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INSIGHTS magazine

VOL. XIV, ISSUE II

from the eyes of industry leaders

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- Thinking About RTO Policy Decisions Differently
- How to Manage Candidate Use of AI in the Recruiting Process
- Building a High-converting Recruitment Funnel

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INSIGHTS Magazine

VOL. XIV, ISSUE II

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Workplace Belonging:
ESSENTIAL STRATEGIES EVERY LEADER SHOULD IMPLEMENT

BY JUAN BETANCOURT

High-impact strategies for fostering belonging can reduce turnover and burnout across industries. Key approaches include cultivating psychological safety, offering equitable pay, and embedding inclusive practices. Building a culture of belonging enhances job satisfaction, creativity, and productivity, creating a supportive environment where employees feel valued, engaged, and authentically included.

A recent report from the Charles Butt Foundation[1] clearly indicates that many experienced and novice educators are leaving the profession due to a myriad of factors. For instance, today's educators face strict scrutiny about what they teach, how they teach it and what materials they assign, especially in light of record-breaking book bans. Faculty and staff shoulder similar pressures in higher education where work life tends to be student-centered, team-oriented and results-driven, requiring employees to labor long hours, wear multiple hats, juggle competing priorities and go above the call of duty.

As if that's not enough, reports show that approximately two-thirds of education professionals feel undervalued, unappreciated and underpaid[2], which compromises their sense of belonging at work (hereafter, workplace belonging) and leads to burnout. Consequently, they silently resign, stay with little motivation or leave the profession altogether.

In this article, we offer a perspective on workplace belonging, explain how it is linked to key outcomes in all business sectors and present several actionable steps or promising practices for recruiting and retaining diverse professionals, while also fostering belonging and success as leaders. This is particularly relevant for those who lead education at the K-12 and higher education levels, but may also prove useful to corporate leaders and entrepreneurs in business, government, medicine and technology, to name a few.

Workplace belonging

Workplace belonging refers to the sense of connection and acceptance employees feel within a work environment. It involves feeling valued, respected and included while also being able to fully participate and contribute to the organization. Belonging is one of five essential workplace qualities that ensure workers' psychological health and well-being, according to APA's 2023 Work in America Survey[3].

Whether at home, school or work, a sense of belonging is a basic need, a human right. It's a universal motive sufficient to drive behaviors—that is, people do something to satisfy their urgent need to belong. They may join a club (e.g., employee resource groups), go back to school, seek new employment or dye their hair blue. The weight of empirical evidence shows that belonging is context-dependent, meaning that its value and significance rely, in part, on the background or situation in which it is used for proper interpretation.

When employees experience a sense of belonging in the workplace, it creates a positive work environment that fosters collaboration, innovation and productivity. Feeling valued and accepted allows individuals to bring their authentic selves to work, leading to increased engagement, cooperation, help-seeking (and giving) and commitment to their tasks and employing organization.

Other studies[4] have discovered several positive outcomes consistently associated with workplace belonging. For instance, employees who rate higher on workplace belonging also tend to feel better about their jobs and work cooperatively with others. Results from the study showed that employees who experience true belonging are:

- 3x more likely to look forward to work
- 3x more likely to say their workplace is fun
- 9x as likely to believe people are treated equitably
- 5x more likely to stick around

Research has shown that a strong sense of workplace belonging can have significant positive gains, especially for education personnel. It can lead to increased job satisfaction and work-related happiness, which can result in higher productivity and lower burnout. It can also foster deeper institutional commitment, leading to less turnover, more stability and greater creativity and innovation.

In short, the key to workplace belonging is trust, and trust is defined as a foundational building block for culture. It depends, in part, on staff knowing your intentions, believing your commitments and understanding your behaviors. Boosting employees' sense of belonging at work takes time, and thus, belonging is built at the speed of trust.

Ways to recruit, retain and regain employees

Building a culture of belonging requires a proactive approach from organizational leaders and managers. It involves creating an inclusive environment where every employee feels valued, respected and supported. Here are some strategies organizations can implement to foster workplace belonging for staff and broaden professional pipelines:

Cultivate psychological safety using a variety of evidence-based, proven strategies:
Psychological safety refers to feeling able to speak up freely, ask questions, make mistakes and take risks without fear of judgment, negative consequences or retaliation. Promising practices include active listening, open dialogue, "no-judgment" zones and creating "brave spaces" where diverse perspectives are celebrated, though they courageously challenge the majority. When employees feel comfortable bringing their authentic selves to work, they thrive and flourish.

Offer equitable pay and financial incentives to help attract, (re)gain and retain diverse, talented educators and employees:
For example, ZipRecruiter reports[5] the average teacher salary in Texas is $41,544, ranging from as low as $19,565 to well over $64,000, which means some public school teachers are paid less than a living wage. District leaders, administrators and policymakers must advocate for higher, more equitable pay for such teachers—it's hard to feel like you matter and belong when you're not compensated fairly for the work you do. Financial incentives like salary raises, relocation assistance, tuition reimbursement, paid time off and signing bonuses can go a long way in improving the perception of prospective staff.

Foster an inclusive culture of acceptance and respect to ensure staff can show up authentically and feel safe and secure at work:
By authentic, we mean freely expressing oneself without fear of judgment or pressure to alter one's true identity to fit in. Leaders might consider creating ERGs for underrepresented groups, book clubs and/or offer training about positive workplace culture to ensure psychological and physical safety and security across and within teams. Take it a step further and employ tools that allow people to see themselves and each other more fully. Tools that embed psychometrics and then apply AI can help employees better understand each other, feel more connected, work more effectively together, and feel more like a team.

In the end, whether you are working within or across teams or leading them, following these tips will help you implement the right foundation to foster a more natural version of belonging and inclusion. By establishing clear communication channels, fostering safe spaces of trust and mutual respect, and celebrating the strengths each individual brings to the team, organizations can leverage the unique strengths of each team, enhance collaboration, and achieve better results. ■

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Building a High-Converting Recruitment Funnel

BY ALEX OLIVER

There is a name for the process of winnowing down candidates step by step until only new hires remain: it's called a recruiting funnel. It starts with many applicants, some of whom are screened out. Then there are candidates; they too shrink in number as phone screens and interviews take place. This brings you to a short list of finalists, then new hires.

In the article below, we will further investigate the purpose and function of a recruitment funnel, providing best practices and real-world examples along the way.

What is a recruitment funnel and why is it important?

A recruitment funnel represents the steps talent teams take to move candidates through the hiring process. Like a sales funnel, the recruitment funnel narrows as it reaches its final destination—in this case, new hires—removing candidates at each stage.

When organizations implement a structured hiring process, they position themselves to create a hiring funnel that is optimized at every stage. A hiring funnel incorporates several distinct steps, each of which comes with its own purpose and set of best practices. Organizations that approach these stages with purpose are better able to achieve the goals inherent to each step.

The benefits of using a recruitment funnel are widespread. A recruitment funnel leads to better processes and practices, improvements that boost the candidate experience, elevate the quality of hires, and even result in time and cost savings.

The 7 key stages of a recruitment funnel

Below, we define the fundamental elements of a robust recruiting funnel and name the metrics that propel progress.

STAGE 1: AWARENESS

The recruiting funnel begins with awareness. Employers must make themselves known to a large number of potential candidates to attract future applicants. Efforts include creating job posts, developing a social media presence and encouraging employee referrals.

These strategies aim at a singular goal: developing a strong employer brand and communicating a thoughtful employee value proposition.

Metrics: Measure awareness by tracking views, clicks and shares on job posts and social media content.

STAGE 2: ATTRACTION

The next step in the recruiting funnel is attracting candidates and encouraging them to apply. While the awareness stage focuses on reaching a general audience, the attraction stage targets a more specific group. Employers may create blog posts or videos to appeal to ideal candidates.

Like in the previous stage, an online presence remains key to attracting candidates. Organizations that build an online community through efforts like blogs and email newsletters will create a strong pool of interested candidates who are primed to apply for open roles.

Metrics: By cross-tracking metrics like email and blog subscribers with application stats, employers can pinpoint the efforts that are most successful.

STAGE 3: INTEREST

Next, it's time for employers to nurture the relationships developing among candidates. Employers can nurture candidate relationships through varied forms of contact.

Some candidates will respond to short, frequent emails updating them on company news, familiarizing them with company benefits, and briefing them on the application process. Other candidates will enjoy more personal opportunities, like webinars and in-person events.

Metrics: By tracking email open and click rates and event registrations, employers can measure the success of their interest efforts.

STAGE 4: APPLICATION

Once candidates are familiar with an organization, it's time to push them to apply. It's essential that employers make it easy for job seekers to apply to their organization.

One way to accomplish this? Optimize application forms for conversion. Applications should feel as effortless as making an online purchase. Companies should collect only the essential information at this stage—they can follow up with promising candidates later.

Employers can also enable their application process for mobile devices. Candidates desire quick applications that can be accomplished on their smartphones.

Metrics: To assess the state of your application process, track both application completion rate and time to apply. These metrics will reveal how many candidates abandon their applications—and how long it takes those who commit to the entire process.

STAGE 5: EVALUATION

Just like the application stage, it's important to keep evaluations quick. Employers can use AI tools at the beginning of this process to promote the resumes of candidates whose skills most closely align with an open role.

Employers can make the most of the evaluation stage by conducting pre-employment assessments. Often virtual, these tests reveal which candidates are most suited to a given role. These assessments also help eliminate candidates who would likely flounder on the job.

Metrics: Employers should keep track of the number of applicants screened and the assessment pass rate.

STAGE 6: INTERVIEW

The interview stage is the last chance employers and applicants have to impress the other. That's why employers need to provide candidates with an exceptional interview experience.

Employers can create consistent interviews by using structured questions to assess candidates' skills and cultural fit. Employers should train interviewers to put candidates at ease and represent the employer well.

Metrics: Employers can track the number of interviews conducted. As employers refine their interview process, they should see how post-interview candidate satisfaction changes.

STAGE 7: HIRE

Finally, it's time for employers to make a hire. Employers must remember that they're continuing to compete for candidates, even in this final stage. Employers should extend compelling, competitive job offers that convince candidates to accept their new roles immediately.

Employers should also continue their efforts to ensure a smooth onboarding experience for new hires. This transition period is an appropriate moment for employers to solicit feedback on the hiring process from new hires.

Metrics: Employers should track offer acceptance rate, time to fill, and new hire retention.

How to optimize your recruitment funnel with data and technology

Employers that want to make the most of their recruitment funnel must enlist the help of data and technology. The most foundational step is to set up funnel tracking with an application tracking system (ATS) or candidate relationship management tool.

Employers can take a number of steps to continually refine their recruitment funnel.

- Identify candidate-to-applicant conversion rates and pinpoint drop-off points at each stage.
- A/B test different job descriptions, emails and landing pages.
- Leverage AI to speed up certain stages, like resume screening and interview scheduling.
- Create more candidate touchpoints with chatbots that can answer candidate FAQs.
- Automate personalized messages that keep candidate communications flowing.

Measuring the ROI of your recruitment funnel

Organizations spending time, money and effort on their recruitment funnels will want to prove the value of their work.

There's no one way to measure the ROI of a recruitment funnel. In fact, it's best that employers take a multi-pronged approach. Employers can begin by tracking cost-per-hire and time-to-fill and watching how these rates change as they refine their recruitment funnel.

Next, employers can track the quality of hire and retention rates. These metrics reveal whether an employer's recruitment funnel is successful in churning out quality candidates. If employers are dissatisfied with their hires, they may need to make changes to even the earliest stages of their funnel.

Finally, organizations can tie hiring results to business KPIs like revenue and productivity. Over time, elevation in the candidate quality should result in better business outcomes.

Recruiting teams that have taken care to optimize their recruiting funnels and track metrics like these need to make leaders aware of their efforts. They should present funnel metrics to leadership in terms that demonstrate the impact of their efforts, in language that leaders less familiar with the recruiting function can understand and appreciate.

Troubleshooting common recruitment funnel challenges

Talent teams looking to improve their recruiting funnels are bound to encounter challenges. Here are a few of the most common funnel frustrations—and some ideas about how to solve them.

- **Low application completion rates:** This is a signal that the application needs tweaking. The application may be too long, too cumbersome or too involved. The application should be easy enough that it lets lots of candidates through the door.
- **Candidate drop-off:** When talent disappears between funnel stages, talent teams may need to speed up their recruiting efforts. Candidates may be dropping out of the process because competitors are snapping them up.
- **Poor interview experiences:** If candidates are reporting dissatisfaction in post interviews, it may be time to provide interview training.
- **Bottlenecks and capacity constraints:** When bottlenecks are halting progress, it's important to identify where the bottlenecks are occurring. When it comes to capacity issues, talent teams should experiment with generative AI tools.

Candidates experience best practices for each funnel stage

Recruiting funnels don't just exist to boost application rates or improve time-to-hire. Their implementation can also help improve the candidate experience. By following these key best practices, talent teams can leverage recruiting funnels to provide a stellar experience for job seekers.

- **Write inclusive, compelling job descriptions:** A good job description captures job seekers' attention and convinces them to apply. It should appeal to a wide range of candidates, using inclusive language.
- **Communicate transparently:** Employers can greatly improve job seekers' experience by providing them an application timeline—and then sticking to it.
- **Give actionable feedback to rejected candidates:** Employers can give rejected candidates pointers on how to do better the next time they land in a recruiting funnel.
- **Celebrate and welcome new hires:** Candidates will enjoy a personalized note, a congratulatory letter or even a small gift when they get the good news. ■

As a content creator at iCIMS, Alex Oliver is well-versed in content and digital marketing from B2B and B2C organizations big and small.

Thinking About RTO Policy Decisions Differently

BY KEVIN EIKENBERRY

One of the most talked about, written about, and maligned topics in the business press this year has been RTO (Return to Office) policy decisions. It makes sense. After all, we collectively lived through a nearly instantaneous change in business context and practices when countries went into lock-down due to the spread of a virus. We changed where and how we worked in nearly the blink of an eye. And even those in roles where working from home couldn't happen suddenly saw work differently.

If you weren't working from home, you knew someone who was.

Then the pandemic and lock downs ended, and businesses began rethinking how, where and when work would take place.

Enter RTO policy decisions.

As the author of a series of books whose titles open with the words "Long-Distance," *(The Long-Distance Leader, The Long-Distance Teammate, and The Long-Distance Team*), I have watched, commented on, written about, and consulted with organizational leaders on these policies.

The state and effectiveness of these decisions doesn't surprise me but does disappoint me. My focus is less on exactly what the policy might be in an organization, but rather how it was determined, and the impact is on the organization.

Two organizations could have identical policies, but very different outcomes now and into the future—with one thriving and the other struggling in ways it might not even understand yet (or attribute to this policy process). The differences are stark and start with a difference in the underlying assumption of the policy decision.

Failure (or significant problems) comes from an either/or view of the decision. Success comes from a both/and view of the situation.

Let me explain.

Either/Or

Most of the RTO policy decisions have seemingly been made with a win/lose, either/or viewpoint of the world. What do I mean?

If we don't bring people back, we will:

- **Lose productivity** (either work in the office or be less productive)
- **Lose collaboration** (collaboration can only happen in the office)
- **Lose culture** (the culture only happens in the office)
- **Lose money** (on the office lease—which is a sunk cost whether people are there or not)
- **Lose control** (if we can't see them, we can't know they are working)

Or, the ultimate example: Come back to the office (x days a week or every day) or lose your job.

So even if you think it hasn't been an either/or approach because some people can work from home some of the time, that split time approach has mostly been seen as a compromise between two "competing" groups—leadership, who are focused on outcomes, and employees, who are concerned about their needs and lives.

If you didn't catch it—the either/or, win/lose view of the situation leads to a mindset of competition. While competition with those in other businesses makes sense, when we pit the competition inside the organization, typically everyone loses.

And that is how most feel about their RTO policy—everyone (the proponents of the office and the proponents of working from home) feels like they have lost.

Both/And

There is a different way to see this situation of massive change and opportunity. It assumes a different starting point, thinking both/and, rather than either/or. Here's what I mean:

- How can we meet the needs of great organizational outcomes and help people meet their needs too?
- How can we create a shared understanding of the context of the situation?
- How can we create a new recipe for shared success?
- How can we come to decisions, that while complex, grow trust across the organization?

Notice that all of these questions start with we. In the world of we, there aren't single winners or losers but a shared blending of needs, expectations, and outcomes. This approach also implies that the goal is to find the best solution, not the singular "right" one.

Admittedly, this approach is harder than either/or. It will take longer. It is messier. It is less black and white. And it also reflects the messy, complex world of work.

Now What?

If you are considering, reconsidering, or unhappy with your RTO policy decision, let me propose some things to consider. My suggestions will take longer and might be frustrating now but will build far greater long-term results. And regardless of where this decision-making process lands you (always in the office, there is no office, or somewhere in between), it will create better results on nearly every measure than taking a dictated either/or approach.

- **Have more conversation.** This implies that parties talk more. Surveys are fine but they are one-way and aren't conversations—they miss the richness and complexity needed to create new and better solutions.
- **Share more honesty.** Leaders need to be honest about their needs for the business. And employees need to be honest about their needs too. Until that happens, we can't come close to a consensus.
- **Create more shared understanding.** When all groups understand the needs and goals of others, there is the chance for a shared understanding that can form the basis of policies or approaches.
- **Identify the shared goals of all involved.** Shared understanding helps create shared goals – goals that motivate and direct everyone's activities and decisions.
- **Try more stuff.** Rather than crafting a "perfect" solution, why not try something? While policies have a place, in a complex situation like we are in today, consider more pilots and fewer (or later) policies. ■

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SHOULD YOU HIRE A FREELANCER OR CONTRACTOR?

PROS & CONS OF EACH

BY JESSICA MILLER-MERRELL

In today's business world, business owners no longer need to limit themselves to full-time employees when looking for talent. Often, departments need extra help but can't justify splashing out on a long-term hire, or perhaps only require additional one-off or seasonal contributions.

Two incredibly popular options among large and small businesses alike are employing freelance and contract workers. Freelancers are a special type of part-time employee usually paid by the job, and often working for multiple companies and clients. Contractors, while also being part-time employees, typically have a higher level of involvement with one company.

Deciding whether to hire a freelancer or a contractor can be tough. In this article, we'll go over the pros and cons of both, so you can make a more informed choice.

FREELANCER: PROS

Cost-Effective
Among the biggest advantages of hiring a freelance worker is that it's cost-effective. Typically, freelancers are paid per job, rather than by the hour. Because of this, you can be sure that you're getting your money's worth. You won't have to pay for the benefits associated with regular employees, such as paid time off, employee insurance and superannuation contributions. This gives you more leeway for other necessary expenses, including packaged solution insurance and product development for your business.

Because freelancers are generally cheaper than contract workers, they're ideal for newer companies or businesses working with a tight budget. By hiring freelance employees, you can get specialized work done without having too many full-time workers on your roster.

Increased Flexibility
Working with freelancers provides unparalleled flexibility, even compared to contract workers. While hiring a new employee often involves a high level of commitment, enlisting a freelancer is possible on a project-by-project basis, meaning you can choose exactly the amount of work to give them.

This level of flexibility makes freelancers ideal for irregular

work. For instance, you might work with a freelance graphic designer to create your logo, as it's something you won't need to do again and again. Hiring freelancers also grants you access to specialized skills you might not have in-house.

FREELANCER: CONS

Quality Control Issues

Freelancers allow for plenty of flexibility and are typically cheaper than contract or full-time employees, but this can sometimes lead to quality control issues. With other kinds of employment there's usually a more rigorous screening process, and you can spend more time on training and development. Because of their transitory nature, this isn't always possible with freelancers, which sometimes leads to sub-standard work.

Because of these potential quality problems, HR departments can be reluctant to work with freelancers. However, it is possible to boost the quality of freelancers' work by carefully screening applicants with trial pieces and providing detailed feedback. If you work with the same freelancers over a long timeframe, they'll get accustomed to your standards and expectations.

Little to No Onboarding Time

Another con of freelance workers is that it's often impossible to give them a comprehensive onboarding process. A freelancer might work with a business for a single project, so it doesn't make sense to invest the same resources to train them as you would a regular employee. This can lead to a lack of understanding of your business' culture and the sort of work you require.

To counteract this, we suggest coming up with a standardized welcome package for each new freelancer you hire. This can include a primer on your company and samples of similar work you want produced. This saves you the time it takes to onboard each new worker while giving them some level of familiarity with your operations and ethos.

CONTRACTOR: PROS

More Involvement With the Company

Among the best aspects of working with contractors is that they can feel like a more integrated part of your team. Independent contractors usually stay on for long-term projects, which gives them a chance to familiarize themselves with the work environment and their teammates.

The opportunity for independent workers to be integrated into the business they're working with has made them a popular choice across many industries. Choosing to work with a contractor gives you more stability than hiring freelancers, while still retaining more flexibility than with full-time employees.

Greater Opportunity for Growth

Because contractors stay around for longer than freelancers, there's usually a greater opportunity for them to grow within your company. This can give your business a massive human capital advantage.

If you're looking for someone who can provide ongoing value to your company while still providing some flexibility, you should aim to hire independent contractors. As long as you provide them with the support they need, you'll have employees who can grow with you.

CONTRACTOR: CONS

More Expensive

Typically, working with independent contractors is more expensive than working with freelancers. This is because you'll often be paying them by the hour. Moreover, you often need to provide them with some of the same benefits as regular employees.

Due to their higher cost, contract workers are a good option if you require help on a longer-term project, or one that requires highly specialized skills or important, timely deliverables from a capable individual you can trust on a relatively regular basis.

Not As Flexible

Besides costing a little more than freelancers, independent contractors also have slightly less flexibility. Usually, businesses hire these employees to work on larger-scale projects or fill bigger roles. This means greater commitment and sometimes set weekly hours.

As a business, you should only hire an independent contractor if you're sure you have sufficient work to give them. Before making a hiring decision, draft a concrete plan of what they'll be doing throughout their time with your company to ensure mutual understanding. ■

Jessica Miller-Merrell is a workplace change agent focused on human resources and talent acquisition. She's also the founder of Workology (formerly Blogging4Jobs) and can be contacted on X at @jmillermerrell.

How to Manage Candidate Use of **AI in the Recruiting Process**

BY CLARK SCHAEFER | STRATEGIC HR

The use of artificial intelligence (AI) is on the rise in many facets of our professional lives, and the recruiting function is no exception. According to a recent Resume Builder survey[1], nearly 70% of companies are expected to use AI in their hiring process by the end of 2025.

Just as most companies are leveraging AI in the recruiting process, candidates are using it too. It's important for employers to understand the implications of candidates' use of AI and identify the necessary steps (if any) to manage it.

Three most common candidate uses of AI

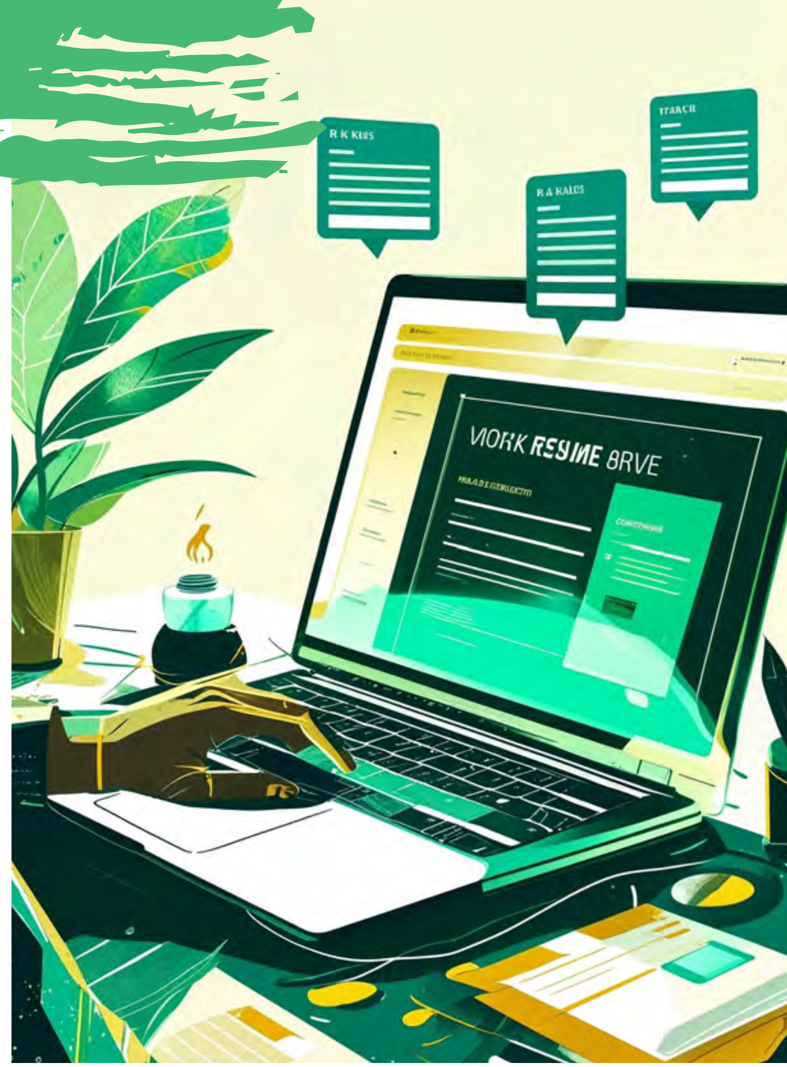
Our talent acquisition team has seen an uptick in candidates using AI, noting a dramatic increase even within the last few months. The three primary ways they have noticed the use of the tool include:

- Completing resumes and applications
- Providing answers to written screening questions
- Creating general communications such as cover letters and emails

What is acceptable candidate use of AI?

We have seen candidates use AI in both subtle noticeable ways and blatant misused ways. When a resume or cover letter incorporates key terms from the job ad that are well-written and help to describe their matching experiences, we applaud it. When our screener questionnaires are returned with the exact ChatGPT search phrase still copied at the top, we cringe.

So, what is acceptable candidate use of AI in the recruiting process? That is up to you and your organization to determine. Your HR or recruitment team may need to decide what makes the most sense for your culture, processes, and preferences, in addition to if and/or how to appropriately communicate that to candidates.



Ways to manage candidate AI use

As AI's use in recruiting continues to increase, it's safe to assume candidates' use will also grow. Here are a few considerations organizations should keep in mind to manage candidate use of AI:

Post an acceptable use statement

If your organization does not want candidates to use AI in certain aspects of the application process (i.e., submitting interview answers), put that in a statement of acceptable use on your career site. Some companies are opting to provide this transparency. Your guidelines can reflect who you are as a company and what you see as acceptable use.

Set limits carefully

For organizations that want tech-savvy new hires who can creatively and efficiently use artificial intelligence, consider refraining from setting too many limits or ruling out candidates who are finding new and creative (yet appropriate) ways to use AI.

Do in-person/live virtual interviews

To ensure you're getting to know the real candidate and their qualifications versus AI embellished resumes or generated prescreen answers, never bypass in-person or live virtual interviews. For example, after the initial screen of resumes and prescreen questionnaires, our talent acquisition consultants prefer to start with phone interviews, then live virtual videos, followed by in-person interviews for final candidates.

Keep in mind, you can request that candidates turn off applications such as CoPilot during video interviews if that's needed.

Leverage behavior-based questions

Utilize behavior-based interview questions. These types of questions are harder to embellish with generative AI if you're correctly probing beyond the initial question with follow-up questions and scenarios. Mixing in these questions will help you get to know the candidate's past behaviors while predicting their future performance in similar scenarios.

Don't make assumptions about AI use

Be careful not to presume that everyone has access and knows how to use AI. It's best to avoid requiring candidates to use AI or favoring only the best matched AI resumes. Accessibility for use and equity should still be a consideration.

Embracing innovation

While artificial intelligence has undeniably transformed the talent acquisition landscape, striking a balance between embracing innovative technologies and maintaining the integrity of your recruitment process is crucial. By setting clear guidelines and establishing thoughtful and equitable policies and practices, your organization can embrace the use of these new technologies that benefit both employers and candidates alike. ■

Strategic Human Resources is a national full-service HR management firm based in Cincinnati, Ohio. In 2021 it joined Clark Schaefer Hackett Business Advisors to lead key HR solutions.

1. Resume Builder. 2024. "7 in 10 Companies Will Use AI in the Hiring Process in 2025, Despite Most Saying It's Biased." Resume Builder website, https://www.resumebuilder.com/7-in-10-companies-will-use-ai-in-the-hiring-process-in-2025-despite-most-saying-its-biased.

How to Give Feedback to Employees Who Can't Handle Criticism

BY MATTHEW NESMITH

Giving employee feedback is important. It's an essential part of effective communication and a key to helping employees improve. According to the Harvard Business Review, 72% of employees considered managers who provided critical feedback as important for their career development[1]. What's more, leaders who rank in the top 10% at giving honest feedback create teams that rank in the top 23% of engagement!

HR can help their organizations give better employee feedback. Below, we'll explore our top tips for giving employee feedback and strategies for the sources of defensive attitudes and how we can overcome them when giving employee feedback.

THE FIGHT OR FLIGHT RESPONSE TO EMPLOYEE FEEDBACK

You've probably heard of the fight or flight response: when facing danger, the body releases adrenaline and cortisol, breathing and heart rate speed up, digestion stops, the stomach churns.

Corrective feedback can reassure employees that their organization wants them to change for the better and that this change is possible. But there's always the potential for employees to interpret the correction as a threat to their basic needs and react accordingly.

This means that when it comes to giving employee feedback at work, no news isn't always good news. Research also shows that elevated cortisol reinforces fight-or-flight[2], making it even easier to perceive threats and setting up recurring patterns of anxiety. Employees experiencing burnout or prolonged stress—whether at your organization or elsewhere in their lives—may interpret even small corrections as threats to their job security.

TAKING THE THREAT OUT OF GIVING FEEDBACK

So, how do you help your managers give constructive feedback when some employees see it as a threat? Here are three employee feedback tips you can take to promote a culture of feedback in your organization.

MAKE IT FREQUENT

According to a recent Gallup survey, half (48%) of employees are more likely to be engaged when they get feedback from their manager a few times a week or more[3].

In fact, it's harder for an employee to take a correction as a personal slight from a manager if everyone in your organization regularly goes through the same process.

You can help ease anxiety about feedback with regular performance reviews, frequent feedback sessions, and one-on-one meetings between employees and managers.

MAKE IT GOAL-BASED

As your managers lead feedback sessions with your employees, getting each employee involved in setting personal goals helps remove this reaction barrier. Effective feedback isn't just about what a manager wants an employee to do; it's about the steps that the employee and the manager can take toward reaching a well-defined goal. When both parties agree on the goal, it opens up space for an effective conversation on how to achieve it.

MAKE IT A CONVERSATION

Sometimes working towards a goal requires managers to implement feedback from their employees, especially when employees need to communicate with another department or if they need additional resources for one of their projects. Managers can't react defensively to employee feedback and expect employees to remain open to feedback.

If your feedback system is going to overcome the fear of giving feedback, it needs to apply to everyone. When employees see that managers act on their feedback, it goes beyond making them feel like they're being heard; it provides solid evidence that their ideas and decisions matter.

WHAT TO AVOID WHEN GIVING EMPLOYEE FEEDBACK

Establishing a frequent and goal-based feedback process that applies to everyone will help you reach even those employees who are resistant to criticism. But an important part of knowing how to give effective employee feedback is also knowing what not to do. Here are some common communication mistakes to avoid, especially when you're dealing with an employee who takes everything personally.

BEING TOO GENERAL OR VAGUE

For employee feedback to have a positive impact, it needs to be specific. Employees can make concrete changes when they know what specific behavior or results need improvement, or what in particular you'd like to see more of. General feedback doesn't give employees enough information to confidently move forward and improve.

72% of employees considered managers who provided critical feedback as important[1]

NEGATIVE BODY LANGUAGE OR TONE OF VOICE

A large part of communication isn't in the actual words we say. How we say it (tone) and the way our body moves (body language) play a role, too. When giving feedback to employees, it's important to be aware of your nonverbal cues as well. According to Forbes, a mind-blowing 93% of communication is nonverbal[4], with body language accounting for 55% of the message we convey.

For example, speaking curtly can make the sincerest compliments feel inauthentic. Likewise, crossing your arms creates a barrier between you and the person you're giving feedback to, while fidgeting can give the impression that you're anxious to be done with the conversation. Make sure your body language and tone match the message you're trying to communicate.

GIVING TOO MUCH FEEDBACK

If you give someone a long list of feedback, chances are they are only going to remember some of it. They might also feel overwhelmed. Be succinct in the feedback you provide. And, if you're following our advice to conduct frequent feedback sessions, only address a few things at a time in each session.

ENDING ON A NEGATIVE NOTE

Helping employees improve should always be the goal of feedback and constructive criticism. Going over past mistakes or rehashing problems as your closing comments will leave people with a negative impression of the meeting. And, chances are, they will forget any words of encouragement you gave earlier. Ending on a positive note, like sincerely expressing your appreciation, is much more effective.

IT ALL BOILS DOWN TO WORKPLACE CULTURE

Creating a culture where everyone feels comfortable giving feedback might seem like a challenge. But when you take the time to develop effective feedback practices throughout your organization, it gets around the individual issues that hold your workforce back from effective collaboration, making it easier to reach your full potential. ■

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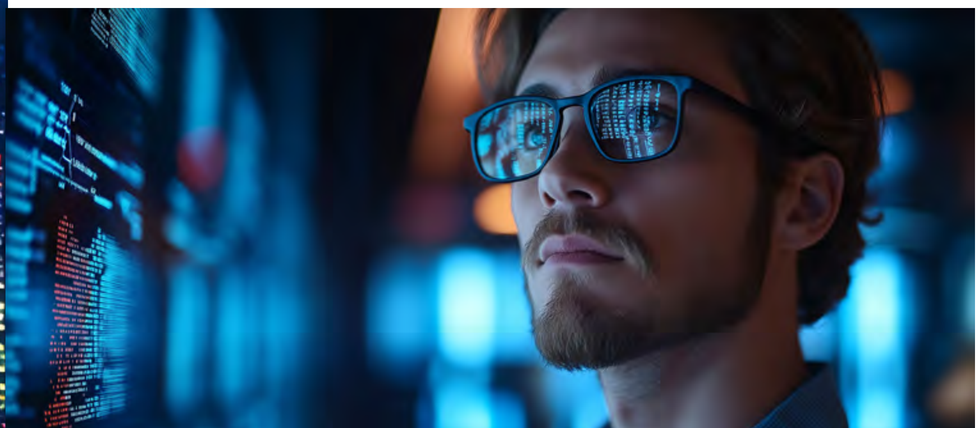
How Inadequate HCM Software Can Hurt Your Business Growth

BY ELLIN MCHARG



Your growing business faces a critical challenge today: keeping up with rapidly changing technology. While it might seem easier to stick with familiar, albeit insufficient, Human Capital Management (HCM) software, this approach can significantly hinder growth and efficiency.

The Hidden Costs of Inaction

Many growing businesses continue to rely on their existing technology for a variety of reasons. Some fear the perceived high costs of new systems, while others are deeply entrenched in legacy systems that align with their current processes. Also, specialized solutions added to fill technology gaps can create a patchwork of systems that can be difficult to replace. Fear of change and lack of leadership support further exacerbate this inaction.

However, doing nothing can end up being far more expensive than the investment in new technology. Inadequate systems can lead to inefficiencies, increased operational costs, and missed opportunities for growth. They can impede employee productivity and engagement in the absence of modern tools that streamline workflows and enhance collaboration.

Understanding the True Cost of Doing Nothing

By not upgrading, businesses may face higher maintenance costs, increased downtime, and a lack of integration capabilities, all of which can negatively affect the bottom line.

Take, for example, a mid-sized company struggling with legacy HR software. Employees face delays in payroll processing, leading to frustration and decreased morale. Managers spend hours manually tracking leave requests and performance reviews, reducing their productivity. The lack of integration with modern tools hampers effective communication and data analysis, hindering strategic planning. And as competitors adopt advanced HR solutions, the company risks falling behind, affecting its ability to attract and retain top talent.

Evaluating new HCM software

Evaluating new technology can be daunting, so it's important to know what to look for when considering new systems. Key features should include scalability, ease of integration, user-friendliness, and the ability to support both current and future business needs.

You will also want to consider how new HCM software will integrate with your existing systems and processes. A seamless integration can minimize disruptions and ensure a smooth transition. Additionally, ease of use is essential to ensuring employees quickly adapt to the new system, maximizing its potential benefits.

The benefits of modern technology

Modern HCM technology offers numerous benefits that can transform growing businesses, including:

- **Cost savings and improved productivity:** Streamlined processes and automation can reduce operational costs and free up employees to focus on more strategic tasks. For example, automated benefits administration in many solutions lets you plan, set up, and administer benefit offerings in one place while ensuring that enrollment and benefits data is securely and automatically delivered to carriers.
- **Enhanced employee engagement:** Tools that enhance communication and collaboration can boost morale and employee engagement. For example, many HCM platforms offer company hubs for connection and communication that can let you easily share company information and reinforce camaraderie and culture.
- **Better data visibility and compliance:** Newer systems provide real-time data insights and help ensure compliance with industry regulations. Most modern HCM software can offer comprehensive reporting and analytics, empowering business leaders to make informed decisions based on accurate, real-time data.
- **The value of artificial intelligence (AI):** Rather than a threat or strategy to eliminate human workers, the incorporation of AI into an HCM platform can strengthen your organizational culture and meet a wide range of productivity and workplace needs quickly and equitably—and in ways that complement rather than replace human skills.

Overcoming barriers to change

Despite the clear benefits, many growing businesses hesitate to adopt new technology due to various barriers, one of which is fear of change. To overcome this, involve employees in the decision-making process and ensure your chosen vendor provides robust training and support throughout the transition.

Another barrier is the perceived cost of new technology. While the initial investment may seem high, it's important to consider long-term benefits and ROI. Modern technology can lead to significant cost savings and increased revenue, making it a worthwhile investment.

Making a business case for change

So, you're ready to start your HCM software journey, but you still need to convince your company's leaders. To successfully advocate for new technology within your organization, you need to build a compelling business case that will resonate with leadership. Here are some key steps to consider:

- **Identify pain points:** Clearly outline the current challenges and inefficiencies caused by the existing technology. Use specific examples and data to highlight how these issues impact productivity, costs, and employee experience.
- **Quantify the benefits:** Present a detailed analysis of the potential benefits of the new technology, including cost savings, productivity improvements, and other tangible advantages. Use case studies and industry benchmarks to support your claims.
- **Calculate ROI:** Provide a clear calculation of the return on investment that includes both the initial costs and long-term savings and benefits. Highlight how the investment will pay off over time.
- **Align with business goals:** Show how the new technology aligns with the organization's strategic goals and objectives. Explain how it will support growth, improve competitiveness, and enhance overall business performance.
- **Address concerns:** Anticipate potential objections and concerns from leadership. Be prepared to address these with well-researched responses and solutions. This might include addressing the perceived risks, detailing the implementation process, and outlining the support available.
- **Engage stakeholders:** Involve key stakeholders in the process early on. Gather their input and support to build a strong coalition that can advocate for the change. This can help in gaining broader acceptance and commitment.

The risk of doing nothing is a significant threat to growing businesses. By understanding the true cost of inaction and evaluating new HCM technology, businesses can unlock numerous benefits, including cost savings, improved productivity, enhanced employee engagement, and better data visibility. Don't let inadequate technology hold your business back any longer. Embrace change and invest in modern solutions to drive growth and success. ■

Ellin McHarg is a product marketing manager and member of the UKG Ready team, where she focuses on creating engaging and informative content that provides SMBs with a better understanding of how the Ready suite can deliver value for their leaner organizations.

Chatbots: The Future of Candidate Screening, or a Temporary Fad?

BY JAMES MOUL

AI-powered chatbots are becoming a staple in the recruiting process, across a wide range of industry verticals and for companies large and small. But do chatbots represent the future of candidate screening?

The answer isn't so simple.

The Pros

Chatbots, like all AI tools, excel at efficiency. They can handle high volumes of applications, ask prescreening questions, and assess basic qualifications 24/7. This saves your recruiters time and ensures no candidate slips through the cracks. Chatbots can also improve the candidate experience by providing immediate responses to questions and guiding applicants through the process.

The Cons

Chatbots often lack the nuance needed to evaluate soft skills or cultural fit – important criteria when finding the perfect candidate. Misinterpreting responses or rejecting qualified candidates based on rigid algorithms can lead to missed opportunities. Plus, relying too heavily on chatbots risks alienating candidates who value human interaction during the hiring process.

Finding Balance

We've said it before, and we'll say it again–AI tools, chatbots included, work best as a complement to human recruiters, not a replacement. They can streamline the early stages of recruitment, but personal engagement is still essential for creating meaningful connections with top talent.

Can chatbots offer promising advantages? Yes. But the future of candidate screening will likely involve a blend of technology and human expertise–leveraging AI for efficiency while retaining the empathy and insight only humans can provide.

James Moul is a copywriter with Haley Marketing Group and the editor in chief of HR Insights. He can be reached at jmoul@haleymarketing.com.

RECIPE

LEMON HERB CHICKEN WRAPS

Quick, fresh, and full of flavor, these Lemon Herb Chicken Wraps are perfect for a healthy lunch or a light dinner. Packed with marinated chicken, crisp greens, juicy tomatoes, and a tangy yogurt-based dressing, they're sure to be a hit.

YIELD: 4 wraps **TIME:** 30 minutes

INGREDIENTS:

For the Chicken:
- 2 boneless, skinless chicken breasts
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- Juice of 1 lemon
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 teaspoon dried oregano
- 1 teaspoon dried thyme
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/4 teaspoon black pepper

For the Dressing:
- 1/2 cup plain Greek yogurt
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- Juice of 1/2 lemon
- 1 teaspoon honey
- 1/2 teaspoon garlic powder
- 1 tablespoon fresh parsley, chopped
- Salt and pepper to taste

For the Wraps:
- 4 large whole wheat tortillas or wraps
- 2 cups mixed greens
- 1 cup cherry tomatoes, halved
- 1/4 cup red onion, thinly sliced
- 1/4 cup crumbled feta cheese (optional)

DIRECTIONS:

1. **Marinate & Cook Chicken:** Combine marinade ingredients, coat chicken, and let sit for 15 minutes. Cook in a skillet or grill pan over medium heat for 5-6 minutes per side until done. Rest for 5 minutes, then slice.
2. **Make Dressing:** Whisk all dressing ingredients in a small bowl. Adjust seasoning as needed.
3. **Assemble Wraps:** Spread dressing on each tortilla, layer with greens, tomatoes, onion, chicken, and feta (optional), then roll tightly.
4. **Serve:** Enjoy fresh or pack for a meal on the go!

Simple, flavorful, and perfect for any occasion. Enjoy!

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