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BEING OKAY
WITH NOT
BEING OKAY

How to create
a psychologically
safe workplace



IS YOUR MENTAL HEALTH PLAN REALLY WORKING?

How to measure
the success of your
well-being strategy

HARASSMENT SPOTLIGHT

Employment law Q&A:
Harassment in a
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Our purpose is people

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For most of us, our *raison d'être* – our purpose – is people. In this special edition of *HRD*, we explore innovations that emerged during the past year and look ahead to what the future holds for Canadian businesses and their people. We connect you with industry leaders, employment lawyers and technology experts to help you understand what HR teams can expect from 2022 and beyond.



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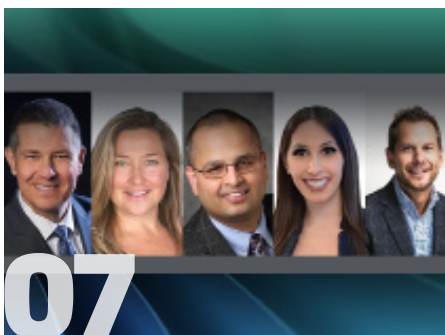
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As employee mental health declines, HR must do more to protect their people



FOR many people, bringing their authentic self to work simply isn't an option. Whether it's a toxic company culture, an

oppressive management team or unrealistic C-suite expectations, many employees still feel uncomfortable expressing their ideas and opinions to their colleagues or leaders. As offices reopen and organizations adopt hybrid working models, it's time to reassess your commitment to providing a psychologically safe workplace. HRD spoke to Tamisha Parris, founder of diversity consulting firm Parris Consulting, about how expectations around psychological safety have changed post-pandemic – and how trust is key to security.

“True psychological safety is when you know you can ask for help without fear of being reprimanded,” says Parris. “It's that trusting relationship that allows employees to feel valued and respected – especially when it comes to their mental health and well-being.”

The events of the past year have completely upended both our personal and professional lives. Employee expectations have changed in almost every respect – from organizational well-being initiatives to perks to career development and diversity plans. In regard to psychological safety, employees are now craving stability, security and, most

of all, trust.

Research from The Workforce Institute at UKG found that 64% of employees believe trust has a direct impact on their sense of belonging at work. What's more, 24% of people have actually left a company because of a total lack of trust from their employer. This only further highlights the overriding need for a more psychologically inclusive environment, especially as we look to re-enter the workplace.

“The pandemic really impacted how we all think about psychological safety in the workplace,” says Parris. “When COVID hit, we

“It's time to remind your people that it's okay to not be okay.”

were thrown in at the deep end. Everything was uncertain – from our jobs to our health – meaning anxiety levels skyrocketed. Being surrounded by so much loss on such an unprecedented scale impacted the way we worked. Employees had to learn to adapt quickly, adopting new video and remote technology, taking on new responsibilities in a remote environment. Similarly, re-entry back into the workplace is just as daunting for teams. Having to re-learn old skills and ways of communicating will leave people feeling psychologically unsafe and hyper-vulnerable. If not handled correctly, employees will undoubtedly feel unheard and unappreciated.”

So, what's to be done? In reality, providing a psychologically safe workplace isn't rocket science – but it starts with being honest with yourself. Does your culture allow for open conversations between leaders and their teams? For instance, say a colleague approaches you about a mistake you've made – don't react with anger or indignation. Thank them for their feedback and move on. Taking this one step further, don't wait for someone else to initiate conversations – actively solicit opinions. Ask your co-workers how you can improve – ask them for their viewpoints.

“Leaders need to ensure that they're leading,” says Parris. “This culture of communication and trust should emanate from the top down. What's more, employers really need to reassess their Employee Assistance Programs [EAP] and see if they need updating. Our re-entrance into the workplace is a wonderful opportunity to ensure that your resources are aligned with your values. It's time to remind your people that it's okay to not be okay. It's okay to seek help if you're struggling; it's okay to be vulnerable. We all collectively need to go further in removing the stigma around mental health – only then will we be able to boast a truly psychologically safe and healthy workplace.”

HR'S CHECKLIST FOR PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY



1. Create a safe and trusting environment



2. Initiate open conversations between leaders and teams



3. Don't react badly to colleagues' honest feedback



4. Show appreciation for new ideas



5. Reassess your well-being programs and EAPs



6. Remind people it's okay to not be okay

CEO SPOTLIGHT WITH ARON AIN

UKG's chairman and CEO reveals how COVID revolutionized the talent market

THE war for talent has never been more intense. The COVID-19 pandemic acted as a catalyst for organizational change – widening the talent pool from regional to international, creating a candidate-led market. *HRD* spoke to Aron Ain, chairman and CEO at UKG (Ultimate Kronos Group), who revealed how the pandemic revolutionized the recruitment scene – and what leaders can expect beyond 2021.

“In Canada, much like other parts of the world, the pandemic disrupted the world of work as we knew it,” says Ain. “Remote work became the norm for those who were able, and for those who must be present to do their jobs, such as the heroic front-line workers, change in processes, distancing and schedules had

“Our talent acquisition team did a tremendous job with finding new ways to recruit top talent.”

to immediately be put into play. Our industry-leading HCM and workforce management technology became a critical asset to organizations to find the right people, with the right skill set, to be in the right place at the right time – and UKG did all we could to help our customers and their people.”

One of the main changes Ain pinpoints in the pandemic was an expanding, global talent market. The widespread adoption of remote work has enabled employers to hire talent from anywhere in the world – and employees to similarly apply to international roles.

“Like many talent markets, the pendulum

has swung from an employer's market pre-pandemic to an employee's market,” says Ain. “We see it all over the world – mostly in the front-line world – that there is a shortage of workers. Really good people have choices as to where they can work, and we work very hard to make

UKG a place where great people (employees) want to be. The pandemic has made the power of employee choice stronger than ever. Not only are companies and employees having ongoing discussions about office versus remote versus hybrid, many people – especially those in the front-line world like

nurses, retail associates, hospitality workers and more – have spent the last year-plus in deep reflection on their careers and what they want their life to be.

“Call it The Great Resignation or Big Quit, or whatever you want – the fact is all employees have choices. The talent is out there – maybe more talent than ever before. Organizations must continue to work hard to find and, more importantly, keep their people by focusing on a thoughtful employee experience and investing in their people leaders.”

As the CEO of a global technology company, Ain has a big-picture perspective on emerging talent trends and what he's



looking for in new hires. Ultimate Software and Kronos went through an industry-changing merger last year, cultivating a whole new company in the midst of a global pandemic. Ain believes that this only made UKG all the stronger – and its talent all the more advanced.

“Our talent acquisition team did a tremendous job with finding new ways to recruit top talent,” he says. “And we're hiring across all areas, from product development, sales and customer support to HR, marketing, finance and all other back-office functions. We know that a diverse team at UKG will help us continue to create and deliver the most innovative people solutions on the market.”

As for the future of talent in Canada, Ain believes it's bright and beaming.

“While we don't know what future impacts the pandemic might bring or where we will be working come wintertime, I am optimistic that across the world, we are addressing important topics that will improve the world of work, such as diversity, equity, inclusion and pay equity,” he says. “UKG will remain at the forefront of these topics and continue to better ourselves as a company for our employees, our families, our customers and the communities in which we live and work.”

SHOULD EMPLOYERS CONSIDER A 'RIGHT TO DISCONNECT' LAW?

The legislation is being considered in the federal government – but would it work for your organization?



Lorenzo Lisi
Partner at Aird & Berlis

There's certainly been a push in the workplace towards a culture that allows employees to disconnect. It's an understandable side effect of the pace of our work life and the reality of the pandemic, which has led to little separation between work and the home. However, the idea of passing a law that provides employees the 'right to disconnect' is not only impractical and difficult to monitor and enforce, but is also not likely what employees are seeking when it comes to work-life balance.

Why? First, consider the feasibility of the rule: What's the penalty for a breach? If the government is the body that will be responsible for enforcement, how will that work? Fines? Investigations? How long will that take? And isn't there already too much workplace bureaucracy? Shouldn't government agencies focus on important workplace issues such as human rights, health and safety, and employment standards?

Second, there is no guarantee that this kind of rule will improve the lives of employees. It might result in more work to be done in a shorter time, which could in turn lead to other workplace issues such as stress and reduced employee satisfaction with their work. Third, this could very possibly have the effect of increasing costs and reducing efficiencies in the workplace, leading ironically to the need to do more work in a shorter period of time.

And fourth, employees themselves may not want this type of restriction. Currently, and particularly during COVID, many remote workers have been making their own work schedules. They may choose to allocate time during what is typically considered a 'workday' to other matters, such as childcare, and work later in the day when they have uninterrupted time. Why should the government impose rules on what it believes a traditional workplace should look like?

At the end of the day, management still has the right to manage the workplace. It may involve work outside of normal working hours. Regulating the workplace in this manner won't help and may in fact hurt.



Dr. Jarik Conrad
VP of the human insights and HCM
Advisory team at UKG

The 'right to disconnect' is a pretty contentious issue for employers. At its core, the concept is absolutely correct. People are working more overtime than ever before, due in the most part to remote work and COVID. We can see that employees are stressed, anxious and burned out, having to be constantly available for calls and emails from colleagues and managers alike. I do believe that some organizations may have been taking advantage of the remote working setup and have been contacting employees when they really should wait until the next day. For that reason, I believe that some sort of rule needs to come into place that protects employees and promotes more work-life balance.

However, I'm not too sure if the 'right to disconnect' is the right choice. Do we really want a rule that hampers flexibility? Employees

“Implementing a ‘right to disconnect’ is only masking the underlying issue.”

have enjoyed choosing when and how they work – and normally, that will be outside of regular hours. For working parents, one of the best times to reply to emails is after they've put their children to bed. I wouldn't want a law that hampered that flexibility for personal work and the hours that an individual finds most effective.

There's no denying that organizations need more stringency when it comes to off-duty contact leading to overwork – however, implementing a 'right to disconnect' is only masking the underlying issue. If your employees are calling for a rule to prevent late-night emails, it's time you looked at your culture and your values. Why are your managers contacting their teams late at night? Why are you allowing your people to become depressed and undervalued? That's the real issue here – and one that requires self-reflection rather than legislation.

THE HEARDS AND THE HEARD-NOTS

Dr. Chris Mullen of the Workplace Institute at UKG reveals the shocking communication gap in our workplaces



EVEN with all the regular pulse surveys and town halls in place, many employees still feel neglected by leaders. Recent findings from

The Workplace Institute at UKG show an overwhelming majority (86%) of employees feel as if not all voices are heard fairly or equally. Around half (51%) of employees in Canada say that underrepresented voices remain undervalued by employers. Even when employees do feel heard, two in five globally doubt it leads to actionable change, with another 75% saying they don't feel heard on important workplace topics like benefits, safety and time-off requests.

"Most employees do feel heard at the workplace, but not all employees are heard equally," reveals Dr. Chris Mullen, executive director at The Workforce Institute at UKG. "For me, that was an eye-opener."

Global findings show that two in three employees (63%) feel they've been ignored in some way by their manager or employer. Staff feel that leaders lack the initiative in seeking out feedback (39%), that their leaders don't care about them as a person (35%) or they're simply not taken seriously (34%). This is why many staffers (43%) would rather tell leaders what they think leaders want to hear, instead of their genuine feedback.

"Companies should be looking at how to listen to employees more. [Surveys are] a good tool for listening and hearing what your employees have to say, but are you communicating? Is it a two-way street?"

Who feels ignored at work?

This gap runs deeper for specific groups of employees. In Canada, underrepresented minorities (51%), non-caregivers (48%) and essential workers (32%) feel especially passed over at work. Among younger workers globally, just 9% of employees believe everyone at their workplaces is heard fairly and equally. A whopping 78% feel that they've been ignored by their leader. For those who have managed to get a word in, 57% believe they're not taken seriously.

This isn't due to a lack of trying by employers. Younger workers (58%) do feel that their leaders empower them to express their views freely at work, though older staffers (74%) are more confident in speaking up. Regardless, Dr. Mullen believes it's high time HR leaders take the initiative.

HR needs to step up

"The onus is on the companies and businesses to give them that feeling that they can speak up and be listened to," explains Dr. Mullen. Increasing efforts in this area should be a business priority, especially

when findings show that 92% of highly engaged employees feel heard at work, compared to a mere 30% of disengaged staff. When employees feel their voices are heard, they feel more engaged (74%), they're more effective at their jobs (74%) and are more confident to share feedback in the future (71%).

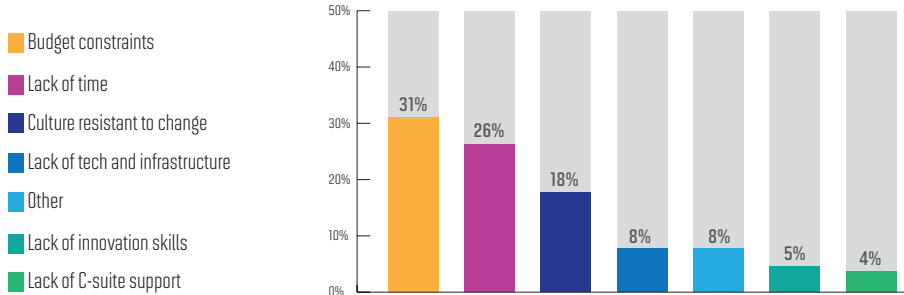
"Companies should be looking at how to listen to employees more," adds Dr. Mullen. "Some companies will probably say, 'Hey, look, we have this survey tool, and that's how we listen.' That is a good tool for listening and hearing what your employees have to say, but are you communicating? Is it a two-way street? If you run a survey, are you communicating back to the employees what you heard – the results [and] what you're going to do about the findings or what they had to say?"

"If you weren't going to do something, don't just brush it under the rug. Say, 'Here's why we possibly can't do this' or 'Here's a roadmap for two years from now, because it's more of a heavy lift.' I think it's also that piece that companies can learn from how we're communicating."

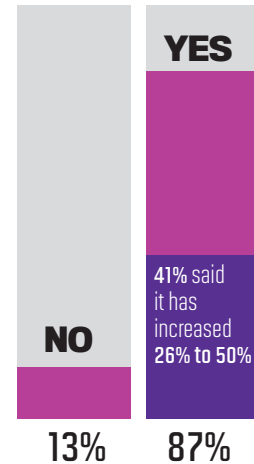
INNOVATION SURVEY RESULTS

What is the biggest barrier to people-centric innovation?

Nearly one in three want more budget



As an HR professional, has your workload increased since the COVID-19 outbreak?



What has been the biggest people-related challenge for your organization throughout the pandemic?



35%

Managing uncertainty



35%

Managing employee mental health and well-being



16%

Maintaining employee morale and productivity



10%

Other



9%

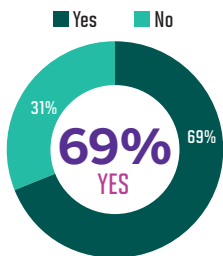
Managing the shift to working remotely



8%

Maintaining communication within the organization

Do you wish your company was more innovative?

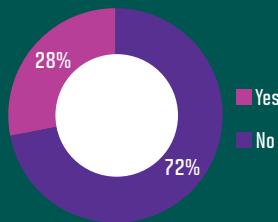


Among the answers, the most common themes were:

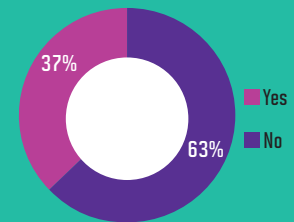
- Having more updated technology, leveraging technology, more automation
- Faster adoption of new processes, technology and ideas
- Better agility, nimbleness, responsiveness
- Culture change

TECHNOLOGY is tightly linked to INNOVATION

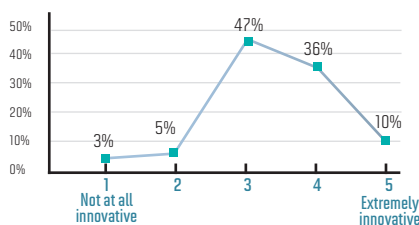
Do you have any formal programs in place to encourage employees to focus on innovation?



Do you plan on launching any innovation programs in the next 12 months?



How innovative is your company?



How important is innovation in your industry for thriving in the future business environment?



Source: HRD and UKG



INNOVATION IN HR

HRD brings together Canadian leaders to discuss how innovation will help shape our people and our purpose

INNOVATION is almost always born out of disruption – and, as we can all agree, the past year has been rather disruptive. COVID-19 brought immense and unforeseen challenges for Canadian employers, forcing leaders to rethink and realign their strategies in order to survive. As a society, we saw global movements protesting social and racial injustice, dealt with a growing mental health pandemic, and grappled with overnight digitization. It became a case of managing crises within crises, of sailing uncharted waters while carrying the whole organization on HR's lap.

In the face of so much change, employers had to be flexible and adaptable in their processes and policies – a perfect breeding ground for organizational innovation. *HRD* recently held a roundtable in conjunction

with UKG, hosted by Cecile Alper-Leroux, group vice-president, research & innovation, at UKG. The roundtable brought together four of Canada's leading HR practitioners to debate and discuss how companies have harnessed innovation to drive forward their people and their purpose.

Building adaptable leaders

When the pandemic first hit, employers' main concern was twofold. How do we protect the mental and physical well-being of our teams? And how do we pivot to remain relevant and productive? The immediate solution to both of these concerns was adopting a remote working model, relying more on technology and apps to provide contact and support. But how was this rolled out? How did employees react to the upheaval?

For Chris Taylor, chief human resources officer at Best Buy Canada, the main priority was constant communication – facilitated by unplanned innovation.

“It was truly extraordinary how quickly our communication evolved,” he explained. “We have lots of stores across Canada, all of which were dealing with different levels of restrictions. As such, it was imperative that we had a strong communication strategy – one to which our employees adapted very quickly. They wanted to be connected. They wanted to hear from their peers. They wanted to understand what was coming next.

“After building an internal platform, we brought all the different government information together in one accessible place. It was a little choppy at the beginning, but we became very fluid. All of this unplanned

HR EXECUTIVE ROUNDTABLE

THE HR EXECUTIVE ROUNDTABLE PARTICIPANTS



Cecile Alper-Leroux

Group vice-president,
research & innovation

UKG



Chris Taylor

Chief human resources
officer

Best Buy Canada



Laura Salvatore

Associate vice-president
of human capital

**Centurion Asset
Management**



Kirk Merrett

Director, HR &
administration

Hyundai Auto Canada



Harry Sharma

Director,
Innovation Hub

Carleton University

innovation proved very successful for us and helped drive our employee experience.”

Resilience in remote work

Adaptability has been key to survival throughout the past year – but adaptability is only achieved through resilience. The shift to remote work was necessary; however, it also presented its own unique set of challenges. As Laura Salvatore, associate vice-president of human capital at Centurion Asset Management, told *HRD*, employee resilience became the cornerstone of success.

“When we first began working from home, we had people rolling their monitors and keyboards out to their cars – no one really knew what the future held,” she said. “For a while, we were teaching our children during our lunch breaks and walking laps across the living room to keep our fitness levels up.

“However, in spite of all of that, we’ve had our most productive year to date. We’ve acquired more buildings than ever before. Our employees are working not only at the

“We’re preparing the leaders of tomorrow – teaching them how to excel in this unprecedented age of innovation.”

Harry Sharma, Carleton University

same capacity that they were pre-pandemic, but they’re actually more productive. Our people showed us that they can work from home and they can do it well. This in itself opened the door for us to start listening more to our people and saying, ‘You know what? They’re right.’”

Salvatore said one of her team’s brightest ideas was to take estate viewing virtual – one of her employees suggested using WhatsApp video and FaceTime to walk prospective residents through their units.

It’s this unplanned innovation born out of collaboration that has driven businesses forward – and this culture of trust would eventually become an integral part of overall

leadership strategy. A recent report from The Workforce Institute at UKG found that 64% of employees believe trust has a direct impact on their sense of belonging at work. The pandemic meant that employers had little choice but to trust their teams when working from home – but it was transparency in communication that differentiated a good manager from a great one.

“Transparency from leadership in our communication really helped our people stay engaged during the pandemic,” said Kirk Merrett, director of HR & administration at Hyundai Auto Canada. “This last year, the companies that had that transparency and really lived their values had the best chance

of success. We had our most engaged group ever – in a midst of a pandemic – and I think that’s because they believed in what we were doing and how we were doing it.”

Collaboration as a team sport

As Salvatore proved, listening to your employees’ ideas isn’t just the ethical thing to do – it’s sheer business gold. The chaos of the pandemic has forced this sort of entrepreneurial style of working, whereby employees felt empowered enough to voice their thoughts and ideas to their management teams – and the results were pretty spectacular.

“One of the ideas that our folks came up with was a formal way to innovate – a *Dragon’s Den* style of innovating competition,” said Merrett. “It’s led by a small group before being presented to our executive panel. We’ve gotten some amazing ideas out of this process. It’s something that was born out of COVID, but we’ll definitely continue with it going forward. It was a big win all around for both business and engagement reasons.”

Understanding what works for your organization may take time and experimentation – but for the most part, all employees should enjoy this form of collective brainstorming. The most important aspect of top-down innovation projects is communication – UKG’s research found that 70% of HR leaders actively ask for feedback and ideas on any new initiatives.

“For us, it’s all about the pragmatism of innovation,” said Harry Sharma, director of the Innovation Hub at Carleton University. “How are these new innovative processes addressing everyday issues which need to be resolved? However, what’s equally important now is for leaders to come up with a sort of framework in which to situate these new ideas. After all, we don’t want to end up in anarchy, letting amazing ideas slip through our fingers. Leaders need to be mindful of structure in order to give each new idea the attention it deserves.”

Structure doesn’t necessarily have to be a bad thing. Yes, creative solutions are often born out of chaotic necessity – however, it would be irresponsible not to have some sort of process in place to develop these ideas.

This is where technology comes in. UKG’s research found that 64% of HR leaders believe tech to be intrinsic to innovation.

“This last year, the companies that had transparency and really lived their values had the best chance of success.”

Kirk Merrett, Hyundai Auto Canada

Salvatore said that, moving forward, she’ll be using tech platforms to inspire innovation across the whole organization.

“At Centurion, our employees submit their ideas via Slack,” she explained. “It’s great because it gives people who work at other sites an opportunity to get in front of our company president and share those ideas. Because really, at the end of the day, these employees have the boots on the ground. It’s been a great way to get those ideas out there while still having some sort of structure in place.”

Each quarter, Salvatore selects one winning idea and awards the employee with a trophy or a prize. “This is just to show that we appreciate our teams’ input – and that we’re following through. We want our people to see that we’re listening and reacting, implementing new solutions each and every month.”

This follow-up is essential. There’s no point in asking for ideas if you’re just going to ignore them. This open communication does wonders for building trust and cementing the employer/employee relationship. As Taylor revealed, he’s all for using technology to not only enhance this experience, but make it smoother and more agile.

“We took on a scrum methodology,” he said. “We found agile coaches to help

facilitate solutions before presenting them through weekly symposiums to the whole company. For instance, at Best Buy Canada we have ‘families.’ Each family is dedicated to a different theme. The entire family works on a set of problems, coming up with the solutions, and then presents these back at our virtual symposiums. We can have

six families presenting at one time using Microsoft Teams.”

Taylor added that while this constant innovation is extremely effective, it’s also pretty challenging from an HR perspective. All these changes require a phenomenal amount of time and effort from HR practitioners and their teams – something C-suite executives need to bear in mind during the process. According to UKG’s survey, 87% of HR leaders have seen an increase in their workload, and 41% said it has increased by 26% to 50%.

Expanding candidate markets

One of the more surprising benefits to emerge from the pandemic was talent mobility and candidate fluidity. Remote working meant that employers could hire people from anywhere in the world – but this perk was something of a double-edged sword. If HR leaders now had access to a global talent market, so did their employees.

But what does this mean for Canadian businesses? How can leaders harness innovation to keep their talent? How has this expanded talent market shifted opportunities? For Salvatore, it descended into an all-out bidding war – a practice she’s more than familiar with.

HR EXECUTIVE ROUNDTABLE

“I’m in the real estate industry,” she said. “We have bidding wars for houses – now we have bidding wars for candidates. Right now in Canada, people are overbidding for homes – similarly, organizations are paying super high salaries to attract top talent. This is putting pressure on us as employers to be innovative. For smaller companies like Centurion Asset Management, the question became how do we build up an employer brand so that we could compete with larger companies? What do we do to be seen as an attractive employer in order to bring in that top talent?”

Salvatore curated LinkedIn campaigns and video content using employee testimonials. Remember, your team members are your biggest brand ambassadors – so showcasing their opinions on your organization can draw in top-tier talent. But once you’ve got them, how do you keep them?

“Employer branding is crucial here,” said Merrett. “Our reputation inside and outside of the organization is key to attracting people and retaining them. We have a very low turnover – almost no turnover, actually. I think that’s a testament to the environment we’ve created – to our leadership teams and our employees.”

Part of this branding should include transparent leadership development opportunities. According to research from Gallup, 59% of millennial employees believe development opportunities are crucial when deciding whether to apply for a role.

“One of the vitally important aspects of retention is creating visible career paths,” said Taylor. “Historically, I don’t think we’ve done too great a job on this – however, the shift to remote work has now created massive opportunities. At Best Buy Canada, we have around 12,000 people, 2,000 of which are post-secondary to late high school students working in our stores. They might want to be a lawyer or a doctor – but what we should be doing is offering them great internal opportunities. We want to show them what



“We have bidding wars for houses – now we have bidding wars for candidates.”

Laura Salvatore, Centurion Asset Management

it would be like working here as a finance professional or a buyer or an engineer.”

Safeguarding mental health

One of the main pressure points of the pandemic has been its impact on our collective mindsets. Our mental well-being was tested like never before, and cases of depression, anxiety and isolation-related stress skyrocketed across Canada. UKG’s research found that managing employee mental health was the number-one challenge for HR during the pandemic. For leaders, it became a question of resilience. Namely, how

can I lead my tired and jaded team when I too am tired and jaded? How can I be a support system for my employees when I’m suffering as well?

“We as employers need to be innovative in thinking about employee mental health,” said Salvatore. “Whether that’s introducing employee support programs, launching apps or hosting Wellness Wednesdays, we need to teach our employees how to take care of their mental well-being.”

Leaders have made quite the show of saying “it’s okay to not be okay” – but how much of that is translating into everyday practices?



How can leaders ensure their people know it's okay to take a day off if they need it? How can we propel that culture of psychological safety and destigmatize mental health in the workplace?

"I think one of the benefits of COVID, if you can call it that, is a change in how we think about employee health and safety," said Merrett. "As HR leaders, we've never really had to consider the physical safety of our teams – that was always another department. But now, HR has started thinking about all the different aspects of health and safety, mental and physical, as one. This is a change I really hope we see stick – but before that, we have to overcome those barriers of acceptance around mental health leave."

At the start of the pandemic, many employees equated working from home with having more free time. In reality, the

"One of the vitally important aspects of retention is creating visible career paths."

Chris Taylor, Best Buy Canada

opposite has proven true. People feel this intense need to be constantly switched on – to be available for meetings and calls and emails at all times of the day and night. Leaders need to start thinking creatively about how to tackle this growing concern – sooner rather than later.

"At Carleton University, we have the privilege of not only being an employer but also a training institution," said Sharma. "Our priority is to make sure our students are well rounded in their profession, while also helping them take care of their mental health. We want to ensure people know where well-being resources are and how they can access them. We're also training them on identifying markers around their well-being. In the future, if they're working in an organization and they start seeing some of those markers, they'll know the steps to take. We're preparing the leaders of tomorrow – teaching them how to excel in this unprecedented age of innovation."

Digitization as an HR component

Whatever the future holds for Canadian employers and their teams, technology and digitization are guaranteed to play a huge role in shaping it. Cybersecurity continues to be a major concern for employers in both remote and hybrid models. The immediate pivot toward a fully remote workforce put a lot of pressure on HR to ensure their IT departments were fully compliant. Salvatore suggested using tester emails – fake phishing messages urging employees to click on links.

"You'd be surprised how many workers click on them," she said. "The only way that's going to change is through training and education. We make our people go through a rigorous training program online, and we've seen the clicks per user really go down."

Training took something of a back seat at the height of the pandemic, with employers more focused on protecting workers' health and pivoting to remote work. Now, as employees prepare to return to the office, development is more important than ever before.

"I think training the workforce has become absolutely a necessity rather than a privilege at this point," said Sharma. "This is particularly true in regards to digitization. Because of the nature of digitization at work, organizations are collecting more data on their teams – their IP addresses and their passwords, etc. This means employers need thorough planning around internal processes."

Protecting this employee data is essential. HR leaders must have solid structures in place to safeguard external worker information.

"I would recommend corporate leaders, especially those who have privacy as part of their mandate, take a closer look at all of the internal processes that they have," said Sharma. "Look to see if any additional data has been collected from your employees or your partners – external or internal partners – and ensure that you put a policy around those units as well."

Looking to the future, this kind of continuous upskilling and adaptability will be key to success. It's been a case of learning as we go, harnessing innovation to create groundbreaking solutions to unfathomable problems. But this reliance on innovative practices shouldn't end with the pandemic. Whether you're implementing a hybrid, remote or fully in-person model, as long as you're thinking and acting innovatively, listening to your people, and upskilling your teams, you'll not only survive in this new normal, you will thrive.

HARASSMENT IN A HYBRID WORKPLACE

What are your legal responsibilities in online abuse?



WHAT do we mean when we talk about harassment at work? The truth is that the definition has evolved – in no small part thanks to the

COVID-19 pandemic.

Once, our idea of harassment in the workplace focused on verbal, in-person bullying, blatant physical or sexual abuse, and unwanted, unwarranted attention. Now, as the world pivots to a more hybrid work model and employees continue to work from their homes, harassment has taken on another dimension. A recent poll taken by UKG found that harassment and bullying were the most concerning areas of misconduct for HR professionals, with 76% of leaders worried about both online and in-person abuse.

Harassment in a hybrid working model may be more subtle, but make no mistake – it’s just as toxic and just as illegal. *HRD* recently spoke to Stuart Rudner, employment lawyer, mediator and founder of Rudner Law, who talked us through the legal pressure points of online harassment.

What constitutes harassment in the virtual workplace?

The classic definition of harassment, as seen in Ontario’s Occupational Health and Safety Act, is “engaging in a course of vexatious comment or conduct against a person in a workplace that is known or ought reasonably to be known to be unwelcome.”

Now, as people continue to work from home, harassment has taken on an online form – namely, social media abuse and elec-

“Harassment in a hybrid working model may be more subtle, but make no mistake – it’s just as toxic and just as illegal.”

tronic bullying. For instance, we’ve seen a rise in toxic WhatsApp messaging, bullying posts on a colleague’s Facebook wall, etc. – mainly because that’s how we communicate now. We’re relying more on digital interactions, which has inevitably led to a spike in digital harassment.

What are some examples of online harassment?

As I often say, there is no law against being a jerk, and there is also a significant difference between managing and bullying. Not every negative interaction at work is actionable, and some managers have a less ‘friendly’ style than others.

If an employee has a bad experience in a video call – perhaps their manager is aggressive – if it’s a one-off, then it’s not harassment. However, if it continues and becomes a pattern, then it’s harassment. In remote work scenarios, many employers are relying on internal messaging systems to communicate with employees, which tend to be very informal. This casual tone leaves room for interpretation in comments and conversations, causing some people to commit forms of unintentional electronic harassment. Even excluding people from meetings or events can constitute bullying.

What are the legal ramifications of online harassment?

Harassment, whether it be in person or online, is governed by provincial Occupational

Health and Safety legislation (or federal for the small number of workers that are federally regulated). Employers have a duty to make all reasonable efforts to provide a safe work environment, free from any form of abuse.

In remote work scenarios, an employee’s home office is their workplace – and the employer must still provide a safe work environment. Even if the misconduct takes place away from the office, is online or is perpetrated by a third party like a customer or supplier, the employer’s duties are triggered. Failing to investigate properly will expose the organization to liability.

How should HR respond to allegations of online harassment?

Before any allegations arise, employers must update their policies to make sure that they refer not only to harassment, but to harassment in all of its forms, including digital. This is mandatory in Ontario and many other jurisdictions, so internal reporting mechanisms must be easy to use and up to date.

Employers have a positive duty to investigate suspected harassment, even if there is no formal complaint, if one of the people involved resigns or if the complainant does not want them to. An investigation must be fair and impartial. The investigator’s job is to decide, on a balance of probabilities, whether there was harassment or not; concluding that it was a ‘he said, she said’ scenario, without reaching a conclusion, is unacceptable.

THE VALUE OF HR TECHNOLOGY IN A POST-PANDEMIC WORLD

Technology was HR’s saviour throughout COVID-19 – but what part will it play in the coming years?



OVER the past year, our practices, policies and expectations have changed – and what may have worked once is no longer sufficient, particularly when it comes to HR technology.

HRD spoke to Stacey Harris, chief research officer and managing partner of Sapient Insights Group, about the role human capital management (HCM) technology has played both pre- and post-pandemic.

“Pre-COVID, Canada had a smaller percentage of employees originally working from home,” says Harris. “Our research found that 22% of Canadian companies had no remote work policy in place at all, and just 4% had a policy for more than 25% of their workforce. However, post-COVID, Canadian companies were much more likely to have a higher percentage of teams working from home – more so than the US, Europe and Asia-Pacific.”

This agility in quickly switching to remote

work helped Canadian organizations weather the storm; however, it also placed a lot of pressure on HR practitioners. This overnight digitization acted as a catalyst for organizational change. As such, HR leaders had to think and act quickly, relying even more heavily on HR technology.

“HR practitioners have seen their workloads increase significantly over the past few months,” says Harris. “In my opinion, one way of mitigating that is to look to emerging HR tech. It sounds simple, but investing in – or leveraging existing – workflow tools is the easiest and most effective way of managing a high volume of tasks. It prevents anything slipping through the gaps, whether that’s employee well-being concerns, appraisals, compliance or recruiting.”

One of the main areas of concern for employers throughout the pandemic was employees’ well-being – both physical and mental. Here, once again, technology played a pivotal role – but not in the way you might think. Sapient’s research found that companies that had a great working relationship with a reliable software provider reaped the benefits.

“In our research, we heard a lot of commentary about the importance of managed service

environments or vendor support services post-pandemic,” says Harris. “In particular, the relationship between employers and their technology vendor’s support staff was critical. A lot of vendors launched resources to help their HR customers understand how to deal with government mandates, secure remote access like VPNs [virtual private networks], boost engagement virtually and leverage the tools they already had at their disposal for communication and safety.”

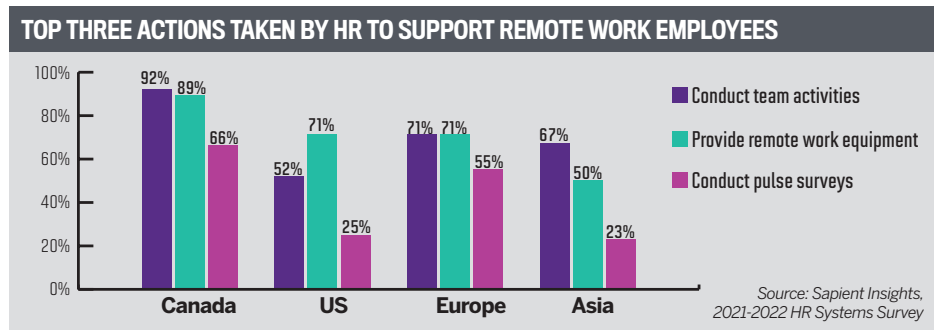
According to Harris, this kind of support was a huge help when it came to managing well-being and productivity in remote work.

“It fell under the mantra of having that great HR solution,” she says. “Companies that had a strong mutual partnership with their vendors found they had both the support and the means to not only survive but thrive throughout the pandemic.”

Looking ahead to the future of HR technology post-pandemic, Harris believes COVID-19 allowed for innovative and futuristic elements to come to the market faster.

“The pandemic really sped up the timeline for HR technology,” she says. “One aspect of this is data tracking and tracing. There were many conversations around the ethicality of employee tracking. Despite this, companies have put in place technologies that allowed them to collect more personal data than ever before. The ability for people to work from home was both a cultural change and a technological one. Employers had to increase internet speeds, replace older hardware, boost the bandwidth of VPNs – it was very much an evolving concept.

“From a trends perspective, what I believe we’ll see are concepts which may have taken 10 or more years to come to the market being realized now within months versus years – which is incredibly important.”



IS YOUR MENTAL HEALTH PLAN REALLY WORKING?

How to measure the success of your well-being strategy



THE COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of solid mental health strategies in Canadian organizations. According to Statistics Canada,

one in five Canadians experienced depression or anxiety during the pandemic – and yet just 23% of employees feel comfortable approaching their employers about mental health concerns.

It's no longer sufficient for employers to provide one-size-fits-all well-being plans. Instead, leaders need to provide a safe space for employees to discuss their issues without the fear of judgment – something Dr. Raeleen Manjak, director of human resources at the City of Vernon, believes has been fast-tracked because of the pandemic.

“The pandemic signalled this shift in how society as a whole talks about mental health and mental wellness,” she says. “Hopefully this is what the future of mental health care will look like. With everyone now talking so openly about mental health, that stigma is diminishing dramatically. It's becoming normalized.”

Measuring the effectiveness of mental health strategies has always been a bone of contention for HR leaders and their C-suite executives. When you're face-to-face with your board of directors, battling for your share of that precious budget, HR needs to speak numbers. But how do you convert health and happiness into stats and graphs? How do you convince the CAO that your mental health plan is sure to succeed?

For Dr. Manjak, mental health has always been quantifiable.

“We started our mental wellness journey many years ago, during the launch of our annual Health and Wellness Fair,” she says. “We asked our employees what areas of their own mental health they'd like to explore during a series of lunch and learn sessions. We covered topics such as anxiety, depression, stress, burnout, grief and loss.”

Dr. Manjak suggests launching an employee-wide survey, as the City of Vernon did, to gather the thoughts and feelings of your people. Using data in this way can

personal consciousness, conflict coaching, and a series of workouts: Zumba, Pilates, yoga, pound, Bollywood, meditation. The series also included an address from both our mayor and our CAO to our employees. It's all about letting employees know you're there for them – you see them, you hear them.”

Even with specific data, intricately measuring the success of a mental well-being initiative can be tricky. Can you ever really be sure that what you're doing is helping?

“It's challenging,” admits Dr. Manjak. “But we're measuring our success through the attendance of our employees. We look at how many people are turning up to the sessions we offer, who's participating in the open discussions. Doing this gives leaders an idea

“With everyone now talking so openly about mental health, that stigma is diminishing dramatically. It's becoming normalized.”

clearly indicate any underlying issues – ones that employees may not feel comfortable voicing to their managers – and will also provide an opportunity to work toward tangible solutions.

“The data helped us see where we needed to celebrate and where we needed to focus; however, just as the survey results were reported out to the employee groups, COVID-19 hit,” says Dr. Manjak. “Since COVID-19, we pivoted quickly, internally in our organization, and developed a digitally curated series entitled Ten (10) Hours of Giving, where we leveraged our relationships with subject matter experts on areas that would support our employees – and their families – during this particularly challenging time. Areas such as nutrition, fatigue management, mental health (anxiety, depression, stress) meditation, mindfulness,

of how well the programs are being received. This type of awareness contributes to future learning and development that we can design and deliver to our employees, all to ensure that our unwavering commitment to a safe and healthy workplace is top of mind in all we do.”

Essentially, employers can measure the effectiveness of their mental health strategies by looking at all areas of the employee experience. For example, how high are your turnover rates? How productive are your people? Are absences increasing or decreasing? Are you seeing morale staying high in remote workers?

As we continue to navigate through the pandemic and the emerging after-effects, having a resilient, agile and focused team is a core indicator that you're invested in your mental health strategy – and that it's working.

LESSONS FROM A CHRO

Jim Reid, chief human resources officer at Rogers, reveals three leadership lessons from the pandemic



AS the chief human resources officer at Rogers Communications, Jim Reid is well versed in the importance of culture and communication.

An essential service in Canada throughout the pandemic, Rogers' employees worked tirelessly and diligently to help customers and support their colleagues. Speaking to *HRD*, Reid revealed the three biggest lessons he learned during the past year – and reflected on how COVID-19 impacted the culture of Canadian organizations as a whole.

Prioritizing culture in a crisis

“Leadership, and leadership’s role in company culture, is fundamental in helping an organization through difficult times,” says Reid. “If we believed the role of a leader was important before, it’s even more critical today. At Rogers, our leaders shape culture, and they play a critical role in helping to build a high-performing team.

“Organizations with the strongest culture and the best leaders are always going to win in the war for talent – that’s where people are going to want to work. Culture and

leadership go hand in hand when it comes to enhancing performance and, at the same time, creating an empathic and transparent environment.”

Leading with empathy and communication

“The past year, people have been unsettled and afraid,” says Reid. “Our approach was to lead with care, compassion and empathy –

team, and we truly wanted to help them get to the other side. At the end of the day, your people are your greatest asset.”

Dealing with a paradox of change

“As a CHRO, the biggest lesson for me was learning how to navigate this paradox of change,” says Reid. “As we dealt with the pandemic, leaders needed to determine what we wanted to keep about our organization and what we had to adjust or change. At Rogers, our people became our purpose,

“Leadership, and leadership’s role in company culture, is fundamental in helping an organization through difficult times.”



and to communicate frequently. People had lots of questions around how to stay safe, how to avoid contracting COVID, what to do if they get sick, how to keep the workplace safe and more. As leaders, we really needed to step up to the plate, and at the heart of this was ramping up communications to our teams.

“At Rogers, we held weekly information sessions where 40% of our entire workforce would tune in. Our chief medical officer was always on call to answer questions and concerns virtually. Our approach was to demonstrate compassionate leadership coupled with transparent communication – demonstrating we sincerely cared about our

and our core values guided everything we did. We continually reinforced that our team members are at the heart of our success, which helped shape our priorities and our decisions post-pandemic.

“COVID also pushed us to think differently and innovate around how we support our people and their well-being and mental health at a time when it’s never been more important. So broadly, over the past 18 months, as leaders we have stayed true to our core values and lead with purpose – but on the other hand, this time has offered an opportunity to reassess, adapt and evolve as an organization so we can continue to be a best place to work in Canada.”

THE ROLE OF TRUST IN MODERN LEADERSHIP

 74%	 68%	 63%	 64%	 55%
of employees prefer to work for a company that's seen as trustworthy	of employees say low trust impacts their daily effort	of employees and leaders say trust must be earned	of employees say trust impacts their sense of belonging	of employees say trust impacts their mental health

Source: The Workforce Institute at UKG

ACCESSIBILITY IN THE WORKPLACE: BRIDGING THE GAP

How did COVID impact organizational inclusion?



If anyone is well positioned to champion people with disabilities, it's Jewelles Smith. As a feminist disability activist, scholar and writer with

specific training in human rights monitoring and women's human rights justice, as well as communications and government relations coordinator of the Council of Canadians with Disabilities, Smith is a voice for Canadians.

"The first thing to always notice is that disability is very diverse," Smith told *HRD* when asked about particular challenges that people with disabilities might face at work. "For example, a person who is hard of hearing will experience different challenges than a person who has a physical disability. What we often hear is that people are afraid to ask for the support they need. As such, they don't disclose the issues they have – and then they struggle. Unfortunately, employers are sometimes afraid to hire somebody with a disability – creating a huge barrier to employment. In reality, there's a lot of benefits to hiring employees with disabilities."

UKG recently received a prestigious award for its commitment to hiring employees with disabilities. Having received a perfect score of 100% on Disability:IN's Disability Equality Index, UKG knows a thing or two about the benefits of diverse hiring. For instance, a report from the Institute of Corporate Productivity

found that three in four employers ranked employees with disabilities to be just as good or even better than their colleagues. Further to that, research from McKinsey & Company highlighted that companies that hire diverse and differently abled workers enjoy increased revenues of up to 35%.

"Living with a disability kind of forces us to be creative," says Smith. "People with disabilities are often amazing problem solvers. They can be really innovative, thinking differently about how to find solutions. Not only do they bring that creativity, but when an employee finds an employer who's willing to accommodate them, they're very loyal. They will inevitably stay long periods of time with the same organization."

Thanks to activists like Smith, progress is continually being made. Awareness of disability issues is being heightened – however, accessibility continues to be a problem in Canada. As well, the pandemic presented its own unique set of challenges for employees with disabilities – issues around remote working accommodation, vaccine requirements and job uncertainty made for an uncomfortable year. Now, as employers look to reopen offices and workplaces, Smith explains that employees with disabilities will need more or different accommodations in order to resume their roles comfortably.






"To foster a culture of accessibility in the workplace, leaders need to reassess their COVID protocols," she says. "For example, how can a blind employee follow the 'one way' directional system indicated on the office floor? How can an employee who uses a wheelchair or a mobility device navigate Plexiglas setups?"

Another major accessibility issue for Canadians returning to their offices is the presence of guide and service dogs. Smith says her service dog has been at home with her all through lockdown – away from the public – meaning he needs retraining before she can return to work. As for the future of accessibility in Canadian workplaces, Smith hopes that progress will continue – quickly and decisively.

In a recent whitepaper from UKG entitled *The State of Workplace Disability Inclusion & Digital Accessibility*, researchers found that 85% of employees believe their company's efforts to address disability inclusion are above average. In fact, 51% of managers believe COVID has accelerated their organization's ability to accommodate workers with disabilities. What's more, 78% of employees believe that accommodation of employees with disabilities will be better than it was pre-pandemic – something Smith hopes will come to fruition sooner rather than later.

"Moving forward, I hope Canadian employers will be more open to hybrid working situations," she says. "I've been pushing really hard for employers this last year and a half to think about the many ways our entire population has been working and be open to those creative ideas continuing."

HOW ARE COMPANIES IMPROVING ACCESSIBILITY?

-  **58%** allow flexible working hours
-  **43%** offer specifically designed training programs
-  **41%** have a dedicated IT resource to assist employees
-  **33%** contract with interpreting service providers
-  **28%** include language partner agreements that require applications be to accessible

Source: UKG's *The State of Workplace Disability Inclusion & Digital Accessibility*

Vancity banks on UKG for more smiles.



Marky Payne, HR Systems
and Reporting Manager

Vancity

“We have transformed the employee experience with UKG,” says Marky Payne of Vancity, a financial cooperative with 2,700 employees, 54 community branches, and more than half a million member-owners. “Visual dashboards in UKG immediately tell managers the story of their team ... and employees have access to convenient self-service features.”

The result: Vancity is now providing more personalized support to employees, improving productivity, and minimizing compliance issues across the organization.

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