



Service, Scale, Speed:
How HR Can Hack The
Employee Experience To
Power Organizational
Performance and Productivity

In partnership with



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About us

ABOUT UNLEASH

UNLEASH is the new customer-first digital media platform built to inspire, connect and enable business leaders, HR leaders, and organizations worldwide to navigate the changing world of work.

We give leaders a platform to share ideas, network, and do business. Leading the debate on the work revolution, UNLEASH brings together leaders who are passionate about people, technology, innovators and advocates, and world-leading influencers who help connect the dots and offer that big picture perspective.

Our previous speakers include Sir Richard Branson, Arianna Huffington, Edward Snowden, Esther Perel, Simon Sinek, Baronness Susan Greenfield, Sir Bob Geldof, Stephen Fry and many more.

Our mission is to provide our community with a sense of PURPOSE and belonging. UNLEASH will be that FORCE FOR GOOD for the HR industry.

unleash.ai

Learn more

ABOUT UKG

UKG (Ultimate Kronos Group) is the future of PeopleDoc, which will become the HR Service Delivery arm of one of the largest cloud companies in the world. At UKG, Our Purpose Is People, and we believe that organizations succeed when they focus on putting people first.

UKG's HR Service Delivery platform includes case management, process automation, and employee file management and empowers HR, managers and their employees to boost productivity, increase employee engagement, manage global compliance and meet the challenges of tomorrow. With more than 12,000 employees around the world, UKG's own workplace culture has been named a best place to work all over the world, including consecutive years on Fortune's 100 Best Companies to Work For list.

ukg.co.uk

Contact: Rémi Malenfant, Director of HR Innovation & Customer Experience, UKG, **remi.malenfant@ukg.com**

Learn more

Foreword

"Productivity has actually increased in our organization since the advent of COVID-19 due to the extra care and management focus on our people. We always knew it was important to have good digital HR tools in place to support employees, and being able to respond to the crisis has made it crystal clear why it was so important to digitally transform HR. But success is as much about partnering with the business as it is about the technology - we mustn't ever lose sight of the human aspect of HR."

MIRKA JANHONEN

What's really worked for HR in helping people and organizations not just survive the crisis, but in many instances, thrive?

To understand how enterprises are adapting, UKG and UNLEASH spoke to HR leaders in international roles at global corporations. And their insights are telling.

They explore HR's impact on the employee experience – from basic processes through to transformational moments – and how getting the right technology in place can help truly power engagement. They also declare that HR itself could be more productive, swapping transactional tasks for the strategic; and, in turn, becoming a driver of efficiency and better outcomes throughout their organizations. All at a time when productivity matters more than ever; it has been identified as the number one priority among 1,000 US and UK CEOs surveyed by UNLEASH¹.

Whilst our panel believe barriers to better HR delivery and workforce productivity remain, all agree on the three key elements that underpin success: **service**, **scale**, **and speed**.

The key challenge now is to construct HR operations using those three pillars while maintaining - even improving - quality of service and creating world-beating employee experiences as the war for talent hots up once again. Can HR be as fast as possible but also fit for purpose?

In this report we draw on the knowledge of our expert leaders to set out how HR can hack the employee experience, to power organizational performance and productivity.



RÉMI MALENFANT
Director of HR Innovation
and Customer Experience



MARC COLEMAN CEO UNLEASH

Meet the HR leaders

We spoke to HR leaders from a broad spectrum of industries and global locations in Spring and Summer 2021. Their backgrounds vary but the common ground and key themes provide significant insight into the challenges facing HR worldwide post-COVID-19.

They reflect broader industry trends and consistently point to the importance of people to an organization's success.

Without HR creating positive people experiences around the moments that matter, employees will not feel engaged, connected, or supported, which in turn, impacts productivity and overall organizational performance.

We would like to thank our HR leaders for taking part and sharing so generously in this research. Their insights shape invaluable reflection and uniquely practical advice that every HR professional can draw from in the challenging weeks and months ahead.



ANTONY EBELLE
Global Head of Digital
Surgery Integration &
Talent Insight
Johnson & Johnson



JESPER GABRIEL
Senior Director,
Human Resources &
HR Business Partner
Grundfos



DUARTE RAMOS
Global VP of
Talent Acquisition &
Employer Branding
Gympass



MARTA HAMMER
RASMUSSEN
VP Performance & Talent
Management
Orkla Group



MIRKA JANHONEN
Director, Digital HR and
Workplace Development,
Orkla Group



HERMAN ROLFERS
Director Global HR
Technology & Solutions
Heineken



IDO SHIKMA Senior Director HR Cognizant



LIZZY JOCHEMS
Talent Acquisition - EMEA
Avery Dennison



MARIE-THERESE HABIB
Country Head of HR
World Food Programme



ADDIE VAN ROOIJ
Vice President People
Operations, L&D services,
M&A HR Services
& Labor Relations
HPE

Everything comes back to the employee experience

"HR leaders who understand which unique moments are important to their employees can make smarter investments with greater impact." GARTNER

All employees in every organization experience moments that matter. Whether these moments are designed or left to chance varies greatly. Some are considered in detail, such as onboarding programs – usually meticulously planned and executed with well-rehearsed precision. Other experiences within the employee lifecycle are smaller, such as putting in expense claims, requesting holiday or finding out what the parental leave policy looks like. But these are no less important; in fact, the sum of these smaller experiences can often be greater than we might expect.

Employee experience was already a buzz word in HR before the COVID-19 pandemic. But as Shikma explains, the concept has broadened further since lockdown; "the boundaries of work-life balance have blurred now with so many people working from home and that can have a huge impact on someone's experience as an employee – and their productivity. But this is the gap that HR can spring into. The moments that matter have changed and HR can get involved in so many different aspects of the business because people **need** answers - and they turn to **us** to find them."

"Everybody has had to redesign their lives, so it's pretty understandable that HR is also rethinking itself and where it adds most value to the business."

IDO SHIKMA

From coordinating remote working, to devising new pandemic policies and processes, and setting up home office spaces, to new workforce planning tools and e-learning provision, to safe return to the office, HR has been "overloaded" in the words of one interviewee as it became the "first point of contact" for everything from "chairs to wellbeing" – despite HR teams often being too "thin" to begin with. The employee experience has only expanded because of the crisis. And with so many variations on the hybrid future of work, that is a trend that looks set to continue.

"Our approach to employee experience now is to think about it from 'cradle to grave'. It is important to consider the different experiences for people at different stages of their journey with us – from new employees, to more mature and those closer to retirement age."

JESPER GABRIEL



Experience is king

Almost all of our HR leaders reference employee experience as a core value or a "North star" as HR teams strive to become as people-centric as possible. The consensus is that creating the right experiences will be a driver of key HR and talent processes – from talent acquisition and hiring, through to retention and succession planning. Heineken confirms that "experience is king," meanwhile Johnson & Johnson reveal it is a key "part of our credo" because "everyone in the organization from the top-down needs to recognize that our people are our most important asset."

"Employee experience is about a set of values where you put your people first – it's not just HR lingo." JESPER GABRIEL

The passion and commitment the interviewed HR leaders showed when discussing the importance of the employee experience permeates everything they do. So, it is key to understand its position as a bedrock for HR in the new world of work. Basics are not just basics. No part of the employee journey should be ignored. It is all up for grabs in terms of being reimagined - and potentially digitalized or automated – but "context is key."

"Employee experience is like the new engagement – it's important but every organization needs to do a deep dive to define what it means for them. What are you really trying to achieve? What does your employee journey look like and what are the key touch points that matter?" SHIKMA

Service, scale, speed: think frictionless HR

HR is often the sum of a series of siloed processes, performed across multiple different systems, which can sometimes feel disparate or disjointed. Not ideal when creating a frictionless, digital experience...so there is value in looking for the overlaps as HR redefines and redesigns itself post-pandemic.

HR HACK: Look at opportunities to
link HR enquiries and the related
transactions e.g. following up a search
for information on time and absence with links
to the relevant forms. Making it as seamless as
possible to take action following an enquiry can
help transform the employee experience
for everyone.



Positive experiences power engagement

"You should never be happy with employee engagement because it could always, always be better."

HERMAN ROLFERS

With employee engagement cited as HR's #1 measure of success for the last seven years2, it is clearly a crucial part of any HR strategy. But it is more of a journey than a destination. Indeed, it would be a rare organization that achieves and maintains 100% employee engagement. But the point is more that HR can never be complacent nor ever stop listening to what employees want and need. The approach to employee engagement needs to be adaptable in order to give people the experience of work that they deserve. Which has been heightened even further during the pandemic:

"HR has helped people stay calm, secure and engaged because they felt we were in control and also helped them to know in advance how they'd be impacted by different changes as the pandemic unfolded." LIZZY JOCHEMS

One of the key shifts highlighted by this research is a move to employee listening and engagement as an ongoing activity. An annual employee survey for example - the results of which may or may not even be acted upon – is no longer enough.

"If you're serious about being employee-centric, then you need to go back to your users on a very frequent basis to hear from them, to listen to them and to learn from them, in order to know the way, show the way and go the way."

HERMAN ROLFERS

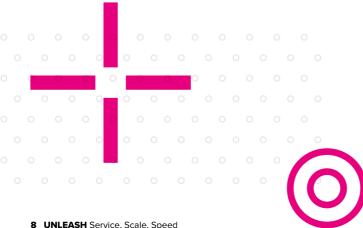
Pulse surveys, employee listening tools and sentiment analysis are all ways of gathering employee data. And on top of this, organizations can analyze the requests raised, and searches made by their people in knowledge bases and via virtual assistants. This is all valuable because "HR needs hard facts around engagement, not just gut feeling." However, "feedback is pointless if we don't act on it" says Antony Ebelle.

Doing this at scale is a real challenge. It's easy to listen to one employee at time. But listening effectively to thousands of employees in larger companies is not. HR systems have a key role to play here beyond the obvious employee engagement tools.

There remains an overwhelming belief that creating positive employee experiences powers better engagement. And why does that matter?

"Gathering the voice of our employees is an important way in which HR contributes to creativity and innovation - which can also increase productivity."

MARIE-THERESE HABIB



Productivity and performance have been in the spotlight throughout the pandemic, with data tending to show outputs have increased despite – or even because of – lockdown and remote working.³

If HR can impact an organization's output through a clear focus on employee experience and increasing engagement, that is something organizations cannot afford to ignore. As van Rooij outlines: "HR has previously been seen as a limiting factor in productivity. If you can make the experience of HR into something that gets people motivated and bringing joy to their work, they will be more engaged, and productivity will increase. HR can hugely contribute, and digitalization allows us to make that happen for remote working - and at scale."

Service, scale, speed: Think individuals and inclusion

In a consumer-grade world, people increasingly expect a tailored, personalized digital experience at work. So, it is no longer enough to create a one-size-fits-all approach. Employees need and want to be treated as individuals. And with areas like neurodiversity on the rise, it is increasingly important to support your people across a variety of different channels and formats.

HR HACK: Explore different options that
cater for the different ways in which
people search and consume HR data
and information. Gather insights from employee
listening tools and surveys to understand how
people access HR information in their flow of
work. Then - from knowledge bases to chatbots
work with your HR systems suppliers to
create more choice in your offering, so that the
employee experience becomes more intuitive
and inclusive based on individual preferences
throughout the organization.



HR is the engine room of enterprise productivity

HR leaders clearly believe their discipline should play a leading role in meshing the myriad factors that make a workforce productive. "There is always room for more engagement" explains Gabriel, "but giving our people the right tools and self-service solutions is definitely helping."

Our interviewees explained how HR efficiencies can transform the wider business output. Several believe there is some way to go before HR can truly champion productivity. Rasmussen states: "Most large organizations have been on a journey to leave behind administrative work and become a more strategic business partner. That requires organizational change and a shift in HR competence and mindset."

For Johnson & Johnson, productivity is an ongoing quest rather than a fixed destination: "We can never assume we have reached the pinnacle of productivity. The evolution of work, and the tools we use mean productivity and the way we measure it will also evolve. So, for example, I might think the productivity of our HR function is unbelievably good. But if I get some new systems and metrics, I might think it's not actually as good as I believed."

Meanwhile, Shikma sounds a cautionary note about balancing productivity demands with the welfare of workers who have had their world turned upside down by the pandemic. Reinforcing the importance of the employee experience and that people-centric vision for HR: "Our role is to find a way to promote productivity - but on the other hand, make sure people are taking care of themselves. They need to get away from their screen and allow time for social contact now that work is very different for many employees."

Service, scale, speed: think systems of work (not just HR systems)

Just as the boundaries have blurred between our personal and professional lives, especially in the last 18 months, so too have the distinctions between systems of work and HR systems. Whilst certain areas such as employment policies very obviously sit within HR, there are other aspects of work that can now be powered by HR technology, including file management, workforce planning and labor analytics.

HR HACK: People data has helped keep organizations running throughout the pandemic. From understanding sickness and absence; to planning for new customer demand; to figuring out who needs to access what, where and when. Exploring how these business-critical activities can be integrated with the rest of your HR activity can create productivity gains for HR itself as well as an employee experience that feels much more a part of the flow of work, than separate administrative tasks.



Defining productivity in a HR context

With all this in mind, we were keen to discover how HR leaders define productivity. The definitions vary, but at its core, it is about alignment of people and teams, underpinned by enabling technology and a HR function that listens to its people - and supports the broader business objectives. Overall, there was a strong feeling that the more HR itself can be productive, the better it can support the rest of the organization with its outputs and performance:

"HR productivity is the sum of experience, effectiveness and efficiency" ROLFERS

There is understandably much to reflect on in the context of the pandemic and its impacts, with the prevailing belief that "This crisis has changed HR" in so many different ways. Shikma explains, "Our role now is to make sure that people can and are able to do their work - not so much on the professional side, but the human side. Are they ok to work from home? Are they able to connect with their team? Are they getting enough support? Do they have contact with their manager? How you measure that is a really good question. Our results as a company will tell you we are still performing - but we must be careful it doesn't come at a price. In some ways it's easy to be productive now because we sit down at our home desks and don't stop to take a coffee break or talk to colleagues - so HR needs to promote the right kind of productivity in a different way to what we've done before." And this opinion is not held in contrast to other HR leaders, who agree that productivity needs this collaboration.

"You get productivity from the individual and also from the organization. You have to break it down from a human perspective as well as a business perspective. It is key to connect elements like HR operations with other business functions to get them working in harmony and increase the sum total of productivity across all of your people." EBELLE

But the fundamental role of technology is clear as Rasmussen surmises: "Productivity means having the right focus and priorities to ensure we spend time in the correct way. Technology can be a key driver and it's very much about creating good habits among colleagues to break down barriers to being productive."

Ultimately, HR has to harness the positive from the last 18 months and use that to power productivity in a people-centered way, says van Rooij. "Digitalization during COVID-19 meant we could continue working as before. Now the onus is on HR to continue with the business; remembering the human aspect of the future of work and how we get the best out of our employees in a post-pandemic context."

Service, scale, speed: Think moments that matter

The pandemic has shifted the balance at work so that what were previously considered 'basics' within an organization, can no longer be taken for granted. Our HR leaders highlighted how their teams have supported people in every aspect of their working lives, from logging on remotely, to digitally signing documents, to sourcing the right chairs and desks. Quite simply, every moment matters!

HR HACK: Removing old assumptions about
the information that people need is critical in a post-pandemic world. To truly support your employees in their everyday experience at work, whilst powering productivity, it is time to revisit the 'basics' and ensure everyone has instant access to answers or signposts to additional resources. Building (or modifying what you already have) from the bottom up now, will provide stronger foundations for the future.

Moving from the transactional to the transformational

Automation has afforded HR leaders the opportunity to prioritize serving and enabling their workforces. Employees and leaders expect convenience, speed, and accuracy from HR processes like never before, as we all enter a hybrid working era.

With today's workforce more dispersed than ever, HR teams are increasingly reliant on configurable solutions and online tools, from employee and inquiry handling; to HR document generation and management; and process automation; to effectively manage their people and workload. These powerful platforms combine to create digital-first, frictionless experiences that help propel productivity within the HR department and across the wider organization.

Handling more transactions means HR services must be delivered faster yet simultaneously remain aligned with wider-business strategies and goals. We keep hearing that digital HR has moved from "nice to have" to "must have." But how many truly transformative HR technology projects are really taking place? UKG⁴ research found most HR professionals think HR is a change agent fostering digital transformation, but few think it is the key driver:

- 58% say HR can be an agent of digital transformation but it needs help from others to achieve this.
- Only 21% say HR is the primary agent of digital transformation in their organization.

Further, a surprising proportion of HR professionals say they are a key decision maker when it comes to selecting new HR technology:

- Only 58% say HR has primary ownership when it comes to selecting new HR technology.
- The IT department has ownership of HR technology in 30% of cases, and the legal department has it in 9% of cases.

But with people's wellbeing and engagement firmly in the spotlight, now is a golden opportunity for HR leaders and their teams to truly own their technology to enable the next generation of employee experience initiatives - and the future of work worldwide.

4 A Global Survey of the Current State and Future of HR", UKG and HR.com, 2020

HR's three pillars of productivity

In seeking to prioritize the experiences and engagement that help power productivity, savvy HR leaders are using the three pillars of **service**, **scale and speed** to make their operations better, broader and faster.





is the ability to provide
- and personalize
where possible these services across
their departments
and geographies,
especially in the era of
hybrid working.



The HR leaders shared their perspectives on why each pillar is an important part of HR strategy and workforce productivity.

SERVICE

Employee-centric ethos: "I have a number of team members who are now certified human experience specialists. Whether setting up systems, or projects like implementing support lines or chat, they're always part of the project team. We start with the employee - the 'customer persona' - and design support around them." **VAN ROOLJ**

From feedback to action: "HR can help productivity by encouraging innovation and creativity. That only works if you're hearing the voice of your staff, who bring many ideas to the table." **HABIB**

Shared service design: "Context is key. It requires a true understanding of what the business is about, and what the dominant themes are to make sense of what you're trying to achieve with technology. And you need to go back to your users on a very frequent basis to learn from them, improving the journeys and experiences you are automating. If you don't do that, you will fail." **ROLFERS**

Data-driven progress: "I would love our HR to be more mature. To achieve this, we will invest in data quality and wider use of different technology functionality. With more shared services in place our organization could be even more productive, and more HR time spent on strategic support for our leaders." **RASMUSSEN**

Train your people: "If I look at my organization right now, I would say, yes, we've got the best tools on the planet. But all those things require one key element: that the people using those advanced systems are trained so they can leverage the benefit, which will increase our productivity levels." **EBELLE**

The rush to digital: "Digitalization means less work; for example, printing contracts wasn't always possible in the pandemic. All these little changes have led us to realize we were overdoing processes that didn't add value. We need to take out manual steps - that's going to continue for the next few years to come." **JOCHEMS**

Set strong KPIs: "We would definitely benefit from having an objectives dashboard for every department to measure against our goals." **RAMOS**

Switching to digital HR

Most HR department have either digitized a large portion of employee files or plan to in the future:

- 51% say they have digitized employees' files on a dedicated solution, while another 37% plan to do so.
- 51% percent also say they have implemented electronic signatures, while 36% plan to do so.

SCALE

Personalize where possible: "You must ensure the HR systems used make the employee experience more personal, rather than alienating anyone." **SHIKMA**

A culture of learning: "It's the role of HR to provide proper solutions but also to motivate our staff to be accountable for their own development - not count on their managers to do it for them." **HABIB**

HR's focus on employee experience needs to spread organization-wide: "HR is only one component of employee experience. Everyone has to make sure whoever comes through the door feels supported to bring their best selves to the organization and deliver." **EBELLE**

360-degree cultural change: "We started three years ago by saying we want to have a unified portal that is personalized for every person in the company." **VAN ROOLJ**

Scaling takes strategy: "We are global but have a small workforce. We need to somehow guarantee

operations for smaller countries. There is potential in scale [of services]. Our structure is currently decentralized; however, we constantly consider smart ways of working." **JANHONEN**

Boosting service adoption: "We want to become the best-connected brewery in the world – and that's not only our connections with customers, but also our employees. If we are serious about this mission, we need to make sure that the services and tools we use are being adopted and are truly helpful to serve anytime, anywhere." **ROLFERS**

Learning pandemic lessons: "We implemented some tools at the start of COVID-19 that helped people stay engaged. If it wasn't for the pandemic that [technology roll-out] may have taken much longer." **JOCHEMS**

HR's model approach: "HR plays a vital role in ensuring organizational objectives, strategy and big picture are cascading down through all departments. What we've done in HR should be applied in every team." **HABIB**





SPEED

All for agility: "When you have a resilient organization, and leadership ready to move fast with adaptability and flexibility, you can find solutions to any challenge immediately." **HABIB**

Not set in stone: "We can do still a better job of being more agile. During these times of disruptive technology and new competitors, goals need to be updated all the time. I think companies sometimes lose sight of exactly what they need to pursue but communicating simple and clear objectives is a great support to everyone." **RAMOS**

Faster connections: "After COVID-19, we will keep a lot of new systems in place because they've been very effective. People are more accessible to each other, so whereas in the past someone waited two weeks to get an appointment with a manager, it's so much easier now - this is one of the silver linings from the pandemic." **SHIKMA**

The capacity conundrum: "Service, scale and speed are crucial. But there's also another element to productivity: capacity. You can have the best systems at the fastest speed available, but if people don't have the capacity to deal with them, productivity won't dramatically increase." **EBELLE**

By getting service, scale and speed of delivery right, HR can become the home of employee experiences that drives engagement and delivers the productivity that organizations continue to strive for, all the while, building resilience and getting prepared for whatever comes next.



Driving productivity through digitilization

Powering productivity through HR tech

Most organizations have now put digital or automation initiatives in place to boost HR productivity.

- 38% say they've had such initiatives in place for less than two years.
- 36% say it's been the case for more than two years.
- Another 17% say they are in the planning phase of such initiatives.

With so many moving parts - and the added challenge of a permanently distributed workforce that will feature a greater proportion of freelancers, gig workers and short-term employees - it is impossible to execute effectively, or scale, without continuing the digital transformation of HR.

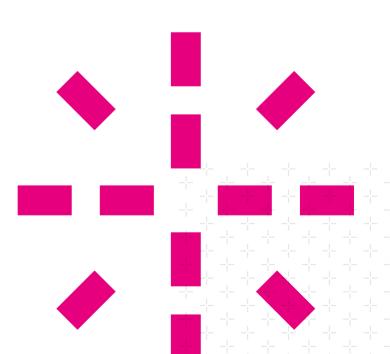
The experts observe many elements that are key to driving improved HR - and therefore enterprise-wide productivity. Chief among them are:

- Optimal technology selection
- Digital transformation of services
- Better data
- Leadership buy-in
- Upskilling HR teams

There's almost no part of the employee lifecycle that would not benefit from an improved experience which sustains engagement and boosts productivity. And these five core areas of focus can be harnessed by HR even before organizations fully emerge from the pandemic.

But there is no one size fits all approach here. What this research shows us is that HR must get under the skin of its organization and understand what will best support its performance and work to help its people. The last word is fittingly summed up by one of our HR leaders:

"We are moving to a new world, and new people systems will help us to be more effective. We are already experimenting, to simplify processes and get people answers more quickly and easily. As HR gets more complex and nuanced – especially in a post-pandemic world – the more we can automate to help our people and free HR up to focus on the bigger issues – the better." SHIKMA



UKG HR service delivery helps you to achieve this and more

HR teams today all rely on some form of digital assistance—whether in storing employee files, managing employee requests, answering questions, or any other item on their extensive list of daily duties.

More and more organisations are starting to realise the potential of HR Service Delivery solutions in maximising productivity gains. Tasks are simplified and manual elements are almost entirely removed, creating more relevant, meaningful, and connected work experiences for all people throughout their unique life-work journey. Empowered with this innovative technology, HR can better serve their employees and utilise analytics to understand and support people in a meaningful way.



HR HACKS and how we can help



Think frictionless HR

Explore how you can link enquiries and transactions to create a joined-up digitalized employee experience.



Consider how to provide choices that cater for individual preferences and ability in how HR data and information is searched and consumed. People increasingly expect a personalized experience, not a prescriptive one.

| Think systems of work, | not just HR systems

Processes and people should always be connected at the core of any organization, but there are usually gray areas around who owns responsibility for what. Rethinking the boundaries here as HR technology solutions are able to power so much more can redefine HR's role at the heart of the business.

| Think moments | that matter

> Basics aren't basics in a postpandemic world. Revisiting the support that HR provides people right across the employee lifecycle is the foundation of creating employee experiences that work and powering productivity in the future.

