has "accelerated opportunities for existing staff, and shone a light on the need for succession planning and internal mobility". As the company works through recovery and rebuilding, these are strategies that will build resilience for the future.

Other companies have traded a commitment to no redundancies for changes in working practices – including redeployment and changes to roles and functions. Michelle Hainsworth, global head of client services at Alexander Mann Solutions, sees clients looking beyond traditional job descriptions, reskilling and redeploying talent to create nimble

teams as they enter the next phase of the pandemic – while preparing for potential aftershocks.

"I'm seeing a real move away from a culture of people needing to change employer to progress their careers," she says. "We're definitely in the era of internal headhunting and internal first." The trend is towards transferable skills, encouraging people to view their roles in more flexible ways.

Widening the talent pool

Dexterity is also about viewing your talent pool in new ways. Alain Proietti at Novo Nordisk knows that great talent is sitting all over the world. These people have employment choices. "If we're too rigid in our approach, they have options to go elsewhere," he warns. His bosses may have raised their eyebrows when Proietti employed a manager based in Finland a couple of years ago, but the relationship has worked, and he perceives that COVID has already changed attitudes to geographical talent boundaries.

In their article, Jesuthasan and colleagues also reference what they call "cross-industry talent exchanges" – sharing employees between high- and low-demand sectors, equivalent of a sports team player loan. It's also not surprising that, with sectors hit in different ways, companies experiencing growth are attracting talent from outside their usual talent pool.

At Thermo Fisher Scientific, Noel Brown has seen an increase in candidates from outside the life sciences sector. "Life science companies have inevitably been in the news during the pandemic, so our reach has broadened in ways we couldn't otherwise pay for," he explains. "Add in retrenchment elsewhere, and we've been attracting several thousand candidates for a single marketing role. Curiosity has led to engagement."

Being human

These more open and flexible approaches to talent are not, of course, without their own challenges. While many people are happy to engage with these new opportunities, others may feel threatened or abandoned. Flexible, remote working has been a revelation for many, while others crave a return to the office. Many have, and will, lose their livelihoods, while 'flexibility' for others translates to increased workloads and pressure. Another thing we've definitely learned in recent months is that dexterity also needs to have a human face.

Insight from Deloitte suggests that companies at the cutting edge of "future of work practices" are likely to be well-positioned to meet the challenges of the pandemic – and beyond. It anticipates digital-savvy organisations made up of many types of worker and partners based anywhere in the world. As automation bites, agile-minded humans will focus more on innovation, creativity and problem-solving. Workplaces will blend physical and virtual environments. Organisations will "value adaptability over procedure".

Crucially, this vision of our brave new world also speaks to some very human talent challenges:

- the need for continuous learning to support upskilling and address continuing talent shortages
- the need to deliver a "consistent employer identity" to all types of employee, contractor and other stakeholder
- the need for "personalised" experiences to "empower people to be their best, balanced selves".

The COVID-19 pandemic has been a resilience baptism of fire

A focus on learning

The need for continuous learning and upskilling is far from a new idea in talent management, and the pandemic has only accelerated the need to equip people to meet the challenges they're facing. Witness, for example, the changing face of management training to deal with mass remote working, or training to support redeployment.

Client and customer-facing organisations are also facing a complete rethink when it comes to handling customer relationships. It has been a disruptive time for sales and business-development functions, which have traditionally carried out business face to face. Cultural differences can impact here too; for example, the personal touch has always been seen as essential for selling into the Italian medical profession. Lawyers and business consultants have had to operate without those relationship-building lunches and networking events. Using multiple channels to interact with the external world is now a reality – and people need to be supported to adjust.

Cultures of learning will be a crucial underpinning for any dexterity-led organisation in future.

Communication, culture and consistency

There is plenty of evidence that organisations have been able to muster considerable reserves of humanity during the pandemic. Calhoun talks of "more kindness, caring and empathy" with "communication and care" at the core. There's been plenty of intentionality in this space: managers checking in more regularly, daily company-wide coffee and chat sessions, shared Spotify playlists, even virtual meditation. Seeing our most senior colleagues communicating from their homes has created an unprecedented we're-all-in-this-together bonhomie.

And, by and large, cutting people some slack and deploying more trust and compassion seems to have been repaid, with productivity and engagement holding up. The question now is: how can that people-centred focus be retained and enhanced? Is it sustainable?

Mutual life insurance, pensions and investments company Royal London's initial response to the crisis led to 98% of its workforce operating remotely within six days of lockdown, even in roles that had previously never been performed this way.

For Victoria Wilson, head of people experience, this initial phase was all about providing practical help for staff as they moved to new ways of working (including a dedicated intranet site, toolkits to support remote working and support for all people leaders), while maintaining great service for their customers, keeping communication channels open and sustaining a sense of community. As a result, some customer satisfaction metrics have never been higher and engagement is strong.

Now, the challenge is to build on this momentum: "From a people-experience perspective, it's important that our colleagues feel supported to continue to balance work and personal commitments," says Wilson. "Providing true flexibility about where, when and how our people work is key to our future success."

She is in no doubt that the company's strong sense of values has been an asset. "The 'spirit of Royal London' is at the heart of our organisation," she says. "We put our culture and our people's health and wellbeing at the core of everything we do."

Proietti similarly aspires to a more 'flex-able' organisation, where people work in a way that maximises their engagement and happiness as well as their productivity. But these kinds of hybrid model, with some staff working remotely and others in the office, need careful thought. New norms about flexible working must be clear and implemented equably across organisations.

Proietti gives the example of a recent meeting where some participants were back in the office and others still working remotely. Inevitably, the remote workers felt they were missing out on the informal chat that's part of face-to-face interaction. Now, all meetings are conducted via screens to level the playing field.

Consistent and fair approaches to people who work in different ways will be essential. In any hybrid remote office-based model, for example, there'll need to be even more of a focus on outputs. Harnessing the trust and humanity we've shown in crisis is a good starting point.

Partnership and preference

In a recent article, Lindsay McGregor and Neel Doshi looked at how best to motivate employees remotely. While, overall, their research suggests that people might be less motivated when working from home, a key factor relates to how much choice people have when it comes to where and how they work. Being able to express a preference, have some agency, matters.

At Royal London, Wilson is clear that the company's future workplace strategy will be based around a partnership with its staff. She is using tools such as continuous engagement surveys and return-to-workplace working groups to plot a way through to the new reality. This sense of partnership and preference is part of Royal London's goal to be an "inclusive, responsible and fulfilling" place to work.

More widely, it seems almost impossible that organisations will be able to ignore a wealth of survey data suggesting that flexibility is popular with a large percentage of the workforce. A more balanced approach between remote working and the interpersonal interaction most people want – some, if not all, of the time – looks likely. It could be that dexterity also means the decline of the one-size-fits-all workplace, with all that implies.

Cranfield's Denyer defines organisational resilience as "an ability to anticipate, prepare for, respond and adapt to and learn from challenges and disruptions in order to survive and prosper". The COVID-19 pandemic has been a resilience baptism of fire. When we ask ourselves "what next?", we need to mind what we've learned, double down on those opportunities to change and reimagine the workplace in terms of the dexterity we all need to face an uncertain future.

2020: The time of the chief HR officer



Jo-Ann Feely

With much of the COVID disruption profoundly ‘human’, HR is in the hotseat, writes Jo-Ann Feely, global managing director, innovation, at Alexander Mann Solutions.

In the wake of the 2008 global financial crisis, we ushered in the ‘era of the chief financial officer (CFO)’. Now, as organisations work furiously to adapt to the new market and employment dynamic imposed by COVID-19, and to address the needs of their people, we could be seeing the ‘time of the chief HR officer (CHRO)’.

After all, the pandemic has fast-tracked the future. Changes to working conditions that would ordinarily have taken years to put in place have, in fact, taken weeks or months, with the virus forcing us to work and live differently. How and where we work has been brought into sharp focus.

A new employment dynamic

Both the marketplace and customer demands are changing rapidly, and it has never been more critical to align our business and people strategies, while recognising that constant flux will be the ongoing pattern. This reality must be overlaid with the fact that some parts of organisations will be slowing down due to market conditions, while others accelerate. All this means that adaptability and dexterity have never been more critical to success.

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To survive and thrive, businesses have had to re-invent themselves, reprioritising their business goals to meet customer demands, while adapting employment models that support both.

Meanwhile, employees have been juggling their personal and professional lives – mostly from home – amid disruptions in education and childcare. Of those organisations reopening physical workplaces, 77% plan to stagger employee hours onsite in the face of likely ongoing school and nursery closures, according to Gartner’s recent survey of HR leaders.

Changing workforce needs

Many of the issues facing businesses as we emerge from the pandemic are profoundly ‘human’. A recent study by Forbes and SAP SuccessFactors revealed that the top three topics on CHROs’ minds are:

- **communication** – understanding what employees are experiencing and taking action accordingly
- **upskilling/reskilling** – to redirect and channel existing capability to where it’s needed while training others in new skills
- **business continuity** – balancing flexible and remote working while managing employee/customer welfare and safety.

CEOs will be hugely reliant on their CHROs to help navigate the current environment and to lead the way in making significant changes in how organisations work, including the employment models they adopt. The pandemic has already forced organisations to digitise more and to get work done in a completely different way; this is likely to drive a change in culture for many businesses.

Talent strategies that underpin the new organisation must include:

- understanding skills and capability; identifying gaps and addressing them
- strategic internal mobility that includes upskilling/reskilling – a ‘grow your own’ approach that includes external and internal talent to plug skills gaps
- using contingent and gig workers
- a culture of ongoing learning and development
- an inclusive and compelling employer brand
- social capital: remote working has negatively impacted organisations’ abilities to create engagement and community, so this must be addressed.

An opportunity for HR

In the previous edition of *Catalyst*, Josh Bersin described HR and talent leaders as the new “heroes of the C-suite” as they simultaneously navigate public health challenges, psychological safety issues and unprecedented workforce challenges.

There is certainly a seat at the table now for CHROs; an opportunity to lead the reinvention of the organisation, and in doing so, elevate the role of HR significantly.

Jo-Ann is a member of Alexander Mann Solutions’ Executive Committee and the Global Managing Director for Innovation, a newly created function that focuses on evolving and developing Alexander Mann Solutions’ service portfolio while realising the benefits of technology in an ever-changing marketplace.



Our total talent strategy is the bedrock of the dexterity we're all going to need in the months and years ahead

***Noel Brown,
Thermo Fisher Scientific***



JUMP TO PAGE 9



TO READ THE ARTICLE

Taking a long-term approach to identifying and nurturing talent



Noel Brown

Thermo Fisher Scientific’s total talent approach is helping it rise to the challenges of COVID-19, explains Noel Brown, senior director for global talent attraction and acquisition.

At a company ambitious for growth, our total talent strategy has been developed to meet the challenges of hiring and nurturing talent across 21 global divisions with an average of 6,000 vacancies at any time. We face many of the same talent challenges as everyone else: building the right pipelines and chasing talent in high-demand areas such as digital and IT. So, when COVID-19 led to a ramping up of hiring in some key areas of our business, we were well-prepared to meet these new challenges head on. It has enabled us to double down on what we’ve already been doing rather than having to start from scratch.

Thermo Fisher Scientific is a life sciences company with a mission to “make the world healthier, cleaner and safer”. As you might imagine, during a global pandemic, our products and services – whether that’s testing, personal protective equipment (PPE) or vaccine research – have been much in demand, with all that implies for deploying the right talent in the right places (mostly, in short order).

The pandemic has meant living our values in so many ways

Building the pipeline

When it comes to building our pipeline for new talent, the foundation of our total talent approach is a long-term view of talent identification and nurturing. Our customer relationship management system is at the heart of awareness and relationship building with the talent we’re going to need in future. The conversations we have are not just around “I have a job; do you want it? Yes/no”, but more about: “let’s keep in touch, build a relationship”. Life sciences businesses are built on curiosity, and we want to use our approach to build that curiosity in the talent pool available to us.

We’ve always been confident that we have a good profile and reputation within our sector but, with COVID-19 highlighting in unprecedented ways what life sciences and pharma companies actually do, we’re also finding that our talent pool is widening. That same curiosity-driven approach is driving engagement outside our sector too.

Inevitably, contingent workers are also part of our talent mix. They’re crucial to help us manage supply and demand variations. But we also see them as an extension of the talent pipeline, another entry point: there are often options to convert to permanent positions if that’s what the worker wants. And we’re always looking for ways to improve our engagement with those who prefer a more arm’s-length relationship. As in other companies, this can be a challenge within large, traditional corporate structures, but it’s a challenge we simply have to face.

Crystal-clear values

More than anything, though, our starting point is always the internal talent we already have available to us. We have a dedicated internal talent team and mobility systems that have created our own internal market for jobs and career development. Existing staff profile themselves, and the system matches them with potential new jobs. It’s been a crucial tool for more cross-division and cross-functional collaboration, which is helping us to keep talent in-company.

Having crystal-clear values and purpose also helps. They’re key to us as an organisation and lead to high levels of employee engagement. They also help to provide continuity across divisions and globally. That kind of engagement has helped us to weather the COVID storm with no disruption to manufacturing or service, and it will inform new practice as we emerge from the crisis with a greater appreciation of the different, more flexible ways in which people want to work. That can only be a good thing for our internal-first approach.

Project Phoenix

We’ve also taken the opportunity to experiment with different approaches to working within the talent acquisition team, to walk the walk when it comes to practical process improvement. This has meant a full skills inventory across talent teams and piloting more agile approaches to how we work. For example, we’ve brought together smaller cross-functional teams to meet COVID hiring demands, which have then disbanded and moved on to the next challenge. It’s been very popular with a team of talent professionals always looking for new learning opportunities, and it’s an approach we’re likely to adopt more widely post-pandemic.

The pandemic has meant living our values in so many ways, most importantly, of course, the very real clinical difference we continue to make to the world’s response. But it has also created the opportunity for the talent team to test and experiment when it comes to how best we can attract, nurture and deploy the talent that underpins everything we do. It’s shown that our total talent strategy is the bedrock of the dexterity we’re all going to need in the months and years ahead.

Noel Brown is senior director for global talent attraction and acquisition at global life sciences company Thermo Fisher Scientific.

The rise of the remote worker



Chris Benson



Linda Iametti

As geography becomes less of a barrier to recruitment, an organisation's brand and value proposition will come to the fore, write Chris Benson and Linda Iametti.

Almost overnight, the global workforce has become largely remote. While there was a trend in this direction pre-COVID-19, organisations had continued to voice concerns around reduced productivity and worker collaboration, despite research suggesting that the opposite is true.

For example, a study conducted in 2017 by Stanford Graduate School of Business found that people who worked from home displayed a 13% improvement in performance, while a 2019 survey by gig economy platform Airtasker showed that remote workers are more productive, working an average of 1.4 more days a month than their office-based peers.

How well a prospective employer shapes and articulates its brand and EVP will become the true competitive differentiator

Casting the hiring net wider

There may be numerous benefits of homeworking for employers, ranging from increased productivity and lower attrition rates to reduced infrastructure costs. Meanwhile, employees gain a better work-life balance: according to *Remote Work Trends for 2020: The Present & Future of Remote Work*, 57% of the workforce say that the option to work remotely is their top perk. Fewer commuters also impact positively on the environment, reducing gas emissions.

From a recruiting standpoint, being able to hire remote workers is a game changer. When geographic restrictions are removed, the talent pool expands significantly, allowing companies to recruit the best talent – and to hire diversely. By embracing remote work, employers can cast their net much wider, reaching into emerging global markets that would otherwise be very difficult to access.

Although unemployment is rising, the gap between available skills and skills requirements remains wide. The surge in demand for technical skills, coupled with a drop-off in manufacturing activity, has exacerbated what has become the great divide in the US labour market. Providing remote work options can help organisations address the issue.

Of course, the flip side of this is that skilled workers are in demand and organisations must work harder to attract them.



Practical actions for organisations to take

- 1** Review how people's priorities have changed since the start of the pandemic. For example, are job security and personal wellbeing becoming more important to current employees and prospective candidates?
- 2** Understand how the reputation of the business (or that of your industry) may have shifted over recent months.
- 3** Develop strategies to keep key talent segments engaged while hiring priorities change.
- 4** Re-strategise the employee experience for remote/office-based/hybrid teams.
- 5** Prepare for new skills and capabilities; for example, the ability to lead remotely.
- 6** Partner with IT to ensure that virtual collaboration and knowledge-management tools are in place, and that cyber risk is being managed effectively.

The value of reputation

With geography no longer a significant barrier for employers or employees, companies must think more strategically about how they attract, engage and acquire contingent talent. Candidates' decisions will be less influenced by proximity to home and commute times, meaning that other factors will come to the fore. These include compensation, but their affinity with a company's values, mission, vision and employee value proposition (EVP) will also be front of mind.

30%

Pre-pandemic

48%

Post-pandemic

Nearly half of employees will work remotely at least some of the time.



'Paying top dollar' is clearly an unsustainable strategy for most organisations, particularly in times of economic uncertainty, so how well a prospective employer shapes and articulates its brand and EVP will become the true competitive differentiator. Research supports this view with 84% of job seekers saying the reputation of a company is important (*TalentNow: Recruitment Statistics 2018: Trends & Insights*) and 50% of candidates indicating they wouldn't work for a company with a bad reputation – even for a pay increase – according to the 2017 *Betterteam Blog*. Staffing firms are often the vehicle by which contingent opportunities are secured, but it is ultimately the brand attraction of the end client which plays the biggest role in attraction... or lack thereof.



Work from home

Increase in % share of searches on Indeed compared to same week in 2019.



173%



404%

The value of brand in recruitment is now more important than ever. During the global pandemic, it is vital for companies to be aware of the messages they transmit about their organisation – intentionally or inadvertently – while managing through the crisis. As the American entrepreneur Mark Cuban put it: "How companies treat employees during this pandemic will define their brand for decades."

The same applies to organisations' treatment of contingent workers. Transparency and empathy – balancing profit with a humane approach to workers – will resonate with potential candidates long after the near-term impact of COVID has departed.

Linda Iametti is Contingent Workforce Solutions Consulting Lead and Chris Benson is Head of Contingent Workforce Operations at Alexander Mann Solutions.



***Invest in your
people and
support them
to keep their
curiosity alive***

***Francesca Gino,
Harvard Business School***



JUMP TO PAGE 12



TO READ THE ARTICLE

Why organisations need to invest in curiosity to thrive

**Francesca Gino**

Curiosity fuels creativity, communication and innovation, but too many organisations smother it, warns Harvard Business School's Francesca Gino.

Over recent months, leaders have come to realise that much of their organisations' talent is able to adapt and learn. For those businesses that struggle to evolve and stay nimble, one thing has become clear: curiosity, a main driver of learning and innovation, is an essential trait that workplaces will need to foster, both during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

This will be no easy task, as curiosity tends to be squeezed out of us as we age. We are all born curious, but as we grow older, our attitude to curiosity changes. In fact, research shows that curiosity peaks between the ages of four and five, then declines steadily.

Organisations, in particular, have a way of killing curiosity. Data I collected from hundreds of employees starting new jobs show that their curiosity starts out high. However, when I checked in with these workers eight to nine months later, their curiosity had dropped by at least 20% across the board – no matter their industry or role. That's a missed opportunity for them, personally, and for their organisations.

Although leaders say they treasure inquisitive minds, most of them stifle, rather than encourage, curiosity

Smothering curiosity

Although leaders say they treasure inquisitive minds, most of them stifle, rather than encourage, curiosity.

In our survey of more than 3,000 employees from a wide range of firms and industries, 92% credited curious people with bringing new ideas into teams and organisations and viewed curiosity as a catalyst for job satisfaction, motivation, innovation and high performance. Yet the same study found that only a quarter (24%) reported feeling curious at work on a regular basis, while 70% said they face barriers to asking more questions at work.

This requires consideration, as curiosity leads to a wide range of benefits for organisations, including:

- increased creativity
- fewer errors in decision-making
- reduced group conflict
- more open communication
- better team performance
- more diverse networks

The renowned 16th-century Italian artist Michelangelo described sculpting as a process whereby the artist releases an ideal figure from the block of stone in which it slumbers. What if we were all to start by assuming that everyone has curiosity within them, and that our role as leaders, colleagues, parents, partners, friends and teachers is to help others to discover and bring out that curiosity? When we do so, people thrive.

Be more pirate

A while back, I became interested in 16th-century pirate ships; 200 years before slavery ended in the US, pirate ships were arguably the most diverse and democratic 'employers' in the world. Crew members were recruited for their skills and attitude, rather than by race or gender, and the captain was chosen by the crew. They could also remove him or her if they didn't like how they behaved towards them.

That raised a question for me that I think about regularly: "Would my 'crew' choose me as their captain today?" I believe that leaders who help their people to hold onto their curiosity are more likely to be chosen. In encouraging curiosity, we are preparing ourselves and our 'crew' for even the most turbulent of journeys.

Curiosity can be fostered, even in those who have lost it over time. So, my message to all leaders out there is that during the ongoing coronavirus crisis, don't forget to think about the long term as well as the short term. Invest in your people and support them to keep their curiosity alive.

Francesca Gino is an award-winning researcher and teacher, and a tenured professor at Harvard Business School. She has been honoured as one of the world's Top 40 Business Professors under 40 and one of the world's 50 most influential management thinkers.



*As soon as we
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ability to flex*

***Maggi Evans,
author & consultant***



JUMP TO PAGE 14



TO READ THE ARTICLE

Liberating our talent to prepare for all possible futures



Maggi Evans

To create nimble, responsive and resilient organisations, we must reframe talent management as talent liberation, writes Maggi Evans.

We're all familiar with the emerging changes in the workplace – the so-called Fourth Industrial Revolution, the digital age. This is bringing fundamental shifts in the nature of work and working life, with many organisations transforming their operating models, building agility into their structures, localising decision making and simplifying processes.

It certainly brings a challenge for HR: having spent decades driving efficiency through consistency and planning, we are having to rethink and reimagine how we can add value to a different kind of organisation. Central to this is finding ways to balance the need for responsive, short-term tactics with the need for long-term strategy and planning.

It's a classic wicked problem; there is no one right answer, no clear starting point and many separate issues are intertwined or contradictory, making it difficult to know where to start. Talent management is perhaps at the epicentre of this wicked problem – trying to resource rapidly changing current needs while also developing the capability for a shifting future (all within a limited budget).

We need to develop adaptive talent strategies

Stuck in a time warp

Many of our current talent tools have their roots in the 1950s, a period with greater predictability; a time when five-year succession plans made as much sense as 10-year strategic plans. The way most organisations 'do' talent management is stuck in this time warp and is not fit for purpose in the current age. We therefore need to overhaul our short- and long-term talent processes, and the way we perceive talent management. We need to think about 'talent liberation' instead of talent management. So, what can we do?

In the short term, we need to develop adaptive talent strategies. These are approaches with sufficient flexibility to enable us to respond to immediate needs, to scale up or down, to redeploy and refocus. This is something we've become more skilled at with the onset of furlough and other government schemes to support employment during the coronavirus pandemic.

There are four elements to this:

- **visibility of short-term available talent (within the organisation and outside it)**
- **rapid reporting to track business needs and identify gaps**
- **simple processes to fill gaps, reskill, upskill, redeploy**
- **a cultural element that embraces flexible resourcing and encourages the transparency and collaboration required for success**

This 'real-time' responsive approach is a challenge to many of our traditional methods of workforce planning, particularly in large and complex organisations. However, the model used in professional services is one from which many organisations can learn. These firms are used to operating in an uncertain world, unsure which contracts will be secured and exactly which skill sets will be in demand.

They have flexible team structures, set up for each project, with the people-management role separated from the task-management role. People are a shared, business-wide resource rather than 'belonging' within specific structures, so are free to move between geographies, customers or business areas.

Leaders and managers have the skills to inspire, motivate and develop people in frequently changing teams. If they don't have enough people on the 'bench' for a project, they will resource externally, or rapidly develop internal people to fill the gaps. Similarly, retail has, for many years, had flexible resourcing, with weekly sales and seasonal trend data driving decisions about rotas and shifts. For professional services firms and retailers, this flexibility is an essential element of their business model – and it's a feature from which many other organisations can learn as they explore how to develop greater agility.

As soon as we plan for just one future, we limit our preparation for the unexpected and with it, our ability to flex

Considering all the possible scenarios

Looking through the long-term lens, we must start by considering the strategic aims of the organisation and possible scenarios for how the organisation might evolve and grow. For each scenario, it is possible to identify potential organisational priorities and risks that the talent strategy needs to address; for example, how to ensure access to critical technology skills, how to resource expansion into new geographies, how to acquire and integrate new businesses successfully.

A strategy can then be built to show how to respond to each scenario – factoring in possible changes in technology which may mean that some roles are more/less important. Inevitably, this is based on a series of 'best guesses'. But as energy company Shell found through its groundbreaking work on scenario planning in the 1960s, the value comes less from predicting an actual future and more from recognising that the future is not set, from being prepared to succeed in a range of possible futures.

As soon as we plan for just one future, we limit our preparation for the unexpected and with it, our ability to flex. As with the short-term talent approach, organisations will only succeed in this if they look at culture as well as process. There are four particularly important cultural themes.

Organisations need to recognise the value of diverse skills and experience. This might even mean bringing in 'disruptive talent'. Firms require access to fresh perspectives. An organisation of clones is unlikely to be able to respond or adapt well to change.

Greater transparency is essential. This means having open conversations about possible scenarios and about the skills and experiences that will be most valued, involving feedback and support to enable people to develop these skills.

Businesses must work in partnership with talented people, whether staff are employed, 'borrowed', temporary or permanent. We need to engage with our people to find the 'sweet spot' between their wants and needs and those of the organisation. This requires thinking about them as stakeholders within the talent agenda. Instead of leaving their voice out of talent plans and decisions, we should be educating and empower our people to be proactive in managing their own careers, encouraging job crafting, motivating and supporting them to be their personal best. Through this, we can help everyone to perform well and thrive, attracting and accessing the broad range of talented people we need to safeguard success.

The approach must be owned by the HR function. These are business-critical issues and all leaders need to lean in, building new skills, challenging current approaches and embracing agility in how work happens.

A fundamental overhaul

These ways of thinking represent a fundamental overhaul of talent management. As HR professionals, we need to let go of our historical approaches and reshape the conversation, finding new ways to drive competitive advantage and manage risk, and so creating organisations that are nimble, responsive and resilient – where talent is liberated rather than managed.

In my experience, leaders are open to this change; they can see that current approaches are not bringing the benefits they need. Now is an ideal time to introduce new language into our talent conversations, to ask about future scenarios, to challenge established practices around secrecy and to invest time in developing a positive talent culture fit for the future.

Maggi Evans is an experienced consultant with international experience across a wide range of sectors, and co-author of *From Talent Management to Talent Liberation*, which will be published in December 2020.

Next time

FOCUS ON DIVERSITY

INCLUSION

Black Lives Matter

EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY

MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Gender balance *Psychological safety*

LGBT+ PROMOTING ENGAGEMENT

REBUILDING SOCIAL CAPITAL

Purpose *Disability*

IMPACT OF REMOTE WORKING

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