

The evolving role of HR and how to adapt





While the dust may be settling on the global pandemic and things may be returning to some kind of normality, **there's no doubt that the events of the past two years have made a lasting impression.** For workplaces in particular, things may never be as they once were. Whether it's the rise of hybrid working models, the greater reliance on technology as an enabler, or the changing needs of employees, **work is now a rather different environment than it was pre-2020.**



You have worked wonders over the past two years to offer your employees the best support, but they may now have additional needs. As we settle into new operating models, it may be time to review and update your strategy. So, to help guide you through this unknown time and enable you to maximise the support you give your employees both now and in future, we've put together this guide.

Read on to see how the people function has been affected and how you can best prepare for the months and years ahead.





Hybrid working needs flexible strategies

1



58% of Irish employees
say that the **most important**
benefit to them is having
flexible working hours/days.¹



For many, a hybrid working model will become the new normal – or at least more prevalent than before Covid. The outcome of this change in working practise is that employees are no longer operating from the same location and at set times. Flexibility is rapidly rising up the list of employee ‘wants’ when speaking to new employers, and businesses are having to comply. Employees can now work from a variety of locations and at times that best suit their lifestyle and work-life balance. They are using the technology that best meets their unique needs and they have new and different requirements from their employers.

What this means for the people function in an organisation is that the one-size-fits-all methodologies of the past will no longer work. Going forward, HR will need to work directly with employees to identify the best strategies. Whilst the concept of hybrid working has been high on the agenda for the last 2 years, businesses are only now starting to implement it fully, and it’s a new territory for many in the people function. So, it really is test and learn for everyone. With this in mind, you’ll need to take time to figure out what works for everyone and what support systems will fit around your employees’ personal lifestyles by communicating with your team individually – even if this means pivoting your approach where necessary. **The future of the workplace is flexibility, and you need to be equally as agile to continue giving the great level of support you do.**



The battleground of recruitment and retention

2



Overall, job vacancies in Ireland were

86% higher in the final quarter of 2021

than the same period in 2020 and

43% higher than pre-pandemic levels.²

As we emerged from lockdowns and social restrictions, many employees across Ireland (and the world) realised that the new hybrid and remote working structures meant that they could work from anywhere, for anyone. Now termed ‘the great resignation’, people are changing jobs at a rate rarely seen. This spree of activity hasn’t just affected employees, but employers are reacting too, with the **hiring outlook in Ireland up 32% so far in 2022³ – the biggest hiring spree in 15 years.**

Whilst we’d like to think of this as just a knee-jerk reaction, it appears to be a trend that is going to continue for some time yet. The employee market is awash with highly capable applicants and lots of jobs to choose from. What this means is you have a difficult task on your hands... retaining your best employees and attracting the right talent to replace the ones you can’t.

Recruitment and retention have always formed part of the HR function, but right now, you may need to increase your emphasis on it. This means identifying exactly what employees are looking for (some of which we’ll cover in this guide) and potentially amending your offering in

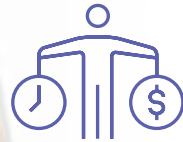
accordance, to ensure that each person feels supported, happy and motivated in their job role. It’s important for you to show these applicants that you are the company to work for – as opposed to the other organisations looking to capture their talent. If you haven’t reviewed your benefits package or salary ranges in a while, then now would be the perfect time. With so much power in the hands of the applicants, **your responsibilities now include being a salesperson on behalf of your business, and selling your offering well.**

It’s important to remember though, that whilst you promote your organisation to applicants, other businesses could be doing the same to the best members of your team. So, you need to fight the battle on two fronts – do what you can to keep your best employees, and show new employees why you are the company to work for. If you are amending your employment offering to meet the needs of new applicants i.e., increased flexibility, be sure to offer these same benefits to your existing employees – or some other company will.



Managing the younger workforce

3



52% of Irish Gen Zs

made choices over the types of work they'd do and the organizations they're willing to work for **based on their personal beliefs/ethics.**⁴

With everything that's happened since 2020, it can be easy to forget that with each day that passes, more members of Generation-Z (born 1997-2012) join the workforce. Why should this matter? Well, whereas other generations of workers were typically content to do their jobs and 'comply' with company strategies and values, Gen-Z are a little more vocal. **Workers in this age group have specific needs and requirements that they want to see fulfilled by their employers – and they expect nothing less.**

They don't want to be told what the company's strategy and goals are, they want to be part of the discussions and planning events. A saving grace though, is that once these individuals do have their say, they are fully prepared to work endlessly to achieve the desired results. As your number of Gen-Z

employees grows, it's worth noting that these workers are best described as 'ethical'. They care deeply about the planet, the environment and businesses' impact on both of these things. They expect their employers to not only care about their global impact but expect to see initiatives in place to support these targets. So, if you have any of these initiatives in place in your business – make sure you promote them widely. In addition, inclusivity is a hot topic for Gen-Z workers – and this doesn't just mean employing a diverse group of people. Gen-Z expects every employee to have a voice and be heard equally across the business (at all levels), so it's vital you have these mechanisms in place too. What's more, they place great value on transparency and honesty in the workplace. While many organisations say these are key values for them, Gen-Z will expect to see them in action – so be prepared to reconsider some of your internal communications. Why is all this important you may ask. Well, as mentioned previously, it's an employees' market out there, so if you don't provide what they need, they'll simply apply to an organisation that does.



Prioritise employee mental health

4

More than 80% of people

felt a lower level of social connectedness as a result of the pandemic, and **30% of people reported worsening mental health.**⁵



The pandemic placed a great burden on people's mental health. From stress and anxiety to loneliness and depression, the impact of the crisis is expected to live on for months, even years to come. While many employees may 'bounce back' as they find their new routines, many others may not be so lucky. As a HR leader, you have likely always done all you can to support the mental health of your employees – from employee assistance programmes to business initiatives. However, in this new hybrid and remote working model, your existing solutions may no longer be able to meet the needs of your employees.

The goal of any good mental health support programme was always to provide assistance to employees even when they aren't at work i.e., 24/7 phone support.

This is still the case, but now you also have to take into account the fact that your employees may not be in the office for days at a time, they may be working 'unsocial hours' and, while some employees may love working from home, others could feel isolated or lonely. Whilst having employees back in the office at least some of the time will enable people managers to spot employees needing help, it won't always be this simple. What this means is that the people function of a business not only needs to review the level of assistance and care they give to their employees these days, but how the existence of this support is broadcast to employees and how the services are accessed.

It's safe to say that digital tools are the new baseline, and these should very much form the foundation of your offering. However, while digital tools such as EAP apps offer easier access, some employees may benefit from treatment such as in-person counselling, cognitive behavioural therapy, or medication. There is one thing to bear in mind throughout all of this... the mental health of your employees is paramount and the support you give is not something that should be experimented with. Whatever your people need, you can assist them in taking the right approach and be confident that they will have access to useful tools that will positively impact their mental and physical health and wellbeing. **So, if you are in any doubt about the level of care you provide both now and in future, be sure to seek the guidance of external experts in this field.**



Supporting your people managers

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Training for managers in managing distributed teams **will be a major enabler** in the successful implementation of remote work policies.⁶



It's true that the changing workplace model has had an impact on every employee throughout the business – whether positive or otherwise. However, some of your employees have greater responsibilities in the aftermath than others. We are speaking of course about people managers. These individuals are the keystone in every business, and their post-covid duties now look quite different. Typically, managers will be guided by your organisation's values, goals, targets and policies. **But do you have a hybrid working policy? What should your managers be doing to best support and assist your employees when they are not in the office?**

As mentioned previously, hybrid working is uncharted territory for a lot of us. But if there is one group that needs clear direction more than any other, it's your people managers. Start by creating the necessary policies and procedures for this new working model. From here, you can look at knowledge gaps or required upskilling that will help your managers perform better. Whether it's spotting deterioration in remote colleague's mental health, or inspiring unity in a team that works in separate locations, there is going to be lots of questions, concerns and challenges for these members of your team – and they will need your help. To ensure that you are helping them as best you can (and therefore the wider business), expect to be closely assisting your people managers for at least the next six to twelve months.

Your guide to a healthier future

There's no denying that we are going through a period of transition, meaning disruption to both you and your employees never feels too far away. But don't fret, you are not alone. At Irish Life Health, we are here to guide you through all the twists and turns that the future of HR may throw at you. We are more than a health insurer – we're committed to supporting and guiding you and your employees to a healthier future. With one-to-one case management, the right mix of virtual and in-person care and more ways than ever to improve mental and physical wellbeing, we'll support you in helping your employees stay healthy... **no matter where they are, or how they choose to work.**

Irish Life Health dac is regulated by the Central Bank of Ireland.

**Professional counselling is provided through Lifeworks by Morneau Shepell and is available to age 16+. Virtual Physiotherapy and Virtual Dietician services are provided by Spectrum Health. Members must be aged 18+. Digital Doctor service provided by Health Hero. Nurse on Call provided by Healix Medical Partnership LLP. General terms and conditions apply, see your Table of Cover and Membership Handbook for details of exactly what's covered. Virtual Physio and Virtual Dietician have separate terms and conditions and they can be viewed [here](#).*

Sources:

¹ Irish Life Health, Red C Research Omnibus, October 2021 | ²businessworld.ie | ³The Irish Times
⁴www2.deloitte.com | ⁵The Irish Times | ⁶DETE



To find out more about how Irish Life Health can guide you through this period of change visit us at:

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