

Top five trends driving the HR agenda in 2018

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The relationship between employees and employers is strained. People want to feel a sense of purpose and belonging at work, but many companies are still struggling to deliver. Instead, they cling to the illusion that their heritage carries enough weight on the job market and stick to old ways of working that make staff feel like an afterthought.



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People have responded by flocking to businesses that make their people a priority and offer an engaging employee experience, or by taking on contract and gig work to gain more control over their career path.

HR leaders, in 2018, will continue to face a major challenge in helping their organisation attract, retain and inspire the best people in 2018. Five major trends will shape talent in the year ahead, and the way businesses respond to these will make or break their fortunes.

Trend 1: HR enters the post-engagement age

Employee engagement has been the HR buzzword of the past five years, but while some companies have put a greater focus on their talent and are rethinking their work culture, few are seeing major improvements. Productivity levels around the world continue to stagnate, suggesting more must be done to engage employees.

The issue is that businesses still focus most of their efforts on serving the individual, when in reality 'engagement' is just one element of the wider employee experience. They must also focus on equally important factors like team dynamics and the

emotional climate across their organisation.

This will be the focus for managers next year, who will need HR's support in developing a complete view of their people and offering them a more rounded employee experience that makes them feel valued. Their aim will be to provide employees with an environment that is mentally and emotionally beneficial, while also enabling them to perform at their best.

In South Africa, we have not experienced the same level of focus on Employee Engagement due to the fact that the employment market appears relatively stable. This is mainly due to the declining economic environment, resulting in the fact that it is difficult getting a job and the priority for most is to hold onto their job rather than exploring new opportunities.

And it's not just employees who have grown complacent; it's businesses too. HR practices in the region still tend to be very transactional and traditional. Talent management as a concept isn't really seen as essential yet, and a large number of businesses in South Africa still aren't really making the most of the full strategic value that can be delivered by a modern, talent-focused approach to HR.

Trend 2: Hiring for competence over confidence

With a skills gap that shows no signs of narrowing and companies still starved for skilled workers, the time has come to rethink recruitment.

This begins with the way companies source candidates, which often reflects unconscious biases that must be uncovered and rooted out.

The interview process itself is also flawed. Too often, it results in people being hired for their confidence instead of their competence. Consider how pointless it is to ask someone apply for an accounts clerk position to do a presentation as part of their evaluation, or to judge them on their interview skills considering the relative autonomy of their role.

HR teams are seeing the cracks in their recruitment processes and will increasingly use a wider pool of data and insight to inform their hiring decisions. This will help them develop new recruitment approaches and strategies so they can ultimately find the right people for the job.

Trend 3: Balancing man and machine

Software and robots are taking on a growing number of repetitive tasks, allowing people to apply their brainpower to more cerebral challenges. For instance, auto manufacturers have automated their production lines, and have now turned their employees' attention to developing the electronic "brain" behind new self-driving vehicles.

In South Africa, the Financial Services industry seems to be leading the way with chatbot technology increasing to provide both customers and employees with more effective and efficient service delivery.

Companies must prepare for change that is coming faster than ever by mapping out a path to automation that not only serves the business' financial goals but also allows workers to thrive alongside new technologies.

As the voice of employees in the boardroom, HR leaders will play an integral role in balancing human skills with machine-based efficiency.

The role of ethics cannot be ignored either. Businesses will ensure the way they use new technologies reflects their values as an organisation, rather than just automating processes because they can.

business, but HR teams will play a major role in facilitating their progress. By complementing their unique insight into human behaviours with a growing range of employee data, HR leaders can help their organisation to develop new programmes and management approaches that genuinely put people first and make 2018 the year of the employee.

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