



The Future of Talent

An exploration of purpose driven leadership, the globalisation of talent, talent magnetism and the future of diverse and inclusive workspaces.

MBNI

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Author Profiles



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Executive Summary

The Future of Talent explores how the past 18 months have reshaped the way talent is thinking, what's important to consider as employers of this talent and how and why organisations need to adapt to attract and retain the best talent in the marketplace.

Many things have changed in the world since 2020 and, for data and technology talent, these changes mean that their skills are in higher demand than ever and they have greater flexibility, opportunity and negotiating positions than they've seen before.

The other side of this, and the bad news for employers, is that more than 70% of data scientists and analysts say they are open to new positions if they come their way. It's simple supply and demand and the supply is in huge demand.

For businesses like yours, it means it's beyond time to start thinking about how you're going to attract and retain talent and how you'll secure your organisation as one of the best places to work in the data and technology industries.

The Future of Talent is your guide to attracting the best people to your organisation through leading with purpose, understanding how to leverage the globalisation of talent, adopting strategies that make your organisation attractive and preparing for a more diverse workforce.

Leading with Purpose

From what we see in the market, it's more important than ever to lead with purpose. The technology and data industries are full of people who have realised they can work for almost any business of their choosing and those people are looking to connect, on a purpose level, with businesses, their leaders, and the work those businesses are doing.

Purpose in business can come in a variety of expressions. From charitable support to sustainable business, to showing your team how their work adds value to the business and its people, to giving them a voice in how the business directs and thinks about its external purpose driven activities.

Globalisation of Talent

Talent is more global than ever. Work from home has been on everyone's mind but people accessing the world's best talent are looking further afield to places like Europe and North America. They are thinking about how to bring the benefits of a global talent base into their businesses.

Organisations can no longer afford to ignore this if they want to be competitive at home and abroad. It's a crucial part of the future workforce planning.

Talent Magnetism

Data and technology talent is in high demand and responsibility is shifting firmly to businesses to make themselves more appealing, attract the right talent and, most importantly, retain that talent.

The data and technology communities are tight knit and your business' reputation for how it treats talent will precede it in every part of the community. Think carefully about the messaging you're putting out there and the experience your employees and applicants are having.

Diversity and Inclusion

Talent pools are increasingly diverse, but this isn't necessarily reflected in boardrooms, at C-Suite level and on the front lines.

This is because of a lack of active, purposeful, inclusion. For hiring managers and executives, that means two things: the first is to stop hiring people that look like you, think like you and have the same socialisation and experience as you. The second is building a place where those people are included, welcomed and safe.

Diversity and inclusion walk hand in hand. People should be encouraged, and able, to bring their full and authentic selves to their work and be safe in the knowledge that that won't lead to hostility and, if it does, that they'll be supported and believed.

“ Stop hiring people that look like you, think like you and have the same socialisation and experience as you. ”



Introduction

The Future of Talent, authored by members of the MBN Solutions leadership team, looks at how the needs and expectations of talent in the data and technology industries is changing, what businesses need to be aware of and how they can respond to these changes.

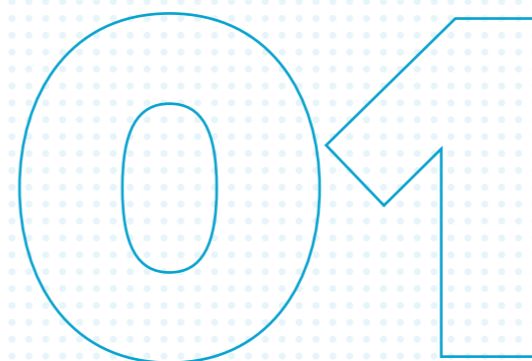
Exploring leadership, globalisation of talent, talent magnetism and diversity and inclusion, The Future of Talent aims to give hiring managers and C-Suite executives insights into the future of the workforce and implementable advice for preparing for this new future.

MBN Solutions holds an important place in the data and technology industries. We work with organisations and leading talent across the UK and Europe and are one of few specialist organisations that are on the front lines and talking with people from CTO level through to qualifying graduates. Our place in the market gives us a unique perspective on the industry, its challenges, and the plentiful opportunities for businesses as the future of talent begins to take shape.

Our thinking on globalisation of talent, talent magnetism and diversity and inclusion reflects what we see in the market as businesses have adapted through the disruptions of 2020 and begun to settle into the new ways of working in 2021.

The four parts of this whitepaper are designed to give you some of the answers, including practical and implementable solutions to help begin your move to a more diverse and inclusive team, a truly global workforce and leading with purpose.

Michael Young
Chief Executive Officer
MBN Solutions



Leading with Purpose: Transforming Your Business for the Future of Talent

Michael Young

The past eighteen months have created greater mobility in the technology and data industries. The decentralisation of work in this space has given people a freedom that many of them previously lacked. The freedom to work remotely, full time, for companies that champion causes they believe in.

That's why it's more important than ever for businesses to be led with purpose. Some businesses will have it ingrained already and others will be looking to pivot - to add purpose to their work - through supporting their communities.

For those pivoting, taking the time to find what's important and thinking about how you can invite your team along for the journey will help you navigate and succeed at the pivot.

Keep in mind that successful cultural change takes time and requires a careful balance of retaining what's important from your team's past and embracing the process of adapting to a purpose driven future (there may be bumps in the road).

At MBN, people are my passion and the people who join us all have this purpose in common. They want to help people lead better lives. Whatever your business might be, if you lead with purpose and invest in something important to you, your team will follow you, especially if you give them skin in the game.

Purpose in Work is More Important than Ever

Purpose hasn't only come to the forefront in business. Nearly two thirds of employees say the pandemic has caused them to reflect on their purpose in life and that there's a disconnect in the alignment of purpose between executives and those on the business frontlines.

That disconnect is stark. Eighty-five percent of executives say that 'they can live their purpose in their day-to-day work', whereas that same number of frontline workers and managers don't think they can.

What's most interesting, and where we should all be focussing, is that when people get the purpose they want from their work, they report a range of better outcomes at work and at home. People that have purpose in their work are happier overall. Happier employees make for better businesses.

This can be simpler than it seems.

Most people want a sense of purpose in their work, a vision of how they're making the world a better place. The value of a sense of purpose, relative to pay and other rewards, rises among younger team members.

In fact:

- 70% of employees are more likely to choose to work at a company with a strong environmental agenda than those without
- 27% of employees are more likely to stay at a company if it has a higher purpose than profits.

Risk Overcommunicating

As purpose takes a more prominent space in the reasons people join and leave companies, it's time for businesses to think about how they will respond to the growing demand for fairness and purpose in work.

In these moments, the value of clear and frequent communication can't be overlooked. Just as this has proven so critical during adapting to remote working, purpose driven leadership requires leaders at all levels of the businesses to clearly communicate their organisation's purpose, how it's applied and what it means for their teams.

This communication needs to be two-way if your teams are going to fully buy-in to the company's purpose. They will want to know why something is happening and what that means for them and the community and it's important that executives can answer those questions openly and honestly.

Sustaining that two-way communication throughout the pivot (or bringing it more to the fore if you're already purpose driven) is crucial to success, especially with the expected continuation of remote working. It's too easy for people to feel like they've become disconnected. Without ensuring all your team has clarity of purpose and its impacts on the wider community, you risk being left behind by highly skilled and mobile talent that can quickly and easily find businesses that align more closely with their values.

One of the biggest changes of the past year, and continuing trends into the future, is this newfound mobility. It's easier than ever for people to join organisations they care about so business leaders need to be mindful of highlighting their purpose not only through the recruitment process but through the lifecycle of their teams.

It's Time to Think about the Journey Ahead

There is no disguising that this journey will be challenging. It can mean being willing to make tough decisions, including prioritising alignment with your purpose even if it requires a reduction in short term profit.

So, how should you prepare for this transition?

Much of what's talked about in purpose driven leadership focusses on the motivating vision from the leader, helping people connect the purpose of the company to the work they're doing. It's about providing two-way communication, empathy, authenticity and integrity. Making sure that we, all of us, walk the talk and listen to the causes that matter to the people that make our businesses run.

I've been leading MBN for almost twenty years and these are some of the biggest lessons I've learned about leadership.

For leaders:

- Don't underestimate the power of empathy.
- Align your purpose with the needs of your customers.
- Draw the lines between your purpose and how it reflects your business to customers and business partners.
- Be transparent with your teams and your customers, talk about how your purpose has helped people.
- Be realistic about how your purpose invites new ways of working and engaging people.
- Communicate your purpose to people joining your organisation through job descriptions and hiring decisions to attract like-minded people.
- On a companywide and individual basis, show your employees how their work adds value to the organisation and encompasses the organisation's purpose.

For the entire organisation:

- Authenticity is more important than ever. People know when you're faking it.
- Have conversations about the organisation's purpose and create collaborative and safe places so people can reflect on what the purpose means to them.
- Customers and team members will be drawn to your purpose, foster communities and connections to rally others.
- Remember that your customers are people, and your work can (and does) matter to them.
- Use data to track and talk about the positive impact of your organisation.

Building a Future Based on Purpose

I encourage you to take this challenge seriously. If you are a business leader, consider the risks of not changing. As your customers, employees and future talent prospects all filter organisations based on their values, it's time to think deeply about your purpose and how it's communicated to all of your stakeholders.

Be ready for some tough conversations. Today's greater focus on values and purpose has prompted discomfort in many teams and they should feel able to raise the topic. A call for a clearer purpose in our work can come from any part of an organisation. I encourage you to create safe spaces and informal gatherings to focus on purpose and demonstrate your willingness to listen and learn. Find the time to join your teams on the frontlines to see how they'd like to bring purpose to their work. It might just identify the key to attracting and retaining the talent you need in future.

“ Be ready for some tough conversations. Today's greater focus on values and purpose has prompted discomfort in many teams and they should feel able to raise the topic. ”

02

The Acceleration in Talent Globalisation and Future Trends

Paul Forrest

Digital transformation promised organisations an opportunity to shake up the way they work and manage talent across remote working, hiring and business growth.

That promise was slow to come to fruition across businesses of all sizes, with many seeing it as an unnecessarily complicated step in the business and workforce management process.

However, as we all know, the ongoing public health crisis has reshaped talent globalisation, normalising many of the remote working and digital transformation promises that hadn't come to fruition.

Acceleration in full remote working and hiring, flexible working and business growth across territories have been successful by leveraging technology across video conferencing, instant messaging and remote project management in ways that it never has before.

For many businesses, these changes are permanent with many reporting they will not require their workforce to operate full time from the office. Now that remote working, well into its second year, has become normalised across the technology and data industries, people are seeing the benefits of reduced commuting and better work-life balance.

I suspect, in the business world, this will go down in history as one of the strongest demonstrations of the extraordinary human capacity for adaptability. People across the world have been exceptionally productive, despite the circumstances.

Better For Your Team, Better For You

Remote work of all kinds is much broader than our current familiarity with home working. While some may be working from their sofa or spare room, others are setting up in cafes, shared spaces or are working from across Europe.

As much as it is about anything, remote work is about trusting your teams to get their work done and empowering them to make decisions. An empowered remote team is as productive – if not more productive – than an office-based team.

There's no reason that it's not here to stay. It's what people want to do, and the technology can help us do it well, so, what's the new business as usual model?

A Strategy to Attract the Best Talent

Attracting people who want to work in a flexible environment has long been pursued as part of inclusion and diversity strategies. However, it is also a hugely attractive part of an employment proposition for many who enjoy working in this model from all backgrounds and demographics. With up to half of many workforces having the opportunity to work remotely at least one day a week, any organisation that doesn't already offer it as an option is lagging behind.

Add into the mix the benefit of accessing resource globally and a business can hire from almost anywhere. People can work from around the corner, another city or even from overseas where there may be fewer challenges within the domestic labour market. Geography is no longer a barrier to tapping into talent and creating a truly diverse workforce.

Enhanced Work-Life Balance

Remote working is inextricably linked to flexible working. Even if people don't have much choice over the hours they work, the lack of commute creates well received extra time. This flexibility is particularly attractive to Millennials, who will make up about three quarters of the global workforce by 2025.

Research also shows that having the option to work from home is the highest priority for this age group. What this means is that it should be a priority with companies that want to attract them and should form part of the employment proposition to attract the best talent.

Enhanced Productivity

Even before Covid-19, remote working had been proven to boost employee productivity across a variety of job roles. Various academic studies have shown that functions such as contact centres have delivered sizeable improvements in productivity, by as much as 13%.

Enhanced Employee Engagement

Perhaps counter-intuitively, much research suggests that staff who work remotely have higher levels of engagement than those who don't. This is despite concerns that isolation risks may reduce engagement. The actual effect appears to be that it changes the style of engagement and concentrates it into more directly productive time with less employee-bonding time.

Reduced Physical Infrastructure Costs

For many businesses, office costs and the space itself are a huge expense. With a larger proportion of teams working remotely, it's possible to reduce these costs dramatically. For example, one major accounting firm has indicated that it could save up to 35% of its office lease costs per annum in one UK city alone.

Navigating Brexit for a Global Talent Force

For those seeking talent from within the EU, the competitiveness of the talent marketplace for in-demand skills, potentially compounded by further reductions in availability now that free movement across the EU has ended, means workforce planning and development should become a priority.

The loss of the right to free movement is likely to be regarded as negative to businesses previously accessing highly skilled talent from within the EU and the introduction of a points-based visa scheme, just like elsewhere in the world, can seemingly add further complications to the remote-hiring process.

However, allowing such resource to remain living in the EU and working in the UK using a remote working model may well yield the desired outcome and is fast becoming a popular option.

Sponsor your EU (or any non-UK) Worker

The points-based immigration system is not necessarily a problem. Any candidate that speaks a good level of English and is offered a job paying more than £25,600, for which they must be educated to A-level standard or above, will be eligible for the skilled migrant route.

Consider that most experienced roles in data science and technology will attract salaries of £45,000 and upwards, and will normally be attractive to well educated professionals, these thresholds are no real barrier.

So, the answer here is to become a visa sponsor and the process is based around a straightforward application that whilst not massively expensive (the cost of the license is £536 for small companies and £1476 for large companies), will pay for itself in time if your hires work out (additionally, for each sponsored worker you hire you will need to issue a certificate of sponsorship at £199 per certificate - workers from some European countries can be issued certificates without charge).

Hire Your Staff Member Remotely

If that doesn't sound too attractive you can avoid this process by hiring the EU employee in their own country by using an employer of record (EOR). With this approach, you can avoid bringing the employee to the UK and sponsoring a work permit and allow them to work remotely for your business from their home or a co-working office.

The EOR becomes the legal employer in the staff member's country and handles all parts of employment administration such as running payroll and withholding taxes. You simply pay the remuneration each month to the EOR for disbursement via their payroll run. The EOR takes the responsibility to make sure that you're in compliance with all of the foreign (local to employee) country's employment regulations, and your business would have no obligations in the UK for the employee.

Finally, you could explore the extent to which the Tech Nation Global Talent visa may help. The Tech Nation Visa enables the brightest and best tech talent from around the world to come and work in the UK's digital technology sector, contributing cutting-edge expertise, creativity and innovation to maintaining the UK's position at the forefront of the global digital economy.

The last year or so has been a period of change for the world at large, but now may be the ideal time to explore the prospect of opening the door to a virtual workforce.

“ Remote working is inextricably linked to flexible working. Even if people don't have much choice over the hours they work, the lack of commute creates well received extra time. ”



03

Why You Need to Think about Talent Magnetism

Rob Huggins

Every organisation has an employment brand. Similar to the company's brand and how it's reflected in the market, your employment brand is how potential talent perceives your business and is made up of the things you say about yourself and the experience of previous and current talent.

What is Talent Magnetism?

Talent Magnetism is about ensuring your employment brand is as strong as it can be.

It's a set of interrelated processes and factors, including company culture and behaviours that, when combined, make an organisation an employer of choice among talent.

It extends beyond the interview process and rewards package to many elements of the organisational landscape. From Glassdoor reviews of the selection process and reward package right through to how (and when) feedback is delivered after interviews and the way the organisation has managed and navigated the work from anywhere model.

In what recruiters refer to as candidate-driven markets (markets where there are more roles to fill than available talent) like data and technology, it's important for organisations to look to constantly enhance their Talent Magnetism.

Why is Talent Magnetism Important?

The growth in demand for data and technological talent has been nothing short of astronomical in recent years. This has led to a candidate-driven market which, as technology continues to progress across automation, AI and Internet of Things, shows no signs of slowing down.

The competitive nature of candidate-driven markets requires businesses to think more actively and pragmatically about their talent magnetism. Organisations that are seen as employers of choice will have a huge advantage over their competition. In the same way that brand perception, loyalty, equity and NPS score are important for an organisation's relationship with its customers, Talent Magnetism will be equally important for these scarce talent pools and where they choose to work.

The truth of it is, even if an organisation has the best strategy and market proposition, it won't succeed if the best people don't want to work there.

What does Good Talent Magnetism Look Like During the Hiring Process?

Building Talent Magnetism and employment brand doesn't have to be complex. Here are some of the basics that every organisation should get right to ensure they're competitive:

- **Job Analysis** – Is the role well defined, 100% required by the organisation and are all parameters stakeholder aligned and approved?
- **Talent Pools** – Are all potential talent pools explored, including academic, employee networks, community events and alumni or are you fishing in the same stale pond as everyone else?
- **Marketing and Advertising** – Is your brand reflected properly during the recruitment process including accurate and appealing messaging, inclusivity and diversity statements and is it being promoted in the right places?
- **Selection** – Are the right people in the room to make hiring decisions quickly and is the selection process reflective of the tasks required for the role? How can you streamline this process?
- **Candidate Experience** – Is the same amount of value attached to the experience of your candidates as to the experience of your customers, who owns that and how is it measured?
- **Reward Package** – Does the reward for this role reflect not only fiscal benefits, but life, purpose and value benefits?
- **Feedback** – Does everyone who enters the selection process receive timely and useful feedback for their performance during and after the process?

Most importantly, Talent Magnetism belongs to everyone in the organisation. It's a holistic, living concept that needs to be embraced by all. The answer to being seen as an employer of choice or a talent magnet should never be siloed off as the responsibility of HR or a People Team. Everyone in the organisation must own talent magnetism.

How does Talent Magnetism Affect Retention?

Of course, talent attraction is only one half of the Talent Magnetism challenge. Retention can be an equally complex proposition. In markets such as data and technology, there's no scarcity of options for talent. So, what are the best organisations doing to ensure that their talent stay?

Firstly, while role tenures have fallen for the majority of positions in the data and technology industry compared to 20 years ago, economic and societal changes like the gig economy and employment mobility have impacted every organisation equally. The organisations that have adjusted and reacted most effectively are the ones seen as talent magnets.

As with attraction, there are some simple guidelines that are very evident when considering why some employers retain their staff longer than average. This is what these organisations are keeping in mind:

- **Retention begins with Attraction** – Look closely at individuals during the selection process to start to understand how and why they stayed in or left their previous roles. Build "stickability" into organisational DNA and it will become normalised.
- **Top Level Commitment** – The best talent magnet organisations have a board level commitment to data and technology. There's an understanding and recognition of value there. Without this, talent will feel restless and easily convinced to look elsewhere.
- **Management** – Top talent has no shortage of opportunities to work with great managers. Organisations that focus their efforts on ensuring their management layer is first-class retain great people.
- **Reward Packages** – These should be reviewed annually, in line with market trends, and should emphasise the changes in an individual's life. For example, private health care options for additional family members.
- **Holistic Views of the Work-Life Balance** - Talent is much more likely to stick where they feel the balance between work and life outside the office is respected by their employer. Flexibility around care provision, life events, contingencies and so forth all add up to talent feeling valued.

- **Support for Improvement** - Talent is retained where it is supported individually, nurtured and encouraged to develop by employers.
- **Purpose Led** – Perhaps the most important element to retention of top talent. Data and technology talent are much more likely to stay with their employer if purpose is at the heart of their work and the organisation.

Retention of top talent can be seen as an organisational Holy Grail. In addition to the cost of replacing individuals who do decide to leave early in tenure, the increased productivity associated with long-serving data and technology talent is often a key driver in organisational success.

In candidate-driven markets, companies that want to be viewed as talent magnets should look very carefully at their employee proposition on a regular basis.

The Importance of a Purpose Led Employee Proposition

Perhaps the single most important element of any talent magnet's employee proposition is the fact that work, at both an individual and collective level, should be purpose led.

The data and technology talent markets are changing. The generation who established, and built, many of the original data and technology talent magnets are ageing out of the workforce. People entering the industries – and the people who are soon to enter – demand a different working environment to the one that has characterised the last thirty years. Areas such as work autonomy and independence and work-life balance feature high on the wish-list of top talent. The organisations most successful in attracting and retaining talent weave these elements, including meaningful personal and group tasks and a collective shared purpose, into their employee propositions.

With a plethora of opportunity out there for data and technology talent, it's unlikely that any organisation who fails to acknowledge the importance of being purpose led will be considered a talent magnet. Organisations who focus on environmental, societal, individual or collective purpose – whilst presenting opportunities for individual growth and success – will continue to be viewed as the employers of choice in the competition for talent.

“ In candidate-driven markets, companies that want to be viewed as talent magnets should look very carefully at their employee proposition on a regular basis. ”



04

The Future of Talent: Diversity in the Workplace

Sebastian Mackay

Diversity and inclusion are words that have been thrown around a lot more recently as the obvious importance of building safe and welcoming workplaces for all people takes its place at the front of the conversation.

While it's finally starting to get the airtime that it deserves, it is a broad topic (for people that aren't actively living it, it can seem too overwhelming and easily end up in the 'too hard' basket) so this piece will only be focussing on gender, sexuality and neurodiversity.

New entrants to the workforce (Gen Z) are the most sexually diverse generation in modern history. Only half of the UK's Gen Z population says they're exclusively attracted to the same sex (54%). The remainder identifying somewhere along the sexuality spectrum – whether it's bi-curious, gay, lesbian, asexual, bisexual or omni-sexual.

Similarly, Gen Z is happy to declare that the gender binary (the idea that gender can only be male or female, based on one's sex) is dead.

In fact, 41% of Gen Z in the West identify themselves in the middle of a masculine to feminine scale, paving the way for more diverse expressions of gender in the workplace than most people are used to seeing.

Diversity Means Difference and There's a Lot to Celebrate

Before we go any further, it's worth mentioning that diversity and inclusion in and of themselves are important concepts to understand. There's a popular saying that diversity is being invited to the party and inclusion is being asked to dance. It's important that we, as hiring managers, don't lose sight of those differences and the nuance in this conversation.

We must create diverse workforces, which will always be some form of blend between LGBTQ+ people, ethnic minorities, women (especially in tech) and people that are differently abled, have unique learning experiences or are neurodiverse.

As well as diverse, that workforce needs to be inclusive. Can the person that's neurodiverse easily orient themselves in your office or access a quiet space for in-depth thinking? Is the language that you're using in your organisation inclusive and gender neutral? And do people understand the importance of using the correct pronouns for gender diverse people even if they're not used to that way of thinking?

It sounds like a lot but although we talk about diversity and inclusion in the same breath, we need to remember that they are two parts of the same concept and they need to be treated with the same level of importance.

It's easy to remember like this: Diversity is reflecting society and all the unique people in it and inclusion is making sure those people are empowered to do their jobs, attend work events and be safe and included in the office.

You might be wondering how diverse the UK workforce is.

Here are some stats:

- Eighteen percent of the UK workforce (more than 7 million people) are differently abled
- Ten percent of the population are neurodiverse
- One million people in the UK identify as Lesbian, Gay or Bisexual and 13% of the respondents in the National LGBTQ+ survey identified as transgender or gender diverse.

What does this mean?

It means that decisions around diversity and inclusion in business and hiring practices are affecting real people more often than business and hiring managers realise.

Preparing for a Diverse Workforce

At the risk of committing a faux pa (because the workforce is already diverse but for a multitude of reasons based around comfort, security and understanding, people might not feel comfortable about being their authentic selves), the workforce is about to get more openly diverse than it's ever been.

The past year has shown that people are more comfortable than ever bringing their lives into their work – whether that's pets or babies de-railing otherwise straight-faced Zoom calls – but bringing different sexual identities, accessibility and learning needs and neurodiversities into the workplace requires extra thinking about inclusivity and diversity that should start from the very first phase of recruitment.

Gender Inclusive Language

Language is evolving and changing. Sometimes it feels like it's moving faster than people can handle but things like gender inclusive language are simple to understand and easy to implement.

Gender neutral language doesn't only affect LGBTQ+ people, it also affects women and gender diverse people. If your company is talking in masculine terms (especially around things like job adverts) it's sending a message to women and people who don't identify as masculine that you're looking for masculine people.

Language is powerful and impacts how many people apply for jobs, what jobs they apply for and, beyond that, which spaces they feel welcome and comfortable in.

Here are the 10 most common masculine-coded words used in job descriptions and when talking about work:

- 1 Strong
- 2 Lead – includes leader(s)
- 3 Analysis – includes analyse and analytical
- 4 Individual(s)
- 5 Decisions(s)
- 6 Driven
- 7 Competitive
- 8 Expert
- 9 Objectives
- 10 Principle

This is important because there's evidence that shows that women, as a group, will apply to jobs at a lower rate when certain masculine words are in job postings and that the proliferation of gendered job advertisements can help sustain gender inequality.

“ It's important that we, as hiring managers, don't lose sight of those differences and the nuance in this conversation. ”

Empowering Neurodiverse People

The technology and data industries attract higher levels of neurodiverse people than other industries. This is, in part, because of the type of work people do – high engagement, detail orientated, relatively solitary and often repetitive.

With 10% of the UK population being neurodiverse (77% of unemployed people with autism want to work) and an increase in companies including HP, Vodafone and Microsoft running recruitment drives specifically targeted at neurodiverse people, it's time to start thinking about how you can empower these talented, focussed and high-value people in your business.

For tech and data companies, there's a veritable goldmine of talent, so long as you know how to tap into it.

So, how do you get neurodiverse people onto your team?

Start with the interviewing process. Reflexive interviewing – focussing on yourself as the interviewer, as well as focussing on the interviewee – is a good place to start, along with offering contracts that are flexible with people's needs. Flexible working throughout the past 18 months has been beneficial to us all but beyond extreme circumstances, continued flexible working can have hugely positive impacts on the neurodiverse people in your organisation by allowing them to choose the hours that suit them and take breaks when they need them – even if that is a couple of hours off in the middle of the day to recharge.

Designing for Neurodiversity and Inclusion

Sensory stimulation (or over stimulation), loud and unpredictable noises and even the constant thrum of a sales floor can all prove challenging for neurodiverse people, making it harder to concentrate and stay focussed.

In fact, more than two thirds of people say distraction from noise is their number one concern with intermittent and unpredictable noise being particularly stressful.

The best way to fix this is to normalise having high-focus, low distraction zones in your offices. These can be pods, small meeting rooms or even a cluster of desks with screens, making them more like cubicles.

The past year of remote work and working from home has helped businesses consider different ways that people work and think about the kinds of equipment they need, how they can be helped and made more comfortable when they're working in suboptimal environments.

So, as we look at returning to the office, committing to remote working or a hybrid model, thinking about supporting neurodiverse people isn't that much more to add to the list.

One way to do that is wayfinding. Wayfinding is, essentially, sign posting an environment to make it easier to navigate and understand. This can include desks that have clear lines of sight and viewpoints, art on the walls, signage or the use of colour to make landmarks. These simple things can help people orient themselves and be more comfortable in new and unfamiliar places.

You can take it further with some simple design changes to your current office by:

- Creating spaces that are memorable and use a rhythm of common elements to generate a reassuring sense of order and landmarks to help people orient themselves.
- Offering a variety of settings from quiet zones to areas that are in the thick of it to spaces that are designed for socialising. Allow people to move freely between the zones that work for them.
- Creating privacy and peace and quiet with workspaces in low traffic areas, using dividers to block and reduce noise and including plants for a calming effect.

How space is used and designed has a profound impact on the people that occupy that space.

Diversity and Inclusion Training

The last part of the puzzle is talking with your existing team and making them aware of what it means to be diverse and how they can help create inclusive environments.

Diversity and inclusion training will help your current team understand their responsibilities, the nuances and importance around things like pronouns and how they can be mindful of gendered language in business and building inclusive spaces for everyone.

“ Remember, people will disclose their diversity in their own time and need to be given the space to do so. ”

The Future of Talent

The future of talent is diverse, inclusive, global and armed with more mobility and opportunities than it has had before. The businesses that understand this are already building diverse teams, planning workforce development and thinking about how they can make their organisation as appealing to talent as it can be.

As the walls come down around our work personas and people are encouraged to bring their full selves to work, there are a lot of opportunities for businesses to align their purpose with their staff, be collaborative in their approach and access more diverse and global talent than ever before.

This white paper talks a lot about change but it's worth remembering that the change discussed in this paper benefits everyone, in the same way that design features for accessibility in products benefit the differently abled and the abled alike.

These changes bring with them opportunities for organisations to grow exponentially and secure the best talent before the market catches up.

The best part of it is that, for those businesses that move quickly, the changes are small. Offices across the nation are adapting to new health requirements so extra signage or creating quiet spaces is only one more step. People are used to working remotely so an Employer of Record for a European based team no longer holds the level of change that it used to and as we've become more accustomed to bringing our lives to our work throughout the past 18 months, most businesses have reacted by creating safe spaces to talk about mental health, so expanding those spaces for diverse people isn't all that much more.

We hope that the observations and arguments in this paper have helped give you a clearer sense of what the future of talent looks like, how your business can adapt and evolve and the simplicity of making those changes, as we all work to create safer office spaces and expand remote working in light of the events of the past 18 months.



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