The CIPD is the professional body for HR and people development. The registered charity champions better work and working lives and has been setting the benchmark for excellence in people and organisation development for more than 100 years. It has more than 150,000 members across the world, provides thought leadership through independent research on the world of work, and offers professional training and accreditation for those working in HR and learning and development.

Executive summary

People Profession 2030: A collective view of future trends **was written by Mel Green, Rebecca Peters and Jake Young at the CIPD.**

There's plenty of debate over what the future of work will look like, with change being inevitable. While we can't predict the future, we can examine the trends and drivers that are likely to influence the world of work – and the people profession – in the next ten years and beyond. As the CIPD, the professional body for experts in people at work, we need to support the people profession to thrive through these changes, and shape the future rather than react to it. Our People Profession Now and For the Future work is set up to do just that.

This report shares the findings of collaborative research, where we engaged with people professionals from different regions, sectors and specialisms to create a collective understanding of the future of the profession.

Drawing on insights from scientific literature, people professionals across an eight-day virtual hackathon, and senior leader roundtables, we share the key trends surfaced and what this means for the future of the profession.

Five key trends influence the people profession

Below, we outline the key trends identified in this research. They are not an exhaustive list of the drivers that will influence the future world of work and the people profession; rather, these were five prominent areas that were consistently raised by people professionals when asked to think about work over the next decade.

A. Internal change: evolving organisational models, structures, and processes

Organisational change was a key theme throughout the hackathon and roundtables. Change isn't new – however, many noted that our organisations are often slow to adapt and innovate, and that business models, structures and processes need to adapt and become agile in order to be future-fit.

The people profession felt this was an opportunity to lead the way in organisational change, design and development.

To thrive in 2030 and beyond, the people profession should:

- Develop future-fit skills to thrive in a changing world, including agility and autonomy, building expertise across the profession in areas like organisational development and change.
- Make horizon-scanning a priority and scan the external environment to anticipate upcoming shifts within the workplace to develop solutions and initiatives that consider people needs from the beginning.
- Adapt people functions for the context they are working in and role-model adaptive, agile ways of working within their own teams.
- Take the lead on strategic change and development, influencing organisational change and development strategy, rather than reacting to it – and balancing the needs of employees and the business in doing this.

B. Digital and technological transformation

Technology and digital change was a key theme throughout the hackathon, covering a broad range of topics, from artificial intelligence and automation, to robotics and advancing technology, to people data and analytics. Digital working has increased to facilitate homeworking throughout the pandemic, but nonetheless it's difficult to predict how technology will advance in the next ten years and beyond and how this will influence our workplaces.

People professionals felt that the profession needed to be at the front of digital and technological transformation. This requires upskilling of employees – including people professionals – and collaborative working across businesses.

To thrive in 2030 and beyond, the people profession should:

- Develop skills for a digital world and address skills gaps within our organisations, recognising that competencies and confidence won't be the same across the workforce or indeed our people functions.
- Develop analytical and data skills within the profession and build credibility in this area.
- Bring people expertise to digital transformation to add real value; for example, engage with employees throughout digital change programmes, treating them as key stakeholders in the transformation process.
- Challenge other business areas to consider the impact of digital transformation on people and their work.
- Address ethical considerations when it comes to data, privacy and implementing new technology.

C. Changing demographics and D&I strategy

Equality, diversity, inclusion and anti-racism were key themes in this research. Challenging discrimination in all its forms, and being actively anti-racist, is imperative for the people profession – now, and in the future.

And, the demographics of our workplaces are also shifting. People management practices need to support all employees to thrive and there was a sense that we need to take a more individualised approach to people management practices to do this.

To thrive in 2030 and beyond, the people profession should:

- Use expertise on people and people management practices to develop effective D&I strategy. This includes influencing senior leaders and the wider organisation to champion equality, and adapting current ways of working and people management practices to progress D&I.
- Be curious and keep knowledge on D&I and demographic shifts up to date – this is a complex and evolving area, so people professionals will need to be equipped with up-to-date understanding of D&I to create meaningful change.
- Look outwards to understand the systemic barriers to D&I; consider how to challenge existing and emerging biases and what the barriers are outside immediate organisational contexts.
- Prioritise and dedicate resource to D&I; while D&I is not something 'done' by people teams in a vacuum, the people profession does have a key role to play.
- Take an evidence-based approach, especially when it comes to forecasting and understanding demographic shifts.

D. Diversifying employment relationships

Many factors, like economic pressure, consumer demand and external disruptors, all play a part in changing what the traditional employment relationship may look like in the future. However, employment relationships change. Hackathon participants felt that people professionals will need to take charge and support change, while promoting fairness and good-quality employment relationships.

To thrive in 2030 and beyond, the people profession should:

- Develop line managers to work in a complex environment with multiple types of employment – for example, provide guidance and training on managing virtual teams.
- Balance stakeholder needs and expectations, employee expectations, ethical considerations and customer demand with what is appropriate in their business context.

- Pay attention to fairness, equality and potential misalignments of power in working practices and relationships.

E. Sustainability, purpose and responsible business
While sustainability and responsible business has been rising up the agenda in recent years, COVID-19 has shone a light on this important area. Purpose- and values-led business approaches were also seen as an emerging trend. The need for organisations to have wider benefits for their local community and ecosystem is seen as increasingly important.

People professionals should be at the forefront of driving responsible business that creates value for all stakeholders, including employees.

To thrive in 2030 and beyond, the people profession should:

- Adapt people functions to reflect a widening remit on corporate social responsibility and increased demand in areas like sustainability, responsible business and organisational purpose and values.
- Take the lead in building responsible business practices. People professionals are perfectly placed to do this and make positive changes to people management practices, especially in diversity, inclusion and equality.
- Weave social value and purpose through the entire employee lifecycle, from attraction to performance and engagement.
- Champion a strategic approach to responsible business, working beyond organisational boundaries with external stakeholders and communities.

Reflections for the people profession

There was a real sense of opportunity throughout the hackathon and roundtables for the people profession to influence the direction of their organisations for the better. This requires a holistic understanding of organisational ecosystems, as well as the future trends influencing the world of work. People practices do not occur in a vacuum.

Other organisational factors within this ecosystem – namely people management, leadership and culture – are integral to people strategies. Throughout this research, people professionals identified that these factors can be enablers or barriers for people practice, as well as for the trends in this report.

And, these trends and emerging factors will have knock-on effects in other areas of practice. One is a focus on learning and skills development for both people professionals and the wider organisation. Another is the potentially increased remit for the people profession. Finally, there is need for the people profession to have a renewed focus on horizon-scanning and awareness of external trends, thinking beyond our immediate context and considering what macro-level, external disruptors influence the world of work and therefore the people profession.

We offer further reflections on this ecosystem and emerging themes in the main report – see pp32–35.

Shaping the future of the people profession

The discussions within this research highlight the true value that the people profession brings to the workplace. We need to build on this and play a key role in driving positive change in organisations as the world of work continues to adapt and shift.

This report is a springboard for future engagement, research and collaboration on the future of work and the people profession. To stay up to date with our research journey, visit the latest insights hub on our People Profession site.

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