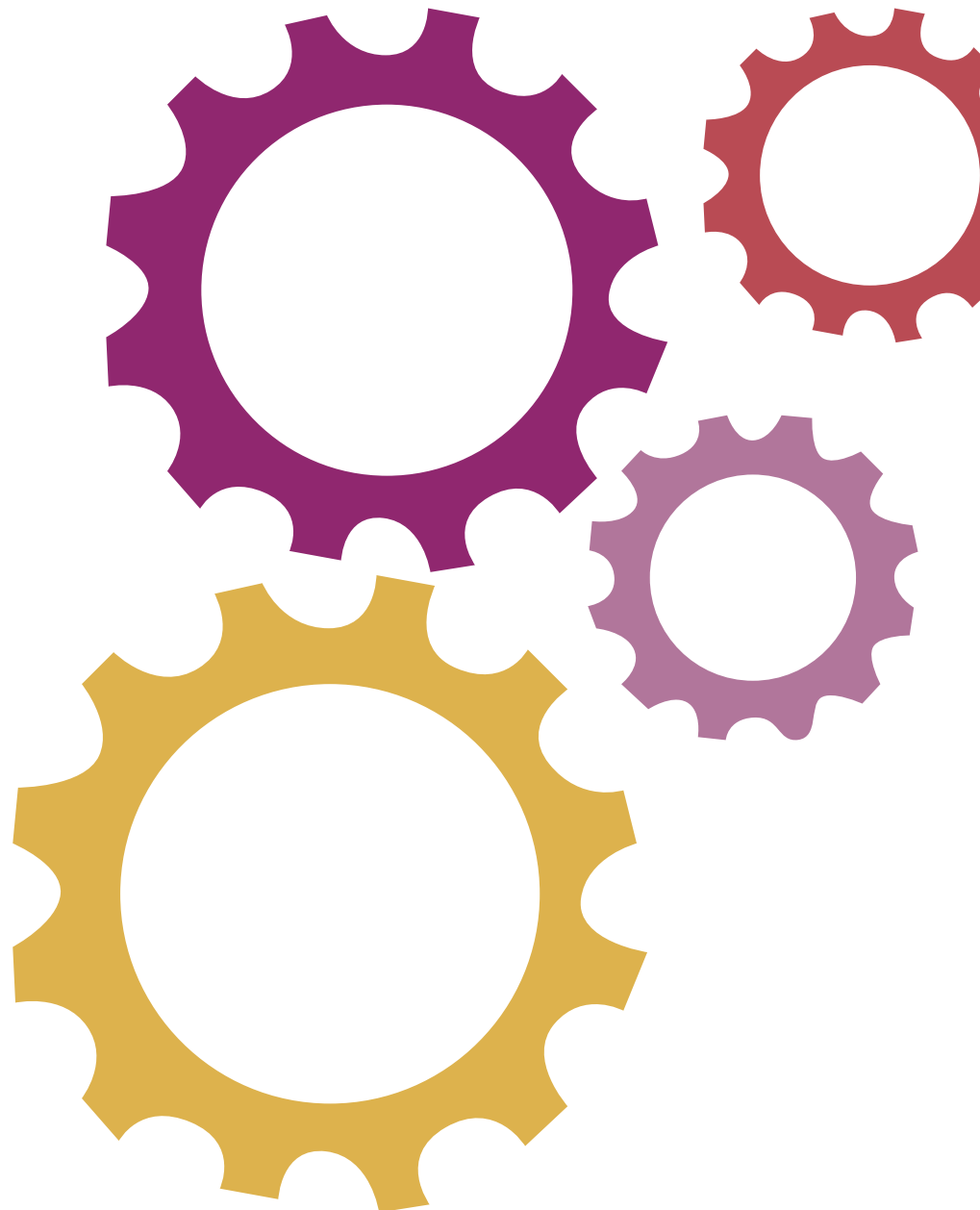


The world of work in 2022



Discussion: The world of work

We recently hosted a discussion with a range of HR professionals. The aim was to look ahead to 2022 and consider how the working world will continue to change during the next year and beyond and how our roles as HR professionals will continue to evolve.

We started off by collectively discussing how the past 18 months have impacted HR specifically, including that:

- HR has become more influential than ever. It's the right hand of the CEO in many cases.
- The pandemic has necessitated taking a more proactive approach to wellbeing. This was already on the agenda pre-lockdown but has required a change of approach considering the pandemic.
- Facilitating new ways of working has taken on a new importance. In particular, enabling connection in the workplace in a remote, work-from-home culture.
- Many have been operating over the past 18 months in "crisis mode", which is not sustainable in the longer term. And whilst most have now adapted, things continue to change and evolve, and many still have a long way to go.
- Many feel that the "human" has been put back into HR. Where previously the focus may have been more on productivity, because of lockdown, the human element is – rightfully – back on the agenda.

“Around 75% of UK workers want to work in hybrid way going forward.”

ONS Survey, June 2021



The subjects for discussion in our break-out groups were:

1. Hybrid working

A recent ONS survey, in June 2021, outlined that around 75% of UK workers want to work in hybrid way going forward. This is clearly going to be an important topic in 2022 and beyond.

2. Mental health

Significant numbers of UK workers have suffered from mental health issues over the past 18 months and continue to do so. A recent survey from the Lime Group highlighted that 25% feel they have hit a psychological “breaking point”, and 50% feel the need to disguise the mental health issues they are facing. With HR managers being more likely to suffer from mental health issues than their business counterparts (HR Review, January 2020). Only 36% (according to an ACAS survey) felt there had been an improvement in mental health provisions in the workplace. Clearly, this is an area in which many employers can improve.

3. Recruitment

The past 18 months have seen a journey through furlough and redundancy, to the great resignation and skills shortages. Recruitment will therefore be an increasingly busy, and important, HR issue in 2022.

4. Inclusion and gender

Though the effects of the pandemic have been felt by most, it has undoubtedly impacted on some sections of the population more than others. For example, women are three times more likely than men to have increased caregiving and housework responsibilities; and are more likely than men to lose their jobs (Forbes, April 2021). A recent survey by McKinsey in November 2020 also showed that employees from diverse backgrounds are more likely to be disproportionately impacted by the pandemic. Inclusion and diversity will undoubtedly remain a top priority for many HR professionals in 2022.

Read on for a summary of each session.

“A recent survey from the Lime Group highlighted that 25% (of UK workers) feel they have hit a psychological “breaking point”, and 50% feel the need to disguise the mental health issues they are facing.”



1. Hybrid working

- The approach depends on the sector.
- With people coming back to office-based working there is a need to relearn how to behave in an office environment. Some have seen cliquy behaviours and there has been a need to have managers oversee that a little bit.
- Some have considered training people on expectations around behaviour. For example, dress code and the boundary between home and work.
- Managers have benefited from guidance on how to run their teams within certain parameters.
- There was mixed feedback about whether hybrid working works and if so how best to structure it. A variety of organisations have requested that staff be in the office 2 – 3 days a week, others have settled on a 4 – 5 day a week pattern. This is something to keep under review in the coming months and flexing may be required.
- There is a question around what the office is for. Is it for collaboration or output? Again, this will depend on the sector.
- Wellbeing and mental health are still important topics, but there are now lots of tools and resources which can be used to help with this. It is important to give these to managers, and to equip them with the relevant tools from the off.
- The role of the HR professional has increasingly moved into the health and safety/operations/ risk spheres in the past 18 months.



Top tips

Be clear on what is expected/ appropriate in the office environment and when home working.

Give careful consideration to what working pattern will work best for the organisation and its staff.

Don't lose sight of wellbeing and mental health issues; ensure that managers have appropriate tools and training to deal with these.

Provide training to staff and managers.

2. Mental health

- There were similar themes for many organisations on this issue - around staff feeling tired and worn down; many felt that the past 18 months had been something of an emotional rollercoaster.
- HR have had to act as role models for healthy behaviours and set examples for staff. However, it is also important for HR to look after themselves from a mental health perspective. This is all the more important when acting as role models for staff.
- Being cognisant of diversity in relation to mental health issues was also cited as something which was important, because people from different backgrounds may have different pressures and require different kinds of support. Everyone has different needs, and people respond and react differently to the same circumstances.
- Events with Kinn & Co, Mind and the Growth Company had been useful.
- More complex mental health issues were being seen across the board. For example, issues relating to psychosis had increased. This in particular demonstrates how important it is to team up with experts when needed.
- Buddy networks have worked well, and some anticipated using “Christmas friends” as a means of providing someone to talk to through the festive period.
- Working patterns could also flex, such as allowing staff to work a 9-day fortnight or 4-day week. This had helped mental health, flexibility, and recruitment.
- Predictions for what 2022 holds in store included that Covid will continue to provide challenges. There is also likely to be the economic challenge of inflation. Another challenge for some sectors might be selfisolation pay and the approach to this.
- Enabling people to talk more openly about mental health, and putting in place the tools to do this, was considered important. Burnout remained a definite risk, and so many organisations were encouraging people to take time off and watch out for that.
- There was a trend of some employees needing help with managing the mental health of their family members or loved ones, particularly where this was starting to impact on their own mental health and ability to work. Where though should one draw the line?
- There was a general feeling that HR needed to be pragmatic and more decisive sometimes, and try not to leave all decisions to managers.

Top tips

Open communication should be encouraged, and an environment where people are happy to share feelings and stories of mental health should be created.

Find experts when necessary.

Leaders should role model and be seen to be looking after their own wellbeing; which means not working to midnight and/or sending lots of emails out of hours.

3. Recruitment

- All were growing, and all were looking at increases of between another 10 – 30% in the next year.
- All were feeling quite challenged on the staffing front and had experienced losing people for various reasons. There has been lots of head-hunting and recruiters are circling. In addition, there seemed to be those who stay at their existing organisations because they think it is safe but are not necessarily fired up on all cylinders or working at their best.
- Retention bonuses had been used by some as a means of keeping staff/keeping staff engaged. Plus, many had invested in internal learning and development for managers, in relation to how to look after staff and keep people who have come through the door. A big question is, how are leaders looking after people who might be looking elsewhere?
- There was also a general difficulty recruiting. Candidates were increasingly interested in hybrid working options and expectations seem to have changed.
- For some organisations, going hybrid could be a huge win (for example, to attract strong candidates living in more remote locations).
- More of the same was expected in 2022.
- Many had streamlined recruitment processes and it was accepted that retaining virtual processes as can be quicker. But care needs to be taken to ensure that no bias creeps in during these processes.
- The jury was out on the use of psychometric testing, etc.
- Attention was being given to how to make sure adverts (and their placement) reflect organisational values and attract diverse candidates.

Top tips

Think about how to incentivise staff to stay.

Stay alive to unconscious bias and diversity issues.

Know when it's time to say "help" and bring in an external resource. For example, some generalist HR teams have found that asking for help from recruitment specialists/experts, rather than doing it themselves, has been a great help.

4. Diversity and inclusion

- The challenges here were similar across sectors, and there is a big appetite for working on these to resolve them.
- An important question is what do we, as leaders, have to bring to this issue?
 - Recognising what we can do in this space, and understanding what our limitations are, is important. Bringing in the right people with the right skill sets to support us should be considered.
- Another question was – how do we do this in a compassionate way, and recognise when we are making mistakes?
- It is important to enable people to raise concerns in a way that allows them to be discussed in an open, transparent way; in an environment where no one seeks to attribute good or bad, right or wrong. Facilitating and empowering people on both sides to be able to talk to each other in an open and safe way is important. As is having a safe environment where they can have those conversations.



Top tips

Recognise limitations and when to get others in to help.

Bring training to life for managers by using examples and going beyond just box ticking exercises.

Consider whether, as default, you should only ever be recruiting outside of your organisation.

Encourage people to talk about things in open way, create safe spaces to talk and encourage all to be tolerant of each other.

Work in 2022: Further reading

Hybrid working

- World Economic Forum, *Why is 'the right to disconnect' so important for employees?* (27 January 2022)
- Personnel Today, *Flexible working requests behind growing number of tribunal cases* (17 January 2022)
- The HR Director, *Hybrid working, what does this mean for businesses in 2022?* (20 December 2021)

Mental health

- SHRM, *Employers Identify Workforce Mental Health Priorities for 2022* (26 January 2022)
- People Management, *Mental ill-health made up half of work-related illness in last year, research reveals* (21 December 2021)
- Health and Safety Executive, *Work-related stress, anxiety or depression statistics in Great Britain, 2021* (16 December 2021)

Inclusion & gender

- People Management, *Menopause should be a protected characteristic, MPs told* (20 January 2022)
- Vodafone, *New research from Vodafone finds one-in-five younger workers in the UK have quit their job due to poor parental leave support* (20 January 2022)
- The Guardian, *Saga to introduce paid leave for birth of a grandchild* (9 December 2021)
- The HR Director, *One in Five Employers Would not Hire a Disabled Person* (7 December 2021)
- Carers UK, *Employers more supportive of caring, but carers still at risk of leaving work unless more measures adopted* (25 November 2021)

Recruitment

- BBC, *Stop asking about salary history, employers urged* (18 November 2021)

Key contacts



Paul Seath
Partner
T: 020 7551 7703
E: p.seath@bateswells.co.uk



Paul Jennings
Partner
T: 020 7551 7964
E: p.jennings@bateswells.co.uk



Victoria Cook
Senior Associate
T: 020 7551 7856
E: v.cook@bateswells.co.uk



Thérèse Rankin
Associate
T: 020 7551 7891
E: t.rankin@bateswells.co.uk



Certified



This company meets the highest standards of social and environmental impact

Corporation

Making a profit is core to all businesses but our goal is to combine this with a real social purpose. Our values are pivotal to us, they shape our decisions and the way we live and work.

We focus on positive social impact as much as we focus on being a successful law firm. Our top tier legal advice is coupled with a real desire to drive change and we were the first UK law firm to achieve B Corp certification, awarded to businesses that balance purpose and profit.

Today, our clients are diverse – from corporate household names, to public bodies, to start-ups. We're also the firm of choice for thousands of charities and social enterprises. We continue to lead the market we helped to shape.

Bates Wells challenges what is possible in legal expertise delivery.