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ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE - READYING THE WORKFORCE IS CRITICAL TO AN ORGANIZATION'S FUTURE

The future of HR is both digital and human as HR leaders focus on optimizing the combination of human and automated work. This is driving a new priority for HR: one which requires leaders and teams to develop a fluency in artificial intelligence while they re-imagine HR to be more personal, human, and intuitive.

AI is moving from consumers' lives into the workplace – upskilling non-AI workers to learn how to work with AI is becoming increasingly important. Developing an AI ready workforce involves five key initiatives:

- Identify the business problem to solve using artificial intelligence and start collecting data on the current state of the problem and the key KPI you want to impact with AI.
- Build a cross-functional team of key stakeholders to educate them on the business benefits of using AI to solve key business problems.
- Implement learning opportunities for key job roles impacted in HR by AI (such as those in Recruiting, New Hire On-Boarding and Corporate Learning).
- Identify new jobs and skills needed as AI is leveraged in the workplace.
- Change performance management and development skills needed in HR roles to include a fundamental understanding of how to use artificial intelligence across the employee life cycle.

When AI is leveraged in the organization, employees will need training on how to work with their AI team members. Craig Roth of the Gartner Blog [predicts that by 2022 \(just three years from now!\), one in five workers engaged in non-routine tasks will rely on AI to do their jobs. As employees depend on the insights of AI to do their jobs, developing an AI ready workforce will be a competitive advantage.](#) There are many current trends that HR will need to prepare for as we enter into a more heavily dominated AI presence. Examples include:

Enhancing the Candidate Experience. For many organizations, the first pilots of artificial intelligence are in talent acquisition, as this is the area where organizations see significant, measurable, and immediate results in reducing time to hire, increasing productivity for recruiters, and delivering an enhanced candidate experience that is seamless, simple, and intuitive.

Personalized Employee Experiences. Using AI to effectively be woven into an employee's onboarding program. New employees who typically want to meet people and acquire information typically may not know where to go. They may ask their desk neighbor, but what if they work in a different department? What if Joe had been welcomed with new hire information on their mobile device that was tailored to his first assignment?

AI can answer a new employee's most pressing or job critical questions to help get them up to speed fast. AI, for example, could provide training suggestions or provide the names, locations, and contact info for people they should look to connect with on their first day or so. That same employee could also be advised by AI engines that a new hire webpage contains a lot of useful information.

Cognitive-Supporting Decision-Making. Cognitive engines could help employees arrive at key day-to-day decisions in the workplace.

Vacation requests - Employees that want to put in for vacation days are informed that it is unlikely to be approved as many others have already booked vacation in that time frame.

Determining your mood - An employee takes a client call. After the call, the employee receives feedback that he seems anxious and should take a break before his meeting.

Team training - When an organization wants to take a more systematic approach to employee training, team managers are provided a list of training opportunities for team members.

Smarter People Analytics. For years, companies have been collecting data on their customers to gain insights to predict future behavior. HR teams have a lot of catching up to do in leveraging these people analytics. Determining what data to track, analyze, manage, and protect will enable AI to play a larger role within HR.

Removing Biases. Even when employers strive to be inclusive, they may subconsciously lean toward candidates who are most like them, or what we call “unconscious bias”. Another bias, language bias, has been discovered that people’s subconscious word associations indicate bias. These biases find their way into job descriptions, as well as resume selections. Now, AI algorithms can be designed to help employers identify and remove these bias patterns in language they use to improve their hiring communications and welcome diverse applicants.

Identifying employees on the way out. AI platforms are designed to single out employees that may be heading for the exit door. It tracks employee computer activity — emails, keystrokes, internet browsing, etc. — and stores it for one month and implements an AI system that analyzes the data to determine a baseline of normal activity patterns in the organization. Based on that knowledge, AI flags outliers and reports them to the employer and also detects changes in the overall tone of employees’ communications to predict when employees might be thinking of leaving.”

As much as the HR technology landscape continues to be disrupted by AI, HR teams need to balance these cognitive tech advancements with transparency. HR professionals need to have a clear understanding of how decisions are being made to mitigate unknowingly injecting bias into their programs. This transparency will be essential in making sure that employees trust the new technology.

PREVENTING BURNOUT *AMANDA WERNLI, PROFESSIONAL CONSULTANT*

What is burnout? Most of us know the basics- it’s a state of emotional or physical exhaustion in relation to work (seen by many as the opposite of employee engagement), which translates into decreased work productivity. Burnout can manifest as increased absenteeism, curtness with coworkers, and cynicism or detachment from work, among other behaviors.

Figuring out how to prevent your employees from experiencing burnout should start with a better understanding of any contributing factors- and this is more than the simple awareness that it is stress-related. Researchers Maslach and Leiter clarify that research has supported six key domains that comprise burnout: work overload, lack of control, recognition and reward, community (constructive, trusting work relationships), fairness (work decisions are fair and equitable), and values (individual values aligning with organizational or job-required ones).

So, how might management act to lessen the occurrence of burnout, based upon these various root causes? If not already requesting regular feedback about an employee’s experience on the job, that’s a place to start. Having this conversation may, and often does, elicit information about fairness or control concerns, work relationship problems, and workload concerns. An effective manager is generally aware of these issues before they progress.

As for the other domains, a values match is often addressed at the time of selection, but should be reaffirmed at periodic points throughout the employee life cycle, such as during formal performance evaluations. Whether or not rewards and recognition occur is already known to management, so this may be the easiest opportunity for improvement or intervention to identify.

Based upon what may be, or may be suspected as, contributing to an employee’s burnout, consider the following strategies:

- Consider reorganizing and redistributing some of the overload. Consider referring an employee to an EAP or to outside counseling for time management or stress management techniques. Job restructuring or job sharing is another option that might allow the employee to reduce current workload.
- Encourage an employee to utilize available paid time off. If you find employees resistant to taking time off for rest and recuperation, consider redesigning your vacation or paid time off policies to be more generous, to encompass a “use it or lose it” rule, or remove a payout/ buy back option.
- Incorporate “thank you” more often into team meetings and one-on-ones to congratulate an employee for meeting goals or a job well done. Provide employee appreciation gifts of any value more frequently- or develop new employee-centered appreciation events, which may or may not involve team building activities. It’s important that rewards and recognition are tied to performance, however, so ensure an association between the two is clear- and that these aren’t just general perks and a means of saying “thanks for showing up.”

Editor: Judy Clark, CPC, SPHR, IPMA-CP: Advantage is published monthly and is designed to provide information on regulations, HR practices and management ideas and concerns. The intended audience is managers, supervisors, business owners, human resource and employee relations professionals. If you have questions about the content, an opinion about the information, or questions about your subscription, please give us a call at (503) 885-9815 or e-mail info@hranswers.com.

- Structure the job or work processes to incorporate employee decision-making and autonomy; ensure that an employee has access to resources which allow for self-service and the option to resolve work-related problems independently, where appropriate. This not only contributes to preventing burnout, but increases job satisfaction as well.
- Actively provide opportunities for employees to team build and get to know one another. This can be at weekly meetings, professional development activities, or organization-sponsored retreats. When employee relations issues arise, actively manage these. Although there is something to be said for allowing individuals to resolve their own problems, negative work relationships that persist are bad for the individuals involved, as well as company culture. Facilitate resolutions to conflicts when possible to ensure more productive ongoing relationships and implement a bullying policy and professional conduct policy to foster positive work relationships.
- Communicate organizational values and job-related values to each employee regularly, if possible, which ties into the concept of providing regular feedback. Ensure that management behaviors, performance evaluation criteria, and cultural norms reinforce stated values instead of contradicting them. When clear expectations and values are provided and remain consistent and an employee understands how to succeed in a role, the employee is less likely to burnout because of a mismatch between individual expectations and job-related or organizational needs. It's also important to elucidate what creates value/purpose in the work that is being performed.
- Provide insight into how job-related and other organizational decisions are reached, when possible, and strive to make fair and equitable decisions. Even when decisions are made which may ultimately impact an employee negatively, ensuring that the process used to reach a decision is transparent, providing an employee the opportunity to provide input or propose alternate options, and sharing the reason for a chosen outcome can increase fairness perceptions.

For additional information on burnout, consider reviewing some burnout research, a source for this article, (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4911781/>) or visiting the World Health Organization (https://www.who.int/mental_health/evidence/burn-out/en/).

HR BY THE NUMBERS

In 2018 76,418 charges of discrimination filed with the EEOC. In 39,469 of those charges, employees and applicants alleged that they were retaliated against for engaging in protected activity. With the potential to cost thousands of dollars, organizations have considerable motivation to limit their exposure to discrimination claims.

According to the [Future of Jobs Report from the World Economic Forum](#), they are projecting that 75 million current jobs may be displaced as artificial intelligence takes over more routine aspects of work.

However, 133 million new jobs may be created, and skills in both emotional intelligence and technical intelligence, like technology design and programming, will be important.

The experience of meaningful work is a personal one, as [Gallup reports we are working on average 47 hours per week with one in five working more than 60 hours each week](#). Increasingly workers are searching for meaningful work, a workplace that aligns to their values, and a supportive and healthy work culture.

A recent report entitled [Meaning and Purpose at Work](#) surveyed 2,285 American professionals, across 26 industries to find out how important having meaning was at work. On average, workers said they'd be willing to forego 23% of their entire future lifetime earnings in order to have a job that was always meaningful to them. This means that building greater meaning at work is no longer a "nice to have," but a business imperative. Employees who find meaning at work are happier, more productive and hard-working, and are absent less.

On average, American workers who place a higher value on meaningful work are in a more senior position, and if they are working in an organization that offers meaningful work they stay longer. [Employees who find work highly meaningful are 69% less likely to plan on quitting their jobs within the next six months, and have job tenures that are 7.4 months longer on average than employees who find work lacking in meaning.](#)

As the quest for meaning in the workplace grows, more HR leaders are putting a greater emphasis on communicating their culture and sharing their purpose and meaning across the employee population. This involves creating opportunities from training to mentoring and coaching to promote a shared vision and a healthy and supportive work culture.

New Numbers for 2020

Each year the government provides new thresholds for retirement programs, Social Security limits, flexible spending accounts, etc. The link below provides most of the new figures. The list is extensive so it is unlikely that all the changes will apply to each employer. But by reviewing them, you can find the ones that apply to your organization and make the necessary employee notifications and changes to your plans. <https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-drop/n-19-59.pdf>

CLIENT ACCOLADES

Congrats to **Gerding Edlen** who acquired the Power and Light Building in downtown Portland. This edifice built in 1928 was originally designed by the legendary architect A. E. Doyle. This purchase adds to the many buildings along the west coast that **Gerding Edlen** has developed and is responsible for. They are also responsible for much of the development of the Pearl District. Way to go, guys!!

HR LINK

Documentation is a universal challenge for HR. At the 8th Annual Employment Law Seminar in Anaheim recently, there was one message consistent across all the speakers' presentations: HR Documentation. Read this travel log from the California conference about the importance of organizing the HR paper trail, being able to find files later when you need them, and keeping records for the appropriate length of time: <https://www.documentlocator.com/blog/documentation-a-universal-challenge-for-hr/>.

Q & A

Q: We have one employee who has been with the organization for 3 years. She previously resigned and returned 4 months later. She now submitted her resignation again, which we accepted and welcomed her decision. Today she sends an email rescinding her resignation. We are not looking forward to have her continue employment and this comes as an opportunity to recruit for other talents. Do we have to allow her to rescind a resignation?

A: No, you do not. Employers and employees work "at will," meaning both have the ability to continue the employment relationship or end it at any time, barring employment agreements or other considerations to the contrary.

If considering rescission, employers should consider why the employee resigned. Unless those circumstances have changed, the organization is simply postponing the eventual resignation.

Regardless, employers may find it helpful to develop a resignation policy that addresses the need for written notice, how much notice is requested (not required), what happens when an employee gives more notice than is needed, payment in lieu of working the notice period, a procedure in which verbal resignations are confirmed in writing (yes email counts), and whether rescission will be allowed. An employer may also wish to discuss in this policy any rules it may have on eligibility for rehire. The policy should be clearly communicated and consistently applied.

This question is the reason that many organizations have sent an email back to the employee letting them know that the organization has accepted their resignation.

in·sub·or·di·na·tion

We get calls from organizations asking about letting an employee go or firing them for insubordination. After we have asked a few questions, we have to advise them that they can make a decision to end employment if they wish, but that we strongly advise them not to use the word "insubordination" because we don't think the offence or behavior rises to the level of what that word really means.

Insubordination is the act of willfully and knowingly disobeying one's supervisor or manager. Refusing to perform an action that is unethical or illegal is not insubordination; neither is refusing to perform an action that is not within the scope of authority of the person issuing the order. Another behavior that is not insubordination is getting upset or angry about being given work direction. While this is not a desirable employee response, it is not insubordination. It is an outburst; it is an emotional reaction, but it does not rise to the level of insubordination, nor should it result in termination if it has only happened once.

To terminate an employee for insubordination there are a couple of actions that an employer (supervisor or manager) should take to ensure that the employee understands the consequences of their refusal to do as directed. First, the work direction needs to be clear and understood. Secondly, it needs to be something that the employee knows how to perform. Thirdly, it needs to be something that can be accomplished safely. Fourth, it has to be legal and within company policy. Fifth, if there is a union involved, the work direction cannot violate the union contract. If all those items are not an issue, then one last consideration is necessary. The employee must understand that

failure to comply with the work direction will be considered insubordination and may, or is likely to, result in termination of employment. That way the employee is making an informed decision if they refuse to carry out the directive.

There are a couple of other aspects that should figure into any decision to terminate for this reason. The first of these, has the organization fired for this behavior before, or would this be the first time, and therefore employees are unlikely to understand the consequences of this type of behavior or response. Another item worthy of thought is how much “freedom of speech” does the organization allow. If the organization’s practices are to allow a wide range of language and commentary from employees, then it may be harder to draw an appropriate line between permitted and unpermitted language. Another concern could be whether or not the employee response was really so egregious, that termination is appropriate, or is there already a rift between the employee and his/her boss that creates a greater sensitivity and level of agitation resulting in a quick to fire preference.

When considering whether a reaction is insubordination, it is best to send the employee home pending an employment decision, give everyone a few hours to cool down and reflect on what best serves the organization, and then decide if ending employment is really the best action. If it is, be prepared to document what transpired so that others will understanding the level of infraction that occurred and why termination was the right answer.

REMINDER - VETERAN’S DAY

Just a reminder that in November there is the new Veteran’s Day Law. New last year, the law permits Veteran’s to have the day off and if for some reason that would be unreasonable, than they can request another day off without pay.

THOUGHTS TO THINK ABOUT

“Don’t think about making art, just get it done. Let everyone else decide if it’s good or bad, whether the love it or hate it. While they are deciding, make even more art.”

~ Andy Warhol

As we express our gratitude, we must never forget that the highest appreciation is not to utter words, but to live by them.

~John Fitzgerald Kennedy

Once there was a grain of sand that wanted to become a beach, an example of where you can’t always do it all by yourself.

~Robert Brault

Gratitude is the best attitude.

~Author unknown

Never look down on anybody unless you’re helping him up.

~Jesse Jackson

Coming together is a beginning. Keeping together is progress. Working together is success.

~Henry Ford

Great ideas need landing gear as well as wings.

~C.D. Jackson

FOR YOUR CALENDAR

Open up your Daytimers, Outlook, and all those Smartphones. The following is a look at upcoming events and workshops, special days, and other diverse and fun activities you will want to be aware of and schedule. **To register for our workshops, go to [HR Answers Events](#), or email your registration form to info@hranswers.com.**

NOVEMBER

National Month of Aviation History, Epilepsy Awareness, Diabetes, Gluten-Free Diet, Gratitude, Lung Cancer Awareness, and Military Family

Nov. 28 Thanksgiving Day – HRA will be closed

Nov. 29 HR Answers will be closed

Coming Up:

Dec. 12 HRA Workshop – Portland/ Tigard
[Job Search Support Workshop](#)
11:00am - 1:00pm

Looking Ahead:

Jan. 22 HRA 6-Day Workshop – Portland/ Tigard
[The Engaged Leader Winter Series](#)
8:30am - 12:30pm

View more details and register for our workshops on our website at hranswers.com.

ON MY SOAPBOX

I know that I have used the words, “What I care about is that we help organizations do good HR.” And I hear it from our staff at times as well. That shorthand “good HR” is easy to say, but I wonder if we have fully defined what that means. I suspect that it might mean different things to different HR professionals. I thought I might tackle that here as this month’s Soapbox offering.

An article earlier this week identified “HR Professional” as the most stressful job in the US. Part of that is because of the constantly changing rules and laws. Sometimes these changes are most definitely not what management or ownership wants to hear, but HR must make the case about avoiding liability and being a responsible employer. This means that HR must have an ear to the ground to know of what is likely to occur, and what is the timetable for achieving the appropriate results.

Knowing the body of knowledge of the HR profession is also a necessity. That is made much easier now than when I started in HR, all those many decades ago. I used to spend time almost every weekend at the Library checking out the business newspapers, trying to learn what was on the horizon, and discovering what were businesspeople struggling with. Now it is as simple as calling up Google on your phone (we don’t even need a computer) and entering a few words to learn whatever tickles your fancy. There are also dozens of feeds and Internet newsletters that work hard to keep HR professionals up to date. All that is before we even consider all of the HR associations that exist, who try hard to keep us informed. SHRM is, of course, the largest such association with over 350,000 members.

So, what makes good HR beyond knowledge of HR and the business, public sector, and not-for-profit worlds? Here are a few capabilities that I think matter.

Communication – HR professionals need to know how to talk, and perhaps even more importantly, how to listen. The audiences will vary from young, new employees and applicants, to senior executives. The topics will range across all subjects, some emotional, and some very technical. So being able to communicate effectively with all people about almost all matters, is critical.

Objectivity – Being able to remain neutral and objective is crucial. I have heard it said that HR professionals’ opinions do not matter. I disagree. Our opinions do matter, but being able to first provide cogent and objective information about both pros and cons of any possible initiative, comes first. We must research thoroughly, consider what else the organization is going through at the time, and then present our recommendation(s) and the reasons for it. Taking sides before investigating, allowing our personal needs to color our suggestions, and basing any actions on friendships must be avoided.

Mental agility – It may sound like a contradiction to say the HR professionals have think clearly, but be able to switch gears at a moment’s notice. The next phone call, email, or knock on your office door may preempt whatever else was planned for the day. The way I have tried to think of it, is that interruptions are not interruptions, they are my business. People don’t contact HR because they simply want to chat. Ninety-five percent of the time (that’s my number not the results of a study), people contact HR because they have a question or a problem. The ability to move easily from a benefits question to an applicant interview, to a meeting with a supervisor struggling with poor performance of an employee, to someone asking for advice about career planning, can all happen in the space of an hour. Just think what that means for an 8-12 hour work day!

Those are three capabilities and the reasons that matter for this Soapbox. Look for more thoughts in next month’s Soapbox. I have only begun to offer opinions about “Good HR.”

- Judy Clark, President



ANSWERS, Inc.
“Whatever the Question”

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