HR

For people-focused business leaders

Futureproofing versus *present practicalities:*
Getting the balance right

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Editor's note

Artificial intelligence, automation, blockchain, robotics… You'd be hard-pushed to find an HR conference today – or any other business conference for that matter – that doesn't have at least a handful of those words splurged across the agenda. Which, in light of them being touted as the disruptive forces about to radically reimagine work beyond recognition, is perhaps no bad thing.

But I can't help but feel that these terms are more often than not simply thrown around as buzzwords – crowd-pleasers if you will. They're designed to draw in those who want to go back to their organisations and reel them off to colleagues to give the impression of being ahead of the game. After all, no-one wants to miss out on the next big thing to hit HR or, as Metrobank's chief people officer Danny Harmer puts it in our cover story, become "the HR equivalent of the next Blockbuster video".

But let me ask you this. How many HR professionals can actually define what these buzzwords mean? How many can honestly say they have integrated, or are integrating them, into the people agendas of their organisations? And how many can't even begin to contemplate these technologies because their HR functions are yet to get the basics right?

There are some technologically-advanced HR teams out there. And, for them, the next stage should very much be about chasing those buzzwords and making them a reality. But there are others who are still finessing the less-glamorous technologies that act as the glue holding the function together.

Which is why in this supplement we set out to strike that very balance between present practicalities and future-gazing technologies.

On the more humble side of the ring we turn to gamification – by no means a new concept for HR. We take a pragmatic look at where it has and hasn't lived up to expectations in recruitment, learning and development, and engagement, and offer some practical tips for getting it right.

Life after the introduction of the General Data Protection Regulation is also explored in this section as, while many months have passed since the deadline for compliance with the new rules, there is no denying that it still poses a headache for many HR teams.

On the more attention-grabbing side of things we dive into the world of Internet of Things workplaces and virtual reality in recruitment. The very future identity of HR is also thrown into question in our feature on HR for robots. With the differences between human employees and social robots increasingly difficult to spot, we explore a future where HR could be doing 'HR' for both a human and robot workforce.

In this world "HR will need to develop a new skillset that can both manage people and manage bots and algorithms", warns Chris Brauer, director of innovation at Goldsmiths, University of London. And it doesn't get much more future-gazing than that.

Rachel Sharp
Deputy editor
HR magazine

Contents

Fit for purpose

Never has HR tech been so sophisticated. But instead of rushing into getting the latest big thing, HRDs must pick the right solution for their current set-up, finds SUZY BASHFORD

"Nobody wants to be the HR equivalent of the next Blockbuster video," says Metrobank's chief people officer Danny Harmer, referencing the movie rental firm that famously failed to keep up with digital technology and so met a very painful, public death.

But as Harmer attests, it's incredibly difficult when "bombarded" by suppliers touting the 'next big thing' to work out whether a new piece of tech is genuinely game-changing, or whether it's being over-hyped by an over-zealous (yet convincing) sales team. This poses a challenge when trying to strike a balance between keeping up with the exciting, future-gazing HR technologies of the moment and making sure to get the important, but admittedly less glamorous, basics right.

Harmer paints a familiar picture when she describes how her team is using her company's current HR system "as well as we can" but increasingly feels that "we're outgrowing it and can think of things we'd like to do with it that we can't". In such a predicament, the temptation is to rush in and overhaul the tech, adorning it with all the bells and whistles that suppliers are promising will reinvent the function.

However, Harmer urges fellow HRDs to take stock and keep grounded before doing this. "The first thing you've got to ask yourself is: how much is it going to cost and what return are you going to get?" she says. "Then, can I justify the investment in this new HR system?"

She knows that, for her, the answer to this last question will soon be yes, which is why she is putting in the groundwork now and ensuring she is well-informed about today's HR tech landscape. A crucial learning so far is the importance of picking the right tech partner, ensuring it is one that has a "willingness to innovate" and grow with you because the advances in technology are only going to become more rapid. In an ideal future, she explains, HR should never need to look at a complete

Present practicalities versus futureproofing: What the suppliers say

What are HR clients asking for? *HR* magazine asked a number of tech suppliers to find out...

Michelle Shelton, product planning director, MHR
"Clients have seen the emergence around AI and want to include technology like chatbots in their solutions; they also recognise the need to provide a stable foundation on which to start. For every client champing at the bit for a chatbot, five are still passing paper around the office."

Charles Hipps, CEO and founder, Oleeo
"Talented people have higher expectations and more choices than ever before. That makes it critical for companies to reach them first, deliver a highly engaging candidate experience and nurture a relationship well ahead of open opportunities. This is what HR clients we speak to are crying out for, and is why we have spent years developing and improving in-built machine-learning capabilities to offer predictive recruiting scoring to time-squeezed talent acquisition teams."

Matt Jenkins, head of consulting, Footdown
"Most commonly we are asked for two things: how can I know what my priorities should be; and how do I measure success/return on investment? Real-time data is becoming the new norm and all HR processes will go in this direction eventually, be it performance reviews, recruitment, exit interviews, training and development, feedback or staff engagement."

Jonathan Richards, CEO, breatheHR
"HR teams want more time. They want to be relieved of admin, giving them time for other tasks such as business development. Automation is hugely popular and a lot of this type of technology is being invested in to boost productivity. If the process is being automated correctly, it will increase overall productivity. HR professionals at SMEs need tech that is simple to use, that will take care of the heavy lifting and allow them to focus on the people and getting the best out of them."

Andy Shettle, chief product officer – ER tracker, Selenity
"HR clients are enquiring more about devolving access to line managers (therefore HR being less administrative) to undertake certain cases such as short-term absence, performance management and, where relevant, the initial stages of grievances to try and resolve them locally and earlier rather than progressing down the formal route. Having a system that allows managers to log informal aspects of cases is crucial if the case progresses to the more formal elements."

system overhaul because a strategic approach to tech, alongside a partner, will mean the system is constantly evolving and upgrading, thereby never becoming obsolete.

Many HRDs have come to the conclusion that the best approach is an iterative one, based on testing and learning what tech works for their individual organisation. There is more choice than there has ever been (in the recruitment technology space alone, there is an estimated 20,000-plus solutions) and, while this can be overwhelming, it also means more opportunities to trial tech before you buy it.

"You can switch in and out of tech; you can try it and, if it fails, try something else. It's a great time to trial," says Aaron Alburey, CEO and founder of consultancy LACE Partners, which helps clients navigate the complex tech landscape and identify the right partners for them. "It's amazing to have this plethora of choice, but it means you've got to be clear what you want as a buyer," he adds.

You've also got to be aware that the way the market works contractually has changed significantly, says Alburey. While, in days of yore, it used to be commonplace for companies to sign lengthy five-year contracts with tech providers, this is no longer the norm, with many opting instead for more flexible options such as three-year contracts with a 'break' clause, or the ability to set the solution before committing.

The relationship with the tech provider is also under more scrutiny than it used to be, with buyers much more cognizant that they are looking for a partner that will help them navigate the landscape on an ongoing basis. Harmer has some advice on the pertinent questions to ask to find this perfect match.

"Are they willing to be curious and partner with you to find a solution? Or are they a 'computer says no' partner?" she says. "We're in very early conversations with people looking at HR systems and I'm very clear that we must be able to flex. If that can't be done, we won't work with them. And bear in mind that partners promise you a lot when trying to win your business so, if they're not filling your heart with confidence before they've even got it, then walk away."

According to Simon Robinson, managing director of Level, the biggest priority for HRDs should be "understanding what the technologies are

and do", or HR runs the risk of "applying the wrong technology to address its problems and opportunities". He argues that it is vital HRDs educate themselves and make an effort to understand the difference between systems that "do" (robotics), systems that "think" (cognitive AI) and systems that "learn" (machine learning).

"With big IT companies and consultancies all

wanting to make money from robotics, many of them are trying to use robotics to solve problems that it's not capable of addressing, because they don't understand the difference between the technologies," Robinson says.

Herein lies a key concern: that the draw to buy into the buzz around robotics or the latest tech will lead HR away from choosing technologies that will actually solve a business need.

"It's improving, but there is not enough knowledge out there for HR directors to take advice, and with the blind leading the blind, the risk of failure is huge. And mistakes can be very costly," Robinson adds.

Michelle Shelton, product planning director at MHR, agrees that HRDs need to approach any introduction of new tech as an ongoing journey. "Establishing the vision for the change, understanding the business impacts and developing a ▶

> **It's amazing to have this plethora of choice, but it means you've got to be clear what you want as a buyer**

roadmap of delivery and communication are all crucial elements in introducing solutions successfully and ensuring the project focuses on what is needed and what should be done, rather than what can be done," she says.

As well as becoming blind-sided by what technology can do, (rather than what HR needs it to do), HRDs can also fall into the trap of neglecting to consider what employees will embrace, rather than recoil from. After all, there is no point having the latest, cutting-edge, all-singing, all-dancing system if no-one wants to use it.

"A healthy balance comes back to the quality of your employee experience," says Kathryn Kendall, chief people officer at Benefex. "Just as with the customer experience, we need to first get the basics right, then really look to personalise our delivery, anticipating the needs of our employees almost before they realise them themselves. But getting the everyday right is key."

Kendall goes as far as to say that HR tech which enables HR to personalise the employee experience is the type of technology that has the potential to "deliver a real step-change" in the function. While in recent years there has been a huge corporate focus on improving the customer experience, the importance of optimising the employee experience too is only now being recognised as equally core to success. "Employees now expect the same level of experience as an employee as they do as a consumer," Kendall says.

The *fundamentals* vs the *future-gazers*

The fundamentals:

The main fundamental is a good HR platform to act as the engine of the organisation, ensuring core processes are effectively and efficiently delivered. These core processes vary by organisation but include, for example, recruitment, learning and payroll. The type of HR tech solution will also vary by organisation. At one end of the market there's the big players operating at scale, such as Workday and Oracle.

At the other, more niche disruptive players such as Charlie HR, which is free. In the middle of the market stand a growing number of platforms that were originally built around a specific function but have now developed into multi-function platforms. For instance, SDWorx began life as a payroll solution and has developed to deliver a broad range of HR tech services.

The future-gazers:

Once you have an HR platform that works for you, you can then decide what to add to it, which is where the balance between basic, core HR functionality and future-gazing functionality comes into play.

In terms of the latter, the big buzz in HR tech is around AI, robotics and blockchain. Indeed, it's even a bit disingenuous to describe AI and robotics as 'future-gazing' because there are so many proven HR case studies utilising both technologies effectively. Within AI, voice activation is one area experts predict will revolutionise the function in the years to come.

Blockchain, however, is less proven and much hyped (according to some) but predicted to make a significant impact on HR. Possible applications include verifying potential recruits, learning and development, cross-border payment management, and automation of data-heavy processes such as payroll and cyber security.

"Employee experience is still lagging behind customer experience, but there is technology out there that is going to transform this. That, to my mind, is where the function needs to be focusing its efforts."

Stonewater director of people and OD Jenny Sawyer constantly reviews the employee experience, from the recruitment stage and throughout an individual's career. The point of this is to understand what matters most to people, so she can get the basics right first.

As a new organisation, with a geographically dispersed workforce, including a large home-based workforce, Stonewater's employee feedback surveys found that colleagues were finding it difficult to locate the right people for the right support and information.

"After comparing a number of alternatives, we opted to add the organisation chart module to our system, to enable people to view an up-to-date chart directly from

the self-service portal," she says "As a result, we do not have to rely on teams to keep their charts up-to-date, as the information is drawn directly from the HR and payroll data on the system."

She has also given the go-ahead for a new service management tool, which enables employees to raise online requests from the HR service specialist team. This removes the need for inboxes and provides staff with signposting and solutions to common queries.

"While this is a relatively basic solution, not only will it improve the service we offer in the short term but the work we do to prepare for this transition will enable us to move more quickly to our longer-term goal of introducing an AI chatbot tool next year; effectively like asking Siri to do your expenses for you," says Sawyer.

If the focus is on using tech to enhance the employee experience, then HR is more

likely to achieve that holy trinity of higher levels of engagement, productivity and efficiency. The key, says Shelton, is finding tech which automates daily tasks and fits seamlessly into employees' lives. "It's HR tech that improves their working experience without them necessarily knowing it's there," she says.

However, at the same time, while technology will inevitably continue to pervade all areas of working life, the biggest threat to company culture, and in fact corporate success in general in the age of automation, is that HRDs will neglect the most important part of this transition.

As Dominic Manley, UK technology product manager, at Aon, explains: "The HR function should be engaging with technology to help make strategic changes, not make strategic changes solely based on new technology. We shouldn't lose sight of the 'human' in human resources." **HR**

THE WORKPLACE REVOLUTION: AUTOMATION IS TRANSFORMING HR

Andy Shettle, Chief Product Officer – Selenity ER Tracker

Employee Relations (ER) cases are complex – tracking, recording and monitoring cases from initial referral to HR through to the final steps takes time, and a lot of data to manage and track. In a paper-based office, processes such as these are convoluted and time-consuming. This is where it is most important to use a software system, which includes AI and automation functionality, to increase efficiency of the HR team and case management.

It's difficult to avoid the hype surrounding automation and Artificial Intelligence (AI). On one side you have the dreamers that believe both will revolutionise the work place and society, on the other you have the decriers shouting loudly that it will put lower skilled employees out of work. The reality is somewhere in between however; automation provides the opportunity to provide better compliance, improved efficiency and visibility, and reduced costs.

HR is a perfect area to take advantage of these new technologies. If you could implement a digital system that can reduce the amount of time employees remain on sick leave, reduce the costs of Employee Relations cases, and even proactively identify trends that can reduce further ER cases from occurring - whilst also freeing up HR administrator's time - you could drastically improve your business's HR function.

Now, more than ever, it is vital for HR teams to be as efficient as possible – with the fees for Employment Tribunals now scrapped, businesses can't afford any mistakes in managing ER cases. Policies and procedures need to be followed correctly and in a timely fashion.

The benefits of automation begin on the transactional administrative tasks such as assigning cases to teams. Cases automatically adhere to HR policy – there are no missed deadlines or human error. Case reminders set against tasks help HR personnel understand which cases are truly priorities so that they can be escalated and responded to more swiftly. Automation can also help to simplify and increase productivity in day-to-day jobs. For example, checking and managing information such as sick days or holiday pay can be completed with a quick, intelligent search. This way of doing things completely removes the need to trawl through files or to send requests to corresponding employee managers. And this isn't just great for the HR department - when the information is readily accessible to all of the people who might need it, the workflow is greatly simplified.

However, automation's benefit extend far beyond just the administrative. It closes existing ER cases quicker and proactively prevents future cases from ever happening. It can uncover hidden or unknown trends in cases by identifying problematic departments, managers, or employees and enables HR teams to put preventative measures in place beforehand.

It is this level of analytics that makes Selenity ER Tracker so advanced.

The right tools

Selenity ER Tracker is a HR case management solution designed with the three stress points of a typical employment conflict or conduct issue in mind: the HR team or person performing line management, the employee, and the employer. It supports HR case management all the way through the process; giving greater compliance, visibility and efficiency on case types, such as: grievance, disciplinary, long term sick leave, or employment tribunal.

As well as ensuring procedures are correctly followed every time, providing compliant and consistent case outcomes, it resolve cases quicker and reduces case costs. Also offering proactive analysis, it helps to prevent cases by identifying trends and patterns.

A large percentage of ER Tracker's features include automation and ensure efficiency across the HR function, including: alerts and reminders, real-time monitoring, auto-populated templates and centralised task management.

The proof is in the pudding

ER Tracker has enabled BrightHouse to centralise its employee relations HR function, simplify case reporting and support its employee relations strategy with the identification of case trends.

Louise Levy, Employee Relations Manager, BrightHouse explains, "ER Tracker gives us a really good way of reporting and a 'reason for being' as a department. The software has been designed to bring control back to the employee relations personnel and it has rapidly sped up the task of updating and reporting employee relations cases on a weekly basis from four hours to under 30 minutes.

"Employee relations cases are changing all the time. Previously, the centralised Excel spreadsheet would only allow one person to update a case on the system at a time. It was impossible to measure timelines or any trends in case types. ER Tracker is much more user friendly and gives the ER team the freedom to easily share case information and provide a better continuity of service."

It is easy to see why HR automation can greatly improve the efficiency of HR departments as well as the entire company. Decreasing error rates and increasing efficiency can help businesses to improve overall productivity and to manage and retain quality staff. HR automation means better HR management.

Should you 'do HR' for robots too?

With intelligent machines predicted to become more prominent in the workplace, RACHEL SHARP asks if they will soon fall under HR's remit

In a packed conference room back in June, two of Israel's national debating champions Noa Ovadia and Dan Zafrir are going head to head with an opponent. They are debating first whether there should be more publicly funded space exploration, and second whether more should be invested in telemedicine technologies.

Neither side has been made aware of the topics beforehand. Each is given four minutes to make an opening statement, followed by a four-minute rebuttal, and a two-minute conclusion.

The result? The audience concludes that the two champions have better delivery, but their opponent had greater substance to its arguments. The competition ends in a draw.

So who is this opponent? You guessed it: a machine. Specifically, an artificial intelligence (AI) system called Project Debater developed by IBM.

The significance of this event, argued the machine's makers, is that it demonstrates AI's ability to take on humans in the very human art of decision-making and persuasion. After years of organisations asserting that, yes, robots can do certain, administrative, low-value human tasks, but no, they cannot match humans in specifically human areas such as decision-making, creativity or empathy, this seems to tell a very different story.

"At the moment we talk about

the idea that we will specialise in human things and all robots can do is calculate and work fast and analyse data, but when you talk to people in tech, they say that this difference will disappear over the next 15 years," says Liz Mellon, editorial board chair at Duke Corporate Education and executive director at Authentic Leadership.

Indeed, it is already starting to. At Robots of London, a UK-based supplier of robots, there has been "an increase of at least 100% in the last year in the number of robots we've put into businesses that perform a human function like acting as a receptionist", according to founder Adam Kushner. From what he has seen, the collaborative or social robots – those designed to interact and work with humans in the workplace – are becoming ever more commonplace.

So HR could be forgiven, in light too of regular bouts of scaremongering around robots usurping humans, for assuming its role is to be the purveyor of bad news here. But, according to many, HR should in fact be exploring how these increasingly humanlike virtual workers and humans can work together as colleagues. Which begs the question of whether it's too far a stretch to think that HR's role will be to manage this new robot element of the future workforce.

According to Anne-Marie Malley, UK human capital leader at Deloitte, it's not a stretch at all. "I think this is definitely the workplace of the future where HR has a role in looking after robotics," she asserts. "Clearly there's not the need for pastoral care or reward for the robots. But HR will need to change its approach to its talent strategy in terms of who – the robot or the human – is best for which jobs."

"These technologies are no longer just tools to extend the ability of human beings," says

Chris Brauer, director of innovation at Goldsmiths, University of London. "They are now autonomous workers that perform specific tasks, [meaning] it's crucial that this is not just in the remit of technologists."

Of course, IT will make a business case that it is their remit because it is about outputs, Brauer says. But he encourages HR to make its own business case around labour dynamics and taking a holistic approach to the workforce.

"If HR doesn't, then a portion of the workforce is going to fall under the remit of others in the organisation and there won't be much focus on the impact that workforce will have on the human part of the workforce," he warns.

Luciana Rousseau, founder of The Human Behaviour People, points to the example of social robots already being trialled in care homes. "I think there has to be a difference between the machines that are just task-orientated and the social robots looking after people," she says. "When it comes to task-based machines, I think this probably will fall to IT or tech. But when we start to tip into that social element, this is where HR will need to step in.

"It's not going to be as simple as 'machines fall to IT' and 'humans fall to HR' – there has to be some bringing together of the two," she caveats, however.

"The reality is there needs to be the combined expertise of technology and HR to define what the make-up of the workforce will be and what technology can enable that," agrees Malley.

This might all sound a bit far-fetched for some. But the idea that robot workers should report to HR is something already on some HR functions' radar.

A division of HR at AXA consists of a connected team of robots and humans doing just this. AXA's head of future

workforce engineering Ambros Scope explains how he manages both his human colleagues and his team of virtual career assistants, developed by the company to coach employees about their careers.

Speaking about these virtual career assistants, he says: "They are wonderful employees as they get better all the time, work when I want them to and don't complain. At the moment they're dream employees."

So should people leaders be 'doing HR,' as it were, for robot workers?

"Whether HR has a talented human or a talented bot working on something, it's just a different way of looking at things, but it does raise the question of how HR can conduct performance management on both the bot and the human," says Mark Lillie, UK power and utilities leader and global CIO programme leader at Deloitte. He cites the example of a bot that predicts something wrongly: "How do you manage the performance of that?"

The answer, he says, lies in taking a "very data-driven approach" that gives a "clear view on role, accountability and the expected output up front" so that "wrong, inappropriate or bad behaviour can be recognised".

"There will definitely be KPIs and targets on the output that ▸

bots deliver, as ultimately the business will want to know that these machines are performing accurately," he adds.

"But humans will always need a different type of performance management," Lillie caveats. "The outputs may be similar but humans will need elements of coaching and rewards that robots don't."

Scope agrees that to treat the two demographics the same KPI-wise would be missing a trick. "It's just not necessary to try to use human KPIs on machines," he says. "It should be about how we can get them to co-operate, not how we can make them look alike."

Mellon agrees with Lillie that the question of how to manage an underperforming robot is a knotty one. "It's like the worst sci-fi movie ever to say to a robot 'you've underperformed so we're unplugging you' if the robot has reached a point where it has empathy," she says.

"The reality is that the more human the robots become, the more human they must be treated around things like this."

And that means, as with any human worker not being up to scratch, it's a case of asking the question: is it skill or will? "If it's a skill issue, you train the human and so you reprogramme the machine. If it's a will issue, then you dismiss the human and unplug the machine," she says.

Mourning for robot colleagues aside, the challenge is that if HR does monitor and manage human and robot workers in the same way, the humans stand to lose the most, warns Mellon.

"Right now, if you compare a human and bot processing data, that would be unfair to the human, and if you compare a human and bot on feeling empathy, that would be unfair to the bot," she says. "But if bots are able to understand empathy in the

> **"The outputs may be similar but humans will need elements of coaching and rewards that robots don't"**

future, these KPIs would disadvantage the human as there is the possibility to develop the bot in this way, but not the possibility to accelerate the human brain for data processing."

Personalised leadership is going to be necessary to cater to these differences, points out Mellon, adding though that this is "nothing new for HR".

On the matter of workforce happiness and engagement, HR will also have a critical role in encouraging human employees to integrate and collaborate with their new colleagues.

"Most often when HR teams ask us for advice on integrating robots within the workforce, it is the humans not the robots that there's an issue with," says Kushner. "At the moment, robots can read emotions and see someone is sad but can't respond to this, and that frustrates humans. HR has to step in and train human workers how to deal with working alongside robots."

Trust between the two parties can be fraught, adds Mellon. So when onboarding robot workers into teams, there is more work to do than with a new human worker. "Robots just say the unvarnished truth and, for humans, if this means raising a flaw in their work, it can feel like a colleague stabbing them in the back.

"Low trust makes for ineffective teamwork and HR is going to have to manage that – if it doesn't, imagine the fights that could break out!" Mellon muses.

But perhaps the biggest consideration is whether HR – as it stands today – is up to the task. Unfortunately, the general consensus is that it's not.

The first stumbling block, says Mellon, is that "the average HR leader isn't even thinking about
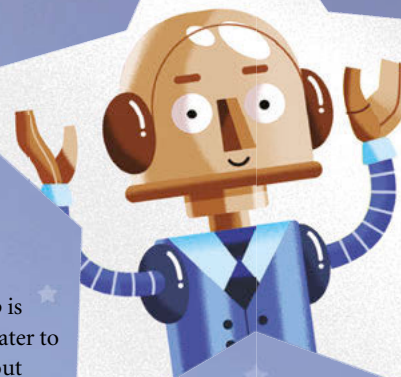
this future yet". But perhaps more critical is that in order to manage robots, HR is going to need to understand them.

"This means HR will need to develop a new skillset that can both manage people and manage bots and algorithms," says Brauer, pointing to a need for HR to become more technologically fluent. "There needs to be a new generation of HR professionals that can reach across those two spaces."

At the milder end of responses to this stands the possibility of having a dedicated member of the HR team whose role is to deal with the challenges of a human-robot workforce. Kushner thinks this kind of HR team set-up is just around the corner. At the more extreme end stands the idea of a complete overhaul of HR as we know it.

"HR needs the robot operator expertise and the human behavioural expertise so I'm not sure how much longer it will keep its 'human resources' badge," suggests Rousseau. And this may call for a rebrand.

"HR's name will probably drop away, as it refers to humans only. Maybe it will become social human resources," she adds, in reference to social robots.

Or maybe it will become RHR – robot human resources. In which case, *HR* magazine may also need to rethink our identity one day soon… **HR**

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Virtually impossible?

With opinion divided over the extent to which virtual reality will be used for recruitment, it is best to keep an open mind, finds JENNY ROPER

Quoting Maya Angelou in relation to HR tech might seem an odd juxtaposition. But the poet, memoirist and civil rights activist's inspiring maxim – "At the end of the day people won't remember what you said or did, they will remember how you made them feel" – is an apt one in discussions of virtual reality (VR) in HR, feels US tax talent acquisition leader at PwC Alexa Merschel.

Her firm is one of many that has, over the past year or so, begun to experiment with VR in the recruitment process. Its most obvious first HR application and that of its close cousin augmented reality (AR) was on the training side of things. Organisations for several years have been using the technology to equip people for scenarios difficult to safely train for in real life – to upskill surgeons, for example, or those working on oil rigs or in nuclear power stations.

But now this ever-evolving tech is expanding into new areas of HR. For PwC: capturing the imaginations of an ever-more demanding and in-demand generation of graduates.

Its US recruitment team has been taking VR headsets to career fairs and college campuses since 2016, using them to bring working at PwC to life. "We decided to remove giveaways at career fairs. So instead of giving people pens and pamphlets, we give them a 'day in the life' at our Boston office," explains Merschel. "They can see what a meeting is like, the workspace, then it creates conversations from there."

Immersive footage of office environments might not seem, to seasoned business professionals, like it would be that eye-opening or groundbreaking for grads. But with the rise of trendy, fun, ping-pong-table-filled offices, this is the perfect way for many firms – Intuit, General Mills and Walmart-owned Jet.com, to name but a few beyond PwC – to show these off.

"We're trying to create what we call 'sticky experiences,' where we're differentiating ourselves by showcasing our culture," says Merschel, adding: "It takes experiencing VR to realise it's more of an emotional versus a traditional experience… and it shows we're at the cutting edge as an employer."

"We realise for many students and graduates this job could be the first time they've ever experienced an office or business environment," adds Alex Bennett, graduate talent manager at L'Oréal, a brand that combines VR with more traditional activities at its student assessment centre days.

This logic becomes even more compelling perhaps where the work environment is particularly far removed from anything the prospective candidate will ever have experienced. Which was the driver behind an initiative launched at last year's Skills London careers fair to showcase the hospitality industry to young people.

"There were about seven hotels that visitors could take a tour of," explains Sam Coulstock, business relations director at Umbrella Training, who organised and oversaw the creation of a hospitality zone. "We had the lobby at The Ritz, the spa at The Landmark Hotel, afternoon tea at Egerton House Hotel, The Harlequin Suite at the Dorchester…"

He adds: "It was exploring the area but also each time you went into an area in the headset you could watch a short careers video or get a tip on how to become an apprentice, or read interesting facts about all the different job roles at a hotel. People loved it, they were queuing to get into the zone."

VR at this stage of the process is, then, a winner from a social mobility point of view, says Coulstock. "When I ask 'Have you considered a career in hospitality?', I'm told so many times: 'What's hospitality?'," agrees Jay Scott, L&D manager at participating chain Firmdale Hotels. "So if we're going to bring young talent into our industry we need to allow them to find out about it. Because if you're a 15- or 16-year-old, why would you ever have been to The Ritz?"

It's a similar story at German mobility and logistics company Deutsche Bahn, now using VR to give people a flavour of what it's like to be a train conductor or electrician, and to ensure that only those who like what they see progress to the next stage (saving time and money). Similarly the British Army uses VR to show people what it's like to drive a tank, to parachute, or be part of a mountaineering mission.

HR magazine tries… immersing ourselves in VR

Our VR experience included a fire-safety training session and a public speaking exercise

There aren't many things that will turn the heads of busy Londoners intent on grabbing their morning coffee fix. But it turns out someone sat in full VR-headset regalia in Starbucks is one.

For this is the unlikely setting myself and eLearning Studios' John Fecci have chosen for my first VR taster. Which – when arranging the rendezvous over email – provides me with my first VR revelation (my first VRR, or VRevelation, my first… I'll stop now).

It takes several (for Fecci probably quite maddening) emails back and forth for me to finally twig that, yes, he understands that I want to be an intrepid journalist and try the tech for myself;

and that VR doesn't require lots of expensive, specialist kit and wires… nor a special padded room.

So here I am in Starbucks, for the most part blissfully unaware of being gawped at due to, well, being well and truly immersed. Fecci specialises mainly in VR training (though he is increasingly seeing, and starting to cater for, demand on the assessment and recruitment side of things). So the first VR exercise I have a go at is fire-safety training.

The experience is instantly far more arresting and absorbing than I'd anticipated. Despite featuring computer-game-esque rather than life-like graphics (providers have to be careful not to trigger PTSD), I find to my surprise my heart rate quickening and stress levels rising.

Taking the right course of action in terms of triggering the alarm and calling 999 is as a result a confused, bumbling affair on my part; the power of VR in recreating high-stress scenarios, so that people are equipped to tackle

them calmly in real life, becomes apparent.

Yet as I remove my headset after the one minute or so trial is up, dazed and slightly sheepish at my fire-safety ineptitude, I find Fecci staring at me incredulously. It turns out, despite being completely rubbish at computer games (indeed, technology in general), I am – I don't think it's too bold a statement to say – some kind of VR savant.

"It's hard to describe without you seeing it, but when most people put a headset on it takes them a while to get used to it, and to get used to clicking the button [on the side of the headset]. But you were just straight off," says Fecci, my ego ballooning by the second.

I continue to display an apparently unusually impressive VR prowess as I test a public speaking simulation, then a training exercise used by scaffolders, in which I – unsurprisingly – fail miserably to set up a gin wheel. Again I find my pulse quickening – this time due

to the terrifying realism of the bright lights and hush of the auditorium, and then the sensation of being high up on a scaffolding rig.

Fecci tries excitedly to discover just what it is about me that makes me such a natch. The fact I play musical instruments? My love of immersing myself in a good book? The fact I'm a vivid dreamer? My general lack of curiosity about technical things? (My ego deflates slightly at this one.)

We come to no conclusions, with Fecci promising to let me know once he cracks what I and a handful of other VR naturals he's met have in common. My conclusions from the trial though are clear: that VR is far more immersive and emotionally engaging than I had imagined, with clear potential for training, testing, recruitment and beyond.

And that the way to get people's attention in London is to don a Star Trek-style headset in a coffee shop… and talk loudly about putting out a fire.

But VR's potential in recruitment isn't confined to the attraction stage. L'Oréal is an example of a firm already using it to test certain attributes during assessment.

Currently the technology is being used to test cultural fit, reports Bennett. "The scenario we use presents our company values in the form of a chat with a colleague – they explain our

core principles and ask candidates to think about and choose which one they relate to most," she explains. "This gives assessors a glimpse into their engagement with what the company stands for and demonstrates how they may fit into the culture of the organisation.

"After that, they take part in a virtual meeting where they ▶

interact with colleagues and team members to make decisions based on the discussion they hear. From this, we can understand their aptitude for things like taking risks, business priorities and comprehension of a strategic business meeting."

Bennett is quick to point out, however, that VR 'testing' of this kind doesn't work in isolation. For now at least, it is crucial to combine it with "proven and more traditional means of testing candidates".

Others are more sceptical still of the current merits of VR for assessment. John Fecci, commercial director at eLearning Studios, works with a wide range of organisations on developing VR training. Use of the technology for testing is still at a very nascent stage, he explains.

In future, VR could be an ideal way of role-playing certain customer-service scenarios, for example, he concedes, reporting discussions with several retailers on this very application. But more research is needed on how people typically interact with the technology, with the average person needing to become much more familiar with it before it is fair to test them in this way.

"The danger is it becomes more of an assessment of how good you are at VR," he says. "People get very immersed and try and reach out to touch something in front of them rather than the button on the headset. We would interpret that as a delay, but actually it would be because you were immersed in the VR."

Fecci adds that the main barrier currently is actually the maturity of cognitive learning and AI. He cites the example of one client who uses VR for sales meetings and interview skills practice. "The complexity is in the answers, not the avatars. At the moment these interviews can't be very long, otherwise you're getting into AI; at the moment it's just hard coding," he says.

"But the aim in future is – because a lot of law firms, for example, record their meetings and have thousands of hours of these – to build an algorithm around the most common responses, and basically build a chatbot."

Barbara Sutherland, senior talent acquisition manager at Jaguar Land Rover, agrees that at the moment VR, and gamification more generally, is better suited to testing technical rather than more complex, softer skills. Her company used a form of VR, branded in line with a wider Gorillaz campaign, last year to attract and test coders (who without the buzz of this technology might not think of working for the business, says Sutherland).

Those who 'broke the code' in the game were fast-tracked through the recruitment process, with 500,000 in total downloading the app. "We did look at this for assessing behaviours. But it's like everything; it's still developing and I'm not convinced on the behavioural side of things at the moment," says Sutherland. "But I've no doubt that in future it'll be more commonplace."

A key factor in the more widespread and sophisticated adoption of VR in recruitment is, predictably, cost. But this is ever less of a barrier to entry, explains Robert Stone, director of the Human Interface Technologies Team at the University of Birmingham .

"Headsets are gradually coming down. It's only £300-400 now for a reasonable one that's not too clunky. And the great thing now is that we have some fabulous online assets.
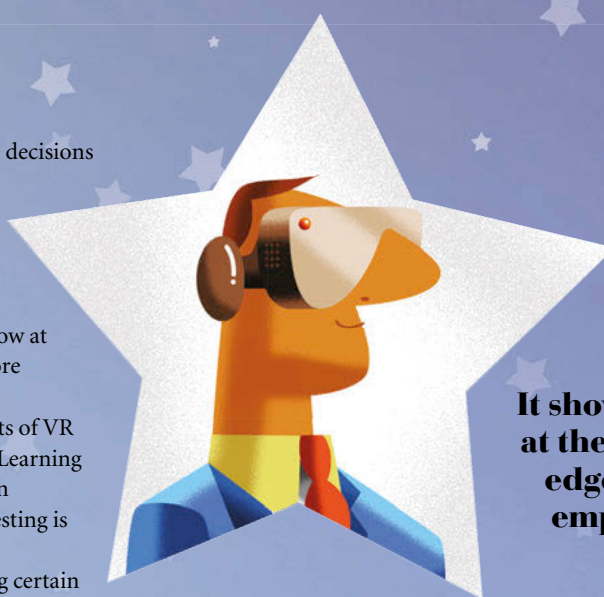
> **It shows we're at the cutting edge as an employer**

You can buy an office environment template, for instance, for around $100."

The Jaguar Land Rover case study provides a good example of the potential for VR to be a lot more lo-fi headset-wise than you might assume. Coders didn't have to come into an assessment centre or own a headset. They simply used their mobile phones to explore the test's virtual Gorillaz garage.

"We've been working with Devonport Naval Heritage to create a submarine you can explore. You can view that on your smartphone either holding it in front of your face and rotating on your chair, or putting it into something like a Google cardboard viewer," adds Stone. Coulstock, meanwhile, reports that: "At Skills London, each person took away a VR cardboard headset they could build then scan a QR code on to view the hotel VR experience in their own time."

Creating 360-degree video VR experiences is now very straightforward, adds Fecci. "You pretty much just stick a GoPro on someone's head, make sure the lighting's decent, and they walk around the office," he reports, adding that this form of VR is increasingly popular for inductions – so new starters can find out where people sit and where meeting rooms are.

What still costs is creating bespoke, non-video material, and – as flagged by Fecci – introducing complex, interactive AI functionality. "For us the ROI is much stronger on the training side of things currently," reports Firmdale's Scott.

And the aspect of recruitment the jury is still very much out on VR-wise is the interview stage. The idea of interviewing a candidate by both donning headsets – mooted by some as a potential solution to interviewing over distance – seems far from taking off. Stone, for example, is sceptical that VR will ever really add anything to what Skype already offers. Haptic technology, including the use of digitally connected gloves, would need to get much more sophisticated and widespread first, he says.

"I think [VR for remote interviewing] is a bit far-fetched," agrees Scott, adding though: "But then 10 years ago we didn't think we'd be interviewing people over Skype."

PwC's Merschel agrees on the importance of keeping an open mind. "Could we advance so that you put your VR glasses on and feel like you're shaking someone's hand and having an in-person interaction? I think that is in the future at some point," she says.

"This technology is advancing on a regular basis. I certainly think it'll come into play for testing and interviewing in the future," she adds. "I do think the sky is the limit." **HR**

HR

For people-focused business leaders

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Perfect conditions

How is technology such as the Internet of Things changing the workplace environment, and is there a danger it will go too far? By RACHEL SHARP

Anyone who's ever watched *Minority Report* will have etched into their memory the gruesome scene where Tom Cruise's character John Anderton undergoes an illegal eye transplant in a dodgy, black market surgery.

The year is 2054 and optical recognition systems – where sensors scan human irises and identify individuals at multiple points as they go about their days (hence the extreme lengths to which fugitive Anderton must resort) – are all-pervasive.

It's a reality where driverless cars, voice-controlled homes and predictive crime units are the norm; all of which felt fantastical in 2002 when the film aired.

But it seems Spielberg was actually modest in his predictions. We're still 36 years from the director's alternate world, and facial recognition, iris scanning and connected buildings have already arrived. Google Home allows people to control lighting and lock doors through voice activation. Samsung's recent smartphone offerings are equipped with iris scanner and facial recognition technology that can be used to unlock the device. Amazon is developing a smart fridge that can detect when it is low on food and automatically reorder products. And this is just the start.

These technologies all fall under the banner of the Internet of Things (IoT), or 'the third wave of the internet'. It's a term – first coined by Kevin Ashton back in 1999 (long before the technology actually caught up with the phrase) – that refers to physical connected devices collecting and sharing data in a connected environment.

As the above examples show, IoT is widespread in the home and consumer world. The business world, specifically the workplace, has come a little late to the party. But it is now starting to get in on the action.

"The work environment has moved from being functional to being a core part of culture and how people work. So rather than an office just being about how many desks we have, it needs to be about flexibility, collaboration and personalisation," says Kirstin Furber, chief people officer at ClearScore.

And this means bringing all the elements of employees, architecture, productivity and the workspace together – something that

organisations are beginning to wake up to, according to James Frankis, European practice area lead, consulting, at design and architecture firm Gensler.

"Real estate of offices has often focused on cost savings, on saving £x per square foot," he says. "But when you improve employee engagement and thereby productivity, you can save a lot more. [Otherwise] you'll be eaten for breakfast by the major tech firms who are creating environments employees enjoy and want to come to work at."

So how can IoT be used to enhance the employee experience? For Frankis, the most interesting aspect is the "microstuff" where employees have the ability to personally control their own workspaces. Augmented workplace environments can learn the preferences and adapt to suit the needs of individual employees, or allow individuals to manage separate areas of the workplace through an app on their phones.

"Often employees work in offices where they can't open windows or change the air con – it might sound basic but personalising this through technology and giving employees control over the part of the building they are in via IoT sensors is weirdly freeing and plays a part in wellbeing," says Frankis.

Another application is that showcased by IT services company Tieto and its new Finnish HQ, built two years ago. The HR and the digital team collaborated to create a smart office that tracks data on both the building and the employees within it.

The company's ambition to "create an activity-based environment and an open source culture that is non-hierarchical, transparent and encourages collaboration" brought challenges that IoT technology was perfectly placed to overcome.

"Managers and employees raised concerns that with the open source culture meaning that you choose where you want to work when you arrive in the building each day, they wouldn't know how to find each other when they needed to work together," explains Katariina Kravi, EVP HR. So the firm came up with an 'Intelligent Building' concept, where employees have sensors on their person that show their location in real time on screens based throughout the building.

"This makes the daily office experience much smoother for employees as they can find colleagues and managers easily. But it also encourages people to meet individuals outside their usual teams and collaborate with people that aren't the usual suspects, helping to boost innovation and productivity," says Kravi. Furniture and meeting rooms are also equipped with sensors so employees can see if spaces are available in real time.

"We have evolved the Intelligent Building into even more of a HR concept with what we call the Empathic Building," adds Kravi. The 'empathic' part works by staff providing feedback via their smartphones, computers or screens – verbally or using happy and sad indicators. Artificial intelligence then crunches the data and provides real-time feedback to HR or management on topics raised – good and bad – about the building, the company, or the work, and trends for different parts of the office.

It's a concept Tieto is partnering on with other organisations. PopInWork – a 'member office' or co-working space – was the first to introduce the Empathic Building concept to Sweden.

One of the key benefits, says partner and cofounder Karin Ståhl, has been the social element. "After just the first couple of weeks, one of the first things we saw was that people feel it's OK to approach someone they don't know," she says. "Being able to see someone on the screen first, click on their picture and find out their name encourages people to connect as it makes them feel less like they're surrounded by strangers.

"The lighting and heating control and monitoring is another benefit. Say someone goes to the gym at lunch – it will make them more comfortable if they can then work in a cooler environment in the afternoon. We can also evaluate the use of each work setting and see what's popular and what's not and adjust the environment accordingly."

But IoT opportunities aren't confined to employee experience. Dan Harding, director of Sign In App, points to streamlining the clocking in and out process.

"Sign In App was developed to replace the visitor book but quickly evolved into staff clocking in and out of the office. And it's evolving further to checking in and out of multiple office locations and even home working, so that bosses have data and information on the movement of their employees," says Harding.

So where is workplace IoT tech likely to go in future? Global spending is predicted to reach $772.5bn this year, up 15% on last year, according to IDC. "It is happening and will happen in lots of ways," says Harding. "So businesses need to embrace it and use it to improve how they engage their employees."

The next leap, Ståhl believes, will be "more devices built into the human body itself to control access to premises". "Maybe we could have a chip in our hand or thumb?" she muses.

For Frankis, there is the opportunity to go further around the element of personalisation and employee control. He sees a world where iris scanners and facial recognition technology will shift from unlocking smartphones to becoming a major feature of offices. And for much the same purposes as Spielberg predicted.

"With perceived rises in terrorist attacks in workplaces, I think we will see iris scan and facial recognition security measures come into play in big office blocks," he says. "These will be able to better protect employees and, being invisible security measures, will again create a nicer employee experience than more traditional security measures."

He adds: "It's that side of *Minority Report* that is going to be real." **HR**

Is *Big Brother* watching?

So we're entering an era of tracking employees with IoT… But could this end up being, well, all a bit creepy? Is there a risk that the concept of the smart office has gone, or will go, too far?

"I've heard of one company where employees have lanyards around their necks that track where they are at all times, that understand the intonation of their voices and whether they are collaborating or chatting, and that uses cameras to watch who people are talking to," says Gensler's Frankis. "That, to me, is getting close to the line."

There will always be a risk that any type of technology is misused, agrees PopInWork's Ståhl. She adds that when her organisation tracks people in the building, dates are not saved and information is not used for anything other than the stated purpose.

It's a point reiterated by Tieto's Kravi: "We made it clear from the beginning that we won't use it as a monitoring tool from a manager's perspective to track absence or attendance or so on, as that would give the tool a completely different flavour."

Tracking should also be voluntary, she continues, adding that employees at Tieto can opt out but that "almost everyone has chosen to get involved".

HR must be transparent about its intentions, says Frankis. "The main issue is if employees don't know why data is being collected or used," he says. "If we think about Cambridge Analytica, the issue was people didn't know what they were signing up to. So if these solutions involve collecting data, be transparent and share it all on screens around the office so that everyone can see it for themselves."

A *relationship* of *compliance*

It's several months since the GDPR deadline passed. But HR will need to work closely and in partnership with tech suppliers long into the future to protect employee data and all involved parties. By ROB GRAY

Ah, remember the heady days of May, when Harry and Meghan tied the knot and our inboxes groaned from the assault of the GDPR-related messages? Happy times!

The GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation) emails have thankfully dried up following the passing of the deadline. But the need to comply has not. There is an onus on HR to protect employee data under these rules. Yet doing so is seldom straightforward, considering a lot of this data is processed and hosted by HR technology providers. So how should HR work with these suppliers to ensure that employee data is protected and all parties remain compliant?

"HR is dependent on tech providers providing solutions," says Helen Armstrong, managing director of HRIS consultancy Silver Cloud HR. "Some are doing this better and quicker than others; it depends on their system. Without the necessary system processes, HR teams are left to work out a manual workaround. But tech providers must enable compliance, so HR should put pressure on them to deliver as soon as possible."

One problem is that HR teams "may have to implement an upgrade if they have an on-premise system to receive the GDPR functionality. This is something they may not have planned – or budgeted – for".

Many HR technology providers, Armstrong explains, are working on the issue of how to purge data or enforce the 'right to be forgotten' principle that the GDPR dictates. Yet it's still early days and getting it right will take time. In future, she hopes to see software providers add settings so that system administrators can automate this purging, by setting a time limit on personal data fields that will automatically purge data without manual intervention. For instance, these limits could mean the automatic deletion of an employee's bank details one month after leaving the organisation.

So what are the key questions HR should be asking of its suppliers?

Test their knowledge

"Start by asking them to tell you how they work with compliance in their own words, which should give you an idea if they know what they are talking about," advises Cecilia Westerholm Beer, chief HR officer at Bisnode. "Get a grip of their knowledge in the area, not just what the supplier writes on the webpage or in brochures. If you need to, bring in your DPO [data protection officer] or other people that have deep knowledge in compliance to ensure

> **Tech providers must enable compliance, so HR should put pressure on them to deliver as soon as possible**

the supplier really knows what they're talking about."

If the supplier is going to handle sensitive information about employees, it is imperative to find out what additional security they have in place for this, says Westerholm Beer. "It is important to understand what they have done, both technical and organisational, to protect the data we share with them. For example, where is the data stored (EU or other), who can access our information, and how has the supplier secured their competence?"

Suppliers are also in a unique position to offer insight into how different clients work. It is often the customer – in this case HR – who realises where there is room for improvement, points out Westerholm Beer. So it's important there is a forum for HR to share feedback with the supplier.

Some of Bisnode's best "and most

appreciated" suppliers have proven "really proactive" in both providing information on how they handle data and suggesting how to collaborate. "That builds trust and makes us much more secure," Westerholm Beer says, warning though that she has "seen the other scenario as well – where a supplier is clueless".

Competent technology vendors will already have mechanisms in place to listen to their customers and make changes to their systems to reflect their needs. "There is no doubt that any updates made to a platform by a vendor should have been done to support an end-to-end process that is deemed best practice," says Jason Dowzell, CEO and cofounder of Natural HR.

"When this is the case, the vendor is very well-placed to advise customers on new ways of working, supported by their updated toolkit. That's really the main job of a software company, irrespective of the GDPR. Vendors that focus on user experience will have carefully designed updates to suit the reality of what customers actually do day-to-day."

The best advice

In the case of the GDPR, says Dowzell, a vendor should be able to advise on areas such as the process for gathering and evidencing consent or to fully complete any requests for data access or erasure. "Vendors, however, are not the right advisors for the choices customers will need to make around areas such as policy, internal cultural awareness, legal matters, dealing with breaches, insurance and so on," he adds.

For Sage Business Cloud People VP Paul Burrin, HR shouldn't rely on the tech provider to have all the answers, but rather work with them to ensure core compliance aspects of the GDPR are met.

What the suppliers say

Mike Eralie, SVP delivery, NGA Human Resources
"One of the real misunderstandings of the GDPR is that most of what it requires isn't new. Instead it really puts an exclamation mark on policies and protections that organisations should have had in place for quite a while now. What does change is the risk level associated with any misstep and that is where I think many organisations won't have done the upgrades and improvements required to manage that new risk level. Technology is key to helping all involved continue to share data with each other safely.

"The new regulations have also spurred a wave of innovation that is exciting to see. We've been meeting with our partners regularly to both explain the needs we have and to learn from them. That two-way communication has been essential. You want partners that treat this seriously and are thinking ahead. Despite the best preparation and intentions, there will be gaps that need to be dealt with. Keeping communication open and focused on solutions will yield the best result."

Tanja Walser, HCM professional services director, Talentia Software
"Frequently, smaller and mid-sized organisations still hold their data in Excel spreadsheets – because that's how it's always been, at some point it was simple and because there's not enough headspace in the busy schedule to change things. If the data is held in HR systems, do only the appropriate people have access to it? Is the data removed when not legally, or for a business purpose, required any more? Are we certain we only hold what has a business purpose in the first place?

"The GDPR has turned a nagging feeling that organisations should review how they manage data into a critical business activity. Organisations are taking the GDPR very seriously; so seriously that we're seeing over-interpretations as organisations err on the side of caution. HR has an opportunity to lead by example and act as advisors to their organisations in the transition to the GDPR becoming second nature. Data protection has always been a pillar of the offering we provide to our customer base. The GDPR brings a more active and trusting collaboration to the relationship between data controller (customer) and data processor (technology provider)."

"Anyone can provide advice and suppliers are expected to fulfil their obligation, if any, with the GDPR," adds Burrin. "But the ownership and penalty for non-compliance ultimately comes back to the data controller – in this case, HR – and so they must take full accountability."

It's a view shared by Joe Healy, HR director at the Society of Petroleum Engineers (SPE). He says data privacy is "bread and butter for HR professionals; we've always treated personal data very carefully". For instance, SPE worked closely with Talentia to 'stress test' a new HCM system.

But many organisations are far from on top of the issue. "There seems to still be a lot of companies, perhaps around 50%, who weren't prepared for the 25 May deadline and still aren't likely to be by the end of the year," says ADP global chief privacy officer Cécile Georges. At the very least, she says, by now the laggards "should have solidly embarked on their roadmap to tackle the privacy principles".

Of course, the burden of compliance does ultimately sit on the shoulders of HR. But working smartly with tech vendors can lighten the load. **HR**

The rules of the game

Gamification has been around for some time now, so where has it proved a useful tool in the HR armoury and where has its value been over-hyped? SCOTT BEAGRIE investigates

I t's been several years since gamification was first talked about in HR circles, but the jury is still out over whether it's a killer application or little more than a gimmick.

Gamification is the use of gaming elements and activities, such as winning badges, earning points and topping leaderboards, in a non-game environment. It appeals to an individual's sense of competition and desire for recognition. Despite the preconception, it needn't involve traditional gameplay; in theory, a wide range of people-related processes can be given the gamification touch.

Lessons have been learned since the concept was first introduced and gamification is showing signs of growing up in the HR and L&D functions. An Coppens, founder and chief game changer of Gamification Nation, which develops gamified programmes for HR, says "good quality" programmes are now replacing the "early-day superficial designs".

"The employers willing to invest in a good strategy design are getting results – those that buy into just superficial solutions or quick fixes are not," she says. "I would even say that many lessons are being shared among HR and learning professionals around how they made gamification work."

Combining gamification with technologies such as virtual and augmented reality (VR and AR) and AI is also making it more effective for many people strategies. But with gaming generations now in the workplace, there is surely more to come.

Here we explore how gamification has and is being used in three core areas of HR.

Recruitment

Predicted use: In recruitment, its application was seen as an innovative and cost-effective way to assess candidates based on how they perform in a game.

How it's been applied: In 2010, L'Oréal's Reveal game, where users compete and share results on social media and a global leaderboard, kicked off the use of gamification in recruitment. Over the years, as well as giving employers insight into the skills, personalities and behaviours of potential hires, gamification has helped engage candidates with the company, the role and the recruitment process itself. It has also been used to raise brand awareness; for example, KPMG's 80 Days to Race the World drew students and graduates to the company. When used with VR, gamification can also give a near real-life picture of what it's like to work in a company.

Tips for getting it right: Understand why you are doing it. "Are the games you are using genuinely measuring the traits that are important for success in the role in your company?" asks Alex Cresswell, managing director EMEA at Pymetrics, which applies neuroscience games and AI to help companies recruit. "Or are they giving you a bland indication of whether someone fits the traditional view of a good employee?" He also stresses the need for the right approach: "Is it a simple, gamified version of a traditional test or do the games have a scientific heritage? And do the games measure cognitive and emotional aspects of behaviour? Multi-modal assessments are shown to be more predictive of on-the-job success."

Good practice in action: Siemens UK worked with gamified psychometric assessments provider Arctic Shores to come up with a fresh approach to how it looks at mindset and behaviours – as well as ability – of candidates in its early careers recruitment process. It implemented game-based assessment Cosmic Cadet, which measures 13 job-relevant behaviours and aspects of cognition, and awards players stars as they move through the process. Existing employees also completed the game, and data was gathered to identify behaviours that predict success and high performance for different roles. A Success Profile was then built against which to measure candidates. The use of gamification has helped increase assessment centre pass rates from 24% to 40%, and doubled the number of female candidates progressing beyond the final stage.

Learning and *development*

Predicted use: When gamification came along, games were already widely used in L&D. But these early learning games lacked engagement and, rather like early e-learning, experienced high drop-out rates. By introducing a sense of competition and instant feedback, gamification was heralded as a more compelling experience for learners.

How it's been applied: Gamification is now part and parcel of many e-learning programmes as a way to increase knowledge retention, make learning fun and provide instant feedback. As well as soft and hard skills training, it's also used in inductions and coincided with a shift to more bite-sized, just-in-time training. Gamification has also proven effective for customised learning, such as City & Guilds' Kineo till training game for McDonald's, where employees have to get an order 100% accurate. The rise of AR is also heralding a new era for gamification in this space, though the education sector seems to be ahead of corporates in this thinking. "It [AR] allows you to create fun interventions such as treasure hunts to knowledge collection points," Coppens explains. "Mobile devices are the key to making this work and gamification can act as the bridge that ties the mixed reality experiences into one learner journey."

Tips for getting it right: As with any learning programme, it is vital to set clear goals and have before and after measurement mechanisms in place. Gamification sometimes fails because the organisation – and even app and platform provider – feels that one strategy should suit all people, says Coppens. She advises investing time in understanding what motivates people in the organisation to learn or be more productive. "Then start with a small pilot group and iterate regularly from there. A gamification design should change a little bit, regularly, just like marketing changes with seasons and special occasions," she adds.

Good practice in action: Gamification is used in QinetiQ's xCITE immersive training environment to futureproof defence training through an innovative approach. xCITE provides an engaging, motivating experience that leads to behaviour change. Progression is through friendly competition and a sense of achievement is enhanced by rewards, while team learning encourages bonding across multiple locations. Each team can review performances, discuss areas of improvement and plan their next engagement. The gamification is complemented by VR, which immerses trainers and trainees in realistic scenarios to practise team skills and uses adaptive learning that adjusts to individual learner needs.

Engagement

Predicted use: As reward is a powerful motivational tool, there was a natural assumption that game mechanics such as badges, points and leaderboards would engage employees in their work.

How it's been applied: The use of gamification to increase engagement in an employee's day-to-day role is usually less about the playing of a game and more about gamifying the working environment. Arguably, sales environments have done this for years with awards for top performers; now this approach is being fleshed out further with gamification and its badges and leaderboards. Application extends beyond sales though, with Uber drivers able to earn badges for 'excellent service' and 'great conversation' for instance. Other firms use it to engage employees in particular initiatives. For example, Aon uses avatars, AR and leaderboards to engage employees with financial wellbeing tools and health applications.

Tips for getting it right: There is a danger that firms simply introduce a set of badges, call it gamification and assume it will increase engagement. Dominic Manley, UK technology product manager at Aon, warns that this will be seen as gamification for gamification's sake. "It is about setting a challenge, even if the challenger is only trying to beat their own personal best. Make sure the rewards are achievable and include layers of the gamification for a longer-term solution that will continue to feel rewarding," he says. "Make it fun; make it achievable but make it meaningful." Also, while such an approach might work well in sales, in a less target-driven environment there is a risk it can have a demotivational effect. "Consider how the end-user will feel during and after the user experience," says Manley. "Care needs to be given in the design to ensure you are hitting the right notes. Collaboration over competition is important. You want people to enjoy the experience, not drive a divide in the workforce."

Good practice in action: Business development and lead generation firm Chartered Developments is using the Earthmiles@Work gamification app to run a team walking competition, to incentivise employee wellbeing. "Our internal competition was fiercely – and amicably – contested. I must have heard the word 'Earthmiles' 350 times in the last week," says Chartered Developments' operations manager Shaun Headlam, adding that it makes "small changes to people's perception of health, exercise and wellbeing, and that is a big deal". He recommends running an internal communications campaign to encourage engagement, and sending "motivational messages" to keep "everyone focused on the team goal". **HR**

Finding the balance

Organisational development director at Total Produce DAVID FROST speaks of finding a happy medium between the technology of today and that of tomorrow

Over the past 12 months, I've noticed that colleagues, business associates and friends are increasingly talking about technology and the pace of change. The conversation often starts when someone has taken delivery of a new electric car. 'We'll all be driving these eventually,' one colleague will say, and of course we all agree. The conversation usually then moves on to when this day will come, to which the response is typically: 'When the range improves and becomes more like a 'normal' car.'

But perhaps this transition will be far more rapid than we first thought. The first electric mass-market cars, such as the Nissan Leaf, had a range of around 150 miles (when driven carefully). Now just eight years later we can already buy an affordable electric car with a range of around 300 miles. It seems significant progress has already been made within a short space of time.

So what does this have to do with HR technology? Well, the rapid improvements in electric vehicle technology are a good indicator of what is possible in today's tech-driven world and points to the human response to these technological changes.

Here's an example of the latter: I recently attended a workshop that was facilitated by a futurologist. He asked us to simply accept as a fact that no-one will own a car in the future; we will just summon an autonomous electric vehicle on our smartphone when we need to get somewhere. The silent reaction in the room was interesting; the futurologist said that our emotional reaction to his suggestion would have been just the same if he had said to a group of people 100 years earlier that their horses would be replaced with vehicles powered by internal combustion engines.

So when it comes to HR, how aware are we of the technology opportunities available today and the impact they could have on the organisation? How aware are we of how tech is likely to advance? How in tune are we with the cultural impact of the changes that will come?

In a recent *HR* magazine webinar entitled 'Embracing a future of AI and automation: HR's role', over 43% of participants polled said that their organisation is not prepared for potentially dramatic technology-driven change, and over 46% responded that HR is not sophisticated at all in terms of automating processes. This suggests there is huge unlocked potential in HR for improving service, performance and productivity. It also suggests HR needs to increase its understanding of technological change if it wants to be able to influence and support the entire organisation. So how can HR do this?

During a recent visit to one of Accenture's technology innovation centres, I was presented with the concepts of 'Go Digital' and 'Be Digital'. Go Digital refers to the concept of completely redefining your business or service so that it solely resides on a digital platform. This is straightforward for a start-up but more complex and challenging to introduce in a traditional, long-established organisation. Be Digital, on the other hand, refers to the concept of embracing digital technology to improve the current business or service model.

I have taken the pragmatic view that it is unlikely that an established HR function will Go Digital. Instead, I believe the right balance is to Be Digital. The first step towards creating a Be Digital HR function is education of the team. Developing a practical understanding of AI, blockchain and analytics (among other technologies) will enable HR to grasp the technological possibilities and future trends.

Then the next step is to carefully consider what problems HR is trying to solve. Is it a better understanding of people data to support the business, in order to create a more efficient recruitment process, enable succession planning or build engagement? With a focus on specific problems, appropriate technological solutions can be considered as part of the overall solution.

Here, the HR function evolves towards Being Digital and team members learn and develop their understanding along the way. Then, as the culture of the function evolves towards embracing technology, the fear of losing the horse and adopting the engine evaporates, and HR becomes well-placed to educate and support the wider organisation. **HR**

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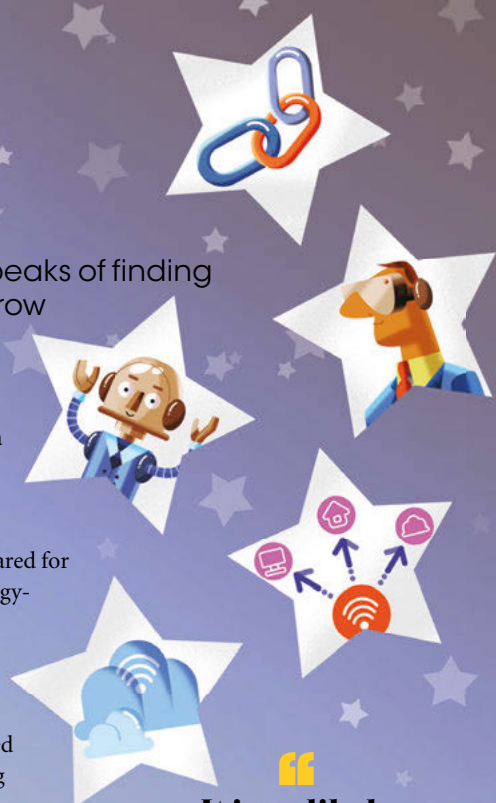
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