

PeopleInsight

Employee Experience Trends for 2019

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How will we understand, engage with and reinvent employee experience in 2019? We've looked at the numbers, we've learned from thought-leaders and we've gathered insights from HR change-makers across the globe.

Whilst tech is all pervasive, its consequences mean we'll be looking much more closely at our personal skills and analogue experiences in 2019. These are the results: the most crucial and eye-opening trends in employee experience for the year to come.

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Employee experience gets first priority

Discussion of employee experience - the story of an employee's journey with a company, from job application through to leaving party - has become commonplace in 2018. It's not just what you tell your employees, it's the ways they see you helping them. It's what they read about you, what they hear you say to the world and what they tell others about you.

According to recent data, **40% of HR professionals^[1] see employee experience as their greatest challenge over the next year.** Second and third place goes to recruitment (37%) and retention (36%). Finding and retaining talent is also highlighted by the Worldcom Confidence Index^[2] as the single biggest issue we face going forward.

The relationship between experience, recruitment and retention is a symbiotic one. Solving the talent problem starts with getting employee experience where it should be (which is what People Insight have helped our clients do.). There is then a linear relationship with employee engagement – thus improving retention, performance and brand advocacy.

A photograph of four people standing in a grassy field, each holding a large white sign with a green checkmark. The people are dressed in casual business attire. The background shows a modern building and trees under a clear sky.

With great culture comes great employee experience

How do you create a great employee experience? Company culture is the place to start.

“Corporate culture is what energizes us or drains us, it motivates us or discourages us, it empowers us or it suffocates us. We all experience the corporate culture of our organizations every single day, whether it be positive or negative.”^[3]

The story of **organisations who’ve dramatically improved employee engagement in 2018 has been one of cultural evolution and sometimes revolution.** Shaping a great company culture starts with setting out what you want to achieve. Clearly defining the mission, purpose, core values and culture goals in relatable, human terms that employees can connect with and respond to.

Providing a framework that enables employees to engage, means they can bring their own cultural goals and priorities into the mix. The culture you end up with is not just top-down wishful thinking. Rather, it’s a joint effort that everyone can become invested in.

Over 2018, more and more of our clients here at People Insight have been putting their focus on creating great culture. We’ve been helping them create values and behavioural frameworks, and assessing culture change through, for example, regular pulse surveys. **Watch out for our series of culture case studies in 2019.** It’s a trend we expect to continue.



Digital enablers and analogue antidotes

What would you imagine is the most desirable workplace perk? No, it's not free booze on Fridays or extravagant Christmas parties. These days we're more interested in book clubs and knitting circles.^[4]

Give it a moment's thought and it makes perfect sense. We live in a world where tech makes our lives better in myriad ways. We can work faster, harder and smarter. The internet is our gateway to a world of AI enabled knowledge, products, experiences and services which enthrall, enable and empower us.

But doesn't it all just get a bit exhausting at times?

As our eyes glaze over in front of all those screens, we start to yearn for physical, tangible, offline experiences. We want a chance to move more slowly, to process more organically. We delight in the things we can make with our hands. Even better, we get a chance to engage with those around us in different and perhaps more meaningful ways.

Start taking the team away from the tech once in a while. It's a great chance to nurture well-being by connecting and cooperating in ways we might have forgotten.



Nimble learning in the face of change

This time last year, we were already talking about VUCA. In 2019, “volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity” is a daily reality. Constant anticipation of change and disruption is hard-coded into us. Does that mean we know how to handle it?

It’s vital to adapt to change in disrupted industries, but adapting requires learning new skills. It also **requires employees to have a mindset of embracing the micro-learning^[5] tendencies** we so commonly use in our personal lives; learning how to make slime for your kids or fix a coffee machine on a YouTube video.

The goal is to provide integrated, accessible solutions that don’t take us out of our workflow, so we should be enabled to easily access knowledge within our natural habitat. We need peer-made informal how-to videos, hackathons, and web tutorials to help us find fast answers for the problems that sit right in front of us.

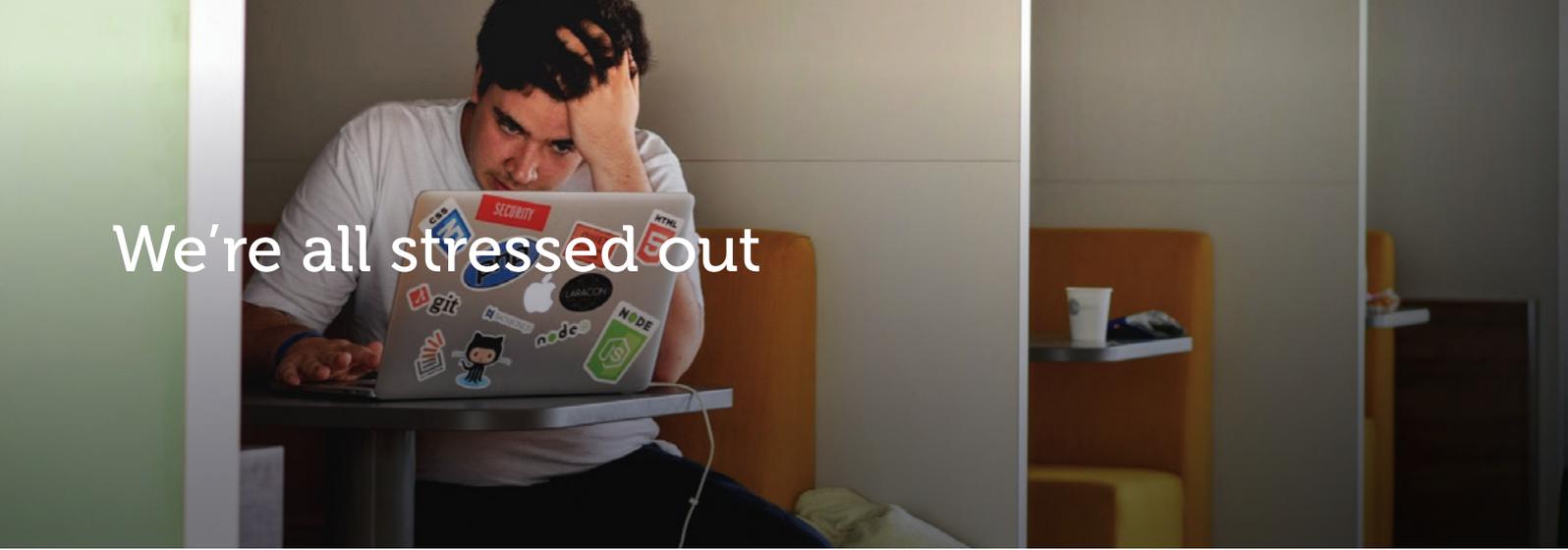


The soft skills gap widens

What once were deemed 'soft skills', such as emotional intelligence, collaboration and negotiation were rated as a 'critical priority' by 90% of respondents to a 2016 Deloitte survey.^[6]

They are a critical priority for fostering employee retention and building a meaningful culture (which we ascertained above, as the greatest challenge for HR professionals over the next year.)

Rather than the soft skills gap narrowing since 2016, there is concern that it is widening with the technologically savvy but soft-skill-poor Gen Z employees entering the workforce. They've endlessly got their 'face in their phone' but are not building the subtleties and complexities of human relationships. This requires great line management, coaching, role modelling behaviour to help our Gen Zs make judgements and communicate empathetically.



We're all stressed out

All the change, learning gaps and workplace performance pressures are stressing us out. According to a recent study, it's as bad as two-thirds of workers saying they have poor or below average mental wellbeing.^[7]

Whilst focusing on wellbeing, healthy eating and exercise has been a popular trend for the last few years, our heavy workloads are frustrating our abilities to achieve a balanced life. Earlier this year Arianna Huffington^[8] wrote Elon Musk an open letter. We'd all heard how the Tesla boss hadn't left his factory in days and some bizarre behaviour had been linked to the stress he was under. Arianna told him how much she supported his visionary work, but also warned him of what a bad role model he was being;

"You're demonstrating a wildly outdated, anti-scientific and horribly inefficient way of using human energy. Tesla and the world ... would be better off if you regularly built in time to refuel, recharge and reconnect with your exceptional reserves of creativity and your power to innovate. Working 120-hour weeks doesn't leverage your unique qualities, it wastes them."

So what can leaders do? Workplace pressures can only be alleviated from the top. It's no good saying you support wellbeing without walking the talk. Get feedback on your performance (we'd suggest our 360 feedback and leadership development rather than Arianna's approach.). Be a role model: have walking meetings, take 10 minutes out for meditation and an actual lunch break, visibly say no in favour of getting home for the kid's performance or flex your day to suit. *You'll probably be more efficient and achieve no less.*

Find out what the time stealers are and try to fix them. Listen to your people. People Insight work with our clients on wellbeing surveys and burnout risk indicators to give leaders the insight into what can be done to help. Your desire to help can be seen as a sign of how much you value your people, which of course is crucial when it comes to retaining talent.^[9]



Personalised and flexible gets fair and equitable

When it comes to employee experience, there's no one size fits all. We're all motivated by different desires, we each have unique needs and circumstances. When it comes to our working environment and the benefits it offers, we have wildly different preferences.

Benefits which sound appealing to everyone might not be the best solution in all cases. Take remote working,^[10] for example. It's often a lifeline for a busy single parent. For an unsure recent graduate, it might only make them feel more disconnected. Vouchers for fast food or free yoga may appeal to very different characters.

The challenge: how to offer personalised employee experiences in a fair and equitable way that makes everyone feel included? We've done some fascinating diversity & inclusion work this year to unearth the hidden factors that impact inclusiveness for some clients. They've been able to overcome these issues, making a big difference to the culture.

Another answer might be to **segment employees in new, more personal ways**. Instead of trying to group employees by department or demographic, we can group them according to their habits or values. It's already happening at companies like Virgin Trains and Starbucks.^[11] We may all have different needs, but if you dig right down to the core of what drives us, you'll find a lot of commonalities. You just have to know which way to dig.

A red toy robot with yellow eyes and antennae stands on a desk. In the background, there is a white laptop, a white mug, and a pen holder with several pens. The scene is brightly lit, suggesting an office environment.

Handling HR pain points with AI

AI has the potential to transform the way we recruit, and for 63% of us it's already doing so. Even more crucially, 69% of us believe it helps us find better-quality candidates.^[12]

AI is proving crucial for data-driven HR projects. It enables us to collate and analyse diverse data sources with ease, giving us an in-depth understanding of key variables relating to every employee and candidate.

There's so much more we can do with AI, though. We can automate time-consuming, repetitive tasks like scheduling interviews, responding to emails and even screening CVs. You might wonder if AI can do that the way it should be done. Can it really grasp the fundamentals of a person, their strengths and weaknesses? Actually, AI might do it even better^[13]. It comes with none of the unconscious bias which so often holds us back in hiring.

When candidates get a fair shot, and when they're met with a streamlined, ultra-efficient communication process, it enhances their experience from the get-go. While they're interfacing with chatbots to track their applications, HR professionals have time to focus on those aspects of the job which AI will never replace: convincing candidates of a company's strengths in relatable, human terms.



Always available isn't always better

Sometimes, **the office feels like the last place to get work done.** Someone is always pinging you or dropping by your desk or having a conversation over your head.

Meetings disrupt your workflow and carry on far too long. Even worse are those pointless meetings where nothing actually gets decided. You might want to leave it at the door when you get home, but there is your phone, still buzzing away with emails and LinkedIn notifications. Still, the expectation is there that you should always be available, always on. Otherwise, you might be branded anti-social, anti-collaborative or even unproductive. Consider the toll that can take on your mental health.^[14]

In 2019, we expect to see a turning of the tide. Employers are starting to understand the need for time alone to focus, without all those constant disruptions. Companies like Macy's in the US are leading the way by reducing unnecessary meetings and increasing focus time.^[15] Empathetic office design also plays a huge part. 'Flexible office space' will account for 30 per cent of corporate portfolios by 2030.^[16] Companies like Airbnb^[17] are purposefully creating spaces where employees can choose to be near others or can choose to work alone in quiet. As Rebecca Ruggles, lead interior designer for Airbnb puts it:

"We don't tell people where they work; instead we create cultural moments."

"Creating cultural moments" might be the perfect way to describe employee experience in 2019. Our focus this year is on learning and understanding, empathising and empowering. We're building value through connection, as we realise that working better only works when you're living better.

References and more on this topic:

- [1] [Employee engagement tops polls are HR's biggest challenge in 2019](#)
- [2] [The Worldcom Confidence Index 2018](#)
- [3] [How Corporate Culture Impacts The Employee Experience](#)
- [4] [Knitting and book clubs top the list of the most in demand workplace perks](#)
- [5] [How Micro Learning is Transforming Workforce Efficiency](#)
- [6] [Human Capital Trends](#)
- [7] [The Stress Management Society](#)
- [8] [An open letter to Elon Musk](#)
- [9] [You're Not Losing Employees Because They're Disloyal, But Because You Are](#)
- [10] [Is it time to rethink remote working?](#)
- [11] [Create MY employee experience](#)
- [12] [Korn Ferry Global Survey: Artificial Intelligence \(AI\) Reshaping the Role of the Recruiter](#)
- [13] [Can Artificial Intelligence Eliminate Bias in Hiring?](#)
- [14] [Revealed: How Britain's always-on culture is really affecting employees](#)
- [15] [Predictions 2019: Employee Experience Moves to Center Stage](#)
- [16] [Disruption or Distraction, JLL report of flexible working](#)
- [17] [How Airbnb Approaches Office Design Around the Globe](#)

We'd love to talk

To find out how People Insight can help you evaluate and improve your employee experience and culture in 2019, contact us at:

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