Talent Accelerator

The forces that are shaping the new working world
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In the wake of the global pandemic and a rapidly accelerating technological revolution, businesses are being rebuilt, reshaped, and reimagined.

As the economy gears up again and the job market begins to make a recovery, we are likely to see a surge in people seeking new roles. But while flexible working may expand the boundaries of the talent pool, it also increases competition, especially for those with high-demand skills. If employees can work remotely, a company’s location is no longer an advantage. To compete for the best talent, businesses must provide the ultimate employee experience.

Savvy companies are already taking a talent-first approach, putting their people at the center of all aspects of business infrastructure: digital and physical spaces, processes, and culture. But now organizations need to evaluate how they can help their employees thrive in a world where the virtual workspace is the central hub for teams. With the help of the right collaborative technology, many teams are growing stronger, despite the physical distance.

In this new working world, the organizations that prosper will be those that deliver learning and development (L&D) opportunities for employees, foster a culture of diversity and inclusion, and provide the tools that enable people to do their best work, on their terms. Leaders must truly adopt a growth mindset. As well as hiring to bring new skills in house, they must further invest in development programs to keep their teams’ skills on pace with changing technology and processes.

Although the working landscape is constantly shifting, we’re starting to see some significant trends emerging that will likely impact the working world in the long term, including the broadening of the talent pool, shifting working patterns, and a renewed demand for diversity. The Citrix Talent Accelerator report highlights current thinking from U.S. employees and HR directors on how the pandemic has affected attitudes toward these topics, providing insight into what present and future leaders can expect from the post-pandemic world of work, and how they can establish a competitive edge.

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About the study

The Citrix Talent Accelerator report examines the opinions and predictions of U.S. knowledge workers and HR directors on the future of the workforce and talent. It was developed as part of Citrix’s Work 2035 project, an ongoing initiative to understand the future of work. The aim of the Work 2035 project is to create frameworks, solutions, and skills to ensure that organizations—and entire economies—can adapt to the new world order and use it to their advantage.

Opinion research was conducted among 2,000 knowledge workers and 500 HR directors in large, established corporations and mid-market businesses with at least 500 employees; all the companies are based in the United States. Both groups of professionals were working under permanent contracts and were currently or had recently been working from home as a result of restrictions to prevent the spread of COVID-19. The study focused on the following sectors: financial services; healthcare and life sciences; telecommunications, media, and technology (TMT); professional services; manufacturing; and retail.

The research was designed and conducted by Man Bites Dog and Censuswide in November 2020.
Executive summary

*Talent Accelerator* looks at knowledge workers’ and HR directors’ visions of the future of work and what their priorities are within four themes: diversity and inclusion; dispersed workforces; virtual workplace connections; and employee development and well-being.

**Diversity drive:** Diversity is being driven from the ground up, as well as being high on the boardroom agenda. HR directors are more cautious about future rates of diversity and inclusion (D&I) than employees are, potentially presenting a more realistic vision of recruitment under challenging conditions.

- 78% of employees and 72% of HR directors believe that location bias will be eliminated as talent acquisition is no longer restricted by geographic boundaries.
- 78% of employees and 69% of HR directors believe that neurodiversity is increasingly recognized in their organization and will drive competitive advantage in the future.
- 86% of employees believe that a diverse workforce will become even more important as roles, skills, and company requirements change over time, compared to 66% of HR directors.

**The rise of the digital nomads:** In the new work equation, more employees and business leaders are championing changing practices, and priorities are shifting. This may signal the dawn of a more resilient workforce, underpinned by flexible technology options.

- 83% of employees and 69% of HR directors think that workers will be more likely to move out of cities and other urban locations if they can work remotely for a majority of the time.
- 78% of employees and 67% of HR directors predict that the geographical decentralization of organizations will result in the creation of new work hubs in suburban/rural areas in the next 12 months.
- 82% of employees and 62% of HR directors believe that workers will need to reskill or upskill at least once a year to maintain a competitive advantage in a global job market.
Unlimited connections: Technology has successfully brought dispersed teams together. Employees and HR directors report feeling more connected to their leadership team and peers when working remotely than when working in the office.

• 86% of employees and 69% of HR directors say that business leaders in their organization are using technology to collaborate effectively and innovate within the company.

• 73% of employees and 72% of HR directors believe that the increased use of technology moving forward will break down hierarchies within organizations.

• 86% of employees would prefer to work for a company that prioritizes outcome over output when measuring productivity, and 69% of HR directors say that their company operates in this way.

Employee development and well-being: A new working world could see significant benefits for career agility and employee development and well-being, powered by personalized tech.

• 83% of employees and 67% of HR directors believe that, in a flexible working future, organizations will enable “career agility” like never before.

• HR directors believe that ensuring an organization has the latest collaborative technology in place to enable agile learning is the most important factor in recruiting and retaining the best talent, and 88% of employees say that they look for this when searching for a new position.
The workforce rewrite
Employees and HR directors foresee a more diverse future
Diversity has moved up the boardroom agenda in recent years, and the research shows that both employees and HR directors believe that this will be a defining feature of the future workforce. But HR directors are more cautious about the increase in diversity and inclusion rates, potentially presenting a more realistic vision of recruitment under challenging conditions.

When considering diversity within their organization, over three-quarters of employees (78%) and just under three-quarters of HR directors (72%) predict that location bias will be eliminated as talent acquisition is no longer restricted by geographic boundaries. A majority of employees (86%) believe that a diverse workforce will become even more important as roles, skills, and company requirements change over time, compared to two-thirds of HR directors.

Employees from the financial services and tech, media, and telecom (TMT) sectors show the most concern about diversity’s place on the boardroom agenda, saying that there is a risk that their organization will deprioritize this issue, potentially jeopardizing future growth (65% and 73%, respectively). However, other industries display a more positive outlook, with only 35% of employees in the healthcare sector believing this to be a risk.

1. Many people with neurological conditions such as autism spectrum disorder and dyslexia have extraordinary skills, including in pattern recognition, memory, and mathematics. Yet they often struggle to fit the profiles sought by employers (Austin, R and Pisano, G—Harvard Business Review, April-May 2017).
The shifting mindset emphasizes the need to humanize workplace technology; in order to power a diverse workforce, employees need tools that work for them. Creating digital workspaces that are intuitive, personalized, and intelligent will be key to recruiting and retaining the best talent, particularly as we enter a new era of flexible working.
The rise of the digital nomads

This year has revolutionized our vision of what work looks like. Globalization kickstarted the remote working trend, and tech companies have long championed a more flexible approach, but the pandemic has firmly cemented this thinking, which is now being implemented by more and more sectors.

Our research shows that employees are the driving force behind this change, with 83% predicting that, in response to global skilled talent shortages, companies will leverage flexible work models to reach out to suitable candidates no matter where they live, compared to two-thirds (66%) of HR directors.

There appears to be a significant difference in attitudes between sectors, dependent on the services they deliver. Over three-quarters of HR directors (77%) from the financial services sector report that their organization is seeking to employ a global workforce in order to optimize productivity and deliver exceptional service, compared to just under half (48%) in the retail industry.

With competition for roles increasing, upskilling will be more of a priority. A large majority of employees (82%) believe that workers will need to reskill or upskill at least once a year to maintain a competitive advantage in a global job market.

Smart suburbs

In a world where people can be more flexible with their working location, we may see a migration of knowledge workers. Over three-quarters of employees (76%) and two-thirds of HR directors (67%) believe that workers will be more likely to prioritize lifestyle over proximity to work, even if it means taking a pay cut. Furthermore, 83% of employees and 69% of HR directors think that workers will be more likely to move out of cities and other urban locations if they can work remotely for a majority of the time.

The working landscape could look very different this time next year. A majority of employees and HR directors (78% and 67% respectively) predict that the geographical decentralization of companies will result in the creation of new work hubs in suburban and rural areas in the next 12 months. Before long, smart cities could sprawl into truly smart suburbs, powered by a flexible and resilient workforce.
Work beyond boundaries
Adaptive leaders will prosper in the battle for talent
Unlimited connections

We are seeing signs that remote working can be a winning strategy, but leaders must continue to adapt their approach as many workers show a preference for a hybrid model of working going forward.

Our research confirms that flexibility remains high on the employee agenda, with 88% of employees agreeing that, when searching for a new position, they would look for a company that offers workers complete flexibility in their working hours and location. A majority of HR directors (69%) agree that this will be an important factor in recruiting and retaining the best talent.

Outcome over output

Performance management will be critical to get the best out of distributed teams. A large majority of employees (86%) would prefer to work for a company that prioritizes outcome over output when measuring productivity, and 69% of HR directors say that their company currently operates in this way.

Gaining insight into employee behaviors can be valuable in supporting engagement and efficiency, as well as informing employee wellness programs. Leaders must work out how they can measure performance without putting unnecessary pressure on their workers.

69% of employees think they’re more productive (by an average of 72%) if they feel that their employer trusts them to get the job done without monitoring their progress.

51% of HR directors think that their organization would be more productive as a whole (by an average of 53%) if employees felt that their employer/senior management team trusted them to get the job done without monitoring their progress.
Tech-powered connections

Technology has been vital in bringing teams together at what has been a fractured time for organizations. A large proportion of employees (86%) and HR directors (69%) say that business leaders in their organization are using technology to collaborate effectively and innovate within the company.

A majority of employees and HR directors report feeling closer to their colleagues while working from home. Around two-thirds of employees and HR directors feel more connected to their direct manager, CEO, senior management team, and peers when working remotely than when working in the office. Agreement was higher among employees and HR directors in smaller organizations within the study than those in the largest organizations. It’s likely that more regular meeting cadence—combined with easier access to colleagues, peers, and leaders through collaboration tools—is partly why there is a notable increase in feelings of connectedness.

Traditionally, gaining face time with the senior management team has been key to career progression, but many workers no longer see this as essential. Almost three-quarters of employees (73%) and HR directors (72%) believe that the increased use of technology moving forward will break down hierarchies within organizations. More open communication with business leaders and senior management teams may power career progression in a flexible working future.
Talent mobility

The research reveals that professionals are positive about the career opportunities the future of work could hold. A majority of employees and HR directors (83% and 67% respectively) believe that, in a flexible working future, organizations will enable career agility like never before. This shows that workers envision a career path that is responsive to change, resulting in evolving job roles designed to optimize creativity, growth, and happiness.

To make this vision a reality, it will be important for employers to provide clear progression paths, regardless of geography, ensuring that employees know where they need to focus in order to advance their career; 87% of employees and 71% of HR directors agree that providing these roadmaps will be important in terms of recruiting and retaining the best talent.

Rising investment in learning and development (L&D)

As the battle for talent picks up, it will be important for organizations to focus on cultivating the talent they already have, as well as recruiting externally. Organizations that prioritize reskilling and upskilling will not only boost the motivation and engagement of their existing workers but gain the attention of the brightest new recruits.

HR directors believe that ensuring an organization has the latest collaborative technology in place to enable agile learning is the most important factor in recruiting and development (L&D). As the battle for talent picks up, it will be important for organizations to focus on cultivating the talent they already have, as well as recruiting externally. Organizations that prioritize reskilling and upskilling will not only boost the motivation and engagement of their existing workers but gain the attention of the brightest new recruits. HR directors believe that ensuring an organization has the latest collaborative technology in place to enable agile learning is the most important factor in recruiting and development (L&D).

67% of employees predict that their organization will increase investment in L&D in the next 12 months (by an average of 59%).

56% of HR directors believe that their organization will increase investment in L&D in the next 12 months (by an average of 51%).
retaining the most creative and innovative talent. A majority of employees (88%) say that this is an important consideration when searching for a new position.

Talent unleashed

Employees are currently more positive about the impact of workplace technology on productivity than HR directors, with 89% of employees believing that technology makes employees within their organization more productive, compared to 69% of HR directors. This gap may be due to HR professionals’ having encountered more resistance in the past on cultural and operational change, compared to the agile change employees have experienced in the last 12 months.

Businesses in certain sectors have had to embrace this over the last year, particularly when operating remotely for long periods of time.

Professionals predict a future of digital wellness: 87% of employees and 69% of HR directors believe that, in a more flexible working future, companies will use technology to automate mundane tasks, minimizing friction so that employees can focus on meaningful work that engages them. Organizations that create an environment in which their workers can unleash their full creativity and cultivate their unique passions and skills will thrive in the future of work.
Conclusion: Recovery and growth

The workplace and how we choose to work will never be the same. Talent will be critical for recovery and growth as organizations strive to build back better.

Both employees and HR directors appear to be positive about the future world of work. As the lines between work life and home life become less rigid, companies may expand the scope of their wellness programs, thinking beyond the 9 to 5. A majority of employees and HR directors (84% and 71% respectively) believe that, in a flexible working future, companies will take a more holistic approach to well-being—an approach that includes, physical, mental, and financial health.

The future also holds opportunities for those whose voices have been missing from the mainstream workforce. This unlocked talent will be an asset to companies in a world where a diversity of insight is what sets organizations apart from the crowd.

As business leaders consider what their organizations will look like moving forward, they should assess the way that they measure employee success; could they get the best out of their workers if they measured their value on outcomes rather than actions?

Workplace innovation is not a one-size-fits-all proposition. As the brightest and the best take advantage of the flexibility offered by a ‘work from anywhere’ culture, software and systems must be dynamic, providing employees with a secure and unified experience that allows them to work in any location, on any device and any network.

The use of people-centric tech platforms will also be vital to fuel collaboration between remote workers and support employee development programs, personalizing content delivery to suit individual working preferences. These factors will lead to a level of career agility we’ve never seen before.

Over the last year, technology has proven itself to be a business continuity game changer; it will now enable growth for businesses as we enter the next phase of work.

Learn more about the future of work at now.citrix.com/work2035.
Locations
Corporate Headquarters | 851 Cypress Creek Road, Fort Lauderdale, FL 33309, United States
Silicon Valley | 4988 Great America Parkway, Santa Clara, CA 95054, United States

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