

HR Top Priorities 2024 Guide

Breaking down HR's top priorities in 2024







Redefining culture, connection and the future of work

To say it's been a rollercoaster few years in people management would be an understatement. Although things aren't back to 'normal', we have entered a kind of normalization phase. Workers and managers are collectively figuring out what the future will look like. Leading the way into that bright, bold, weird and wonderful future will be Human Resources – also known as HR, People Operations, People and Culture, Human Capital, Employee Experience Architect and countless other names.



Today's HR professionals have a lot on their plate

Whatever you call it, HR has a wide remit in a dynamic landscape. Today's function is an evolved, multidisciplinary advisor to all. As we try to map where this evolution will end up, we first need to clarify HR priorities for the coming year. Otherwise, there's a real risk of job creep, missed opportunities and misalignment.



Three themes for 2024

We see HR's priorities grouped into 3 themes. Each theme covers 3 priorities with an extensive list of sub-priorities that rise and fall in the pecking order depending on the organization.



We work closely with HR departments to provide the data, insights and tools needed to manage people with confidence. This gives us rare insight into the challenges teams are facing now, and the obstacles they're preparing to face in the future.

We don't assume that every organizational leader will see themselves reflected in every priority; however, we encourage you to reflect on how your organization can adapt for what's to come.



Theme 1 Transforming, not transitioning

Evolving the HR operating model

Over the next 12 months, organizational development, organizational design, HR strategy and change management will consolidate into a strategic advisory function focused on informing and enabling organizational transformation.

HR is hardly recognizable from a few years ago. Whether it was the world changing, the workplace evolving, or a worldwide pandemic, the scope of HR has fundamentally shifted.

A recent Sage poll revealed that 91% of HR leaders and 96% of C-suite execs (n=1,000+) say the department's role has fundamentally changed. And yet only 32% and 41% (respectively) say the change will continue. Based on evidence from the departments orbiting HR, we think that's an underestimation.

Going into 2024, Gartner's research shows CEOs' and CFOs' visions align on three priorities: growth, technology and talent.

What you can do to prepare

Define a strategic vision for HR

HR needs to evolve from process-driven to peoplefocused. A strategic roadmap will help you define your purpose and contribution in the new world of work. You can use these definitions to establish priorities, set goals and communicate more effectively.

Assess your analytics

If you're not already being asked to prove HR's effectiveness with data, the call is coming soon. Now is the time to evaluate your reporting, data pipeline and KPIs to find opportunities where data can add value.

Set boundaries

All these new initiatives expose HR to a very real risk of job creep. Use your strategic vision and KPIs to establish and communicate clear boundaries. Organizational priorities – not the loudest voice – will determine what you focus on and what you leave behind in 2024.



Growth

With C-suites under pressure to show profitable growth, there's an increasing need for HR to deliver meaningful, measurable ROI.



Technology

The future will likely see you managing people and machines as technology impacts everyone from legal to marketing to IT to operations (and HR).



Talent

A global talent shortage, an increasingly mobile recruiting pool and new employee expectations mean HR needs to think differently to attract and retain the best people.

Redefining culture and connection

Maintaining and strengthening organizational culture requires new strategies and approaches in an increasingly hybrid world. One outcome of the transformation will be "HR" titles disappearing, with "People and Culture" language taking their place.

Cultivating shared values can be challenging when employees aren't in the same physical space every day. Culture starts to feel forced. Even 100%-on-site organizations can't ignore how values around work, culture and community have changed in recent years. Many of these changes will come to a head in 2024. HR will be tasked with bringing the two sides together.

When Gartner surveyed 500 HR leaders in 40 countries,



41%

41% said hybrid work compromised employees' connection to culture.



47%

Nearly 1 in 2 (47%) didn't know how to affect change to achieve the desired culture.

HR will play a critical role in aligning and connecting employees to company culture in 2024.

In light of this evolved function, "Human Resources" suddenly seems too bogged down in process and compliance. "People and Culture" gets closer to describing what you do – at least it names your two focus areas.

HR is a thing of the past. From here on out, it's all about People and Culture.







People and Culture can thrive in a hybrid environment



Define and articulate the culture essentials

Work with leadership to clearly define the organization's core values, mission and vision. Remember that company culture is a living thing; you can only guide it.



Co-design your company's hybrid work policy

The policy should include guidelines for communication and collaboration, so everyone understands expectations around behavior and attitudes.



Support managers to build and maintain a positive team culture

Many managers still need convincing on the potential of hybrid work. Your role is not to enforce compliance but to help managers regain peace of mind and communicate with their team.



Provide opportunities to contribute to culture

Create feedback mechanisms where employees can share their thoughts and concerns about culture and connection. You can use this feedback to recommend improvements.



Measure cultural KPIs

Culture isn't intangible. There are plenty of performance metrics related to culture and connection, such as absenteeism, turnover, schedule adherence, productivity and employee engagement. They're all measurable with the right technology.

Wielding tech to its full potential

Both within the evolved People and Culture remit and throughout the organization, AI is the biggest opportunity in 2024. We're past the point of early adoption. But there's still time to catch up.

Technology plays a pivotal role in streamlining processes, improving employee experiences and informing decision-making. Artificial intelligence (AI) represents the biggest opportunity for organizations to achieve step-change growth rather than incremental improvements.

UX researchers Nielsen/Norman Group tested the impact of generative AI like ChatGPT on productivity. Their results were surprising, even for tech nerds like us.

Call center agents could handle

13.8% more inquiries per hour

Professionals could write
59% more business documents
per hour

Programmers could code

126% more projects per week

What else can AI do for business?

Management

- Online customer support
- Process optimization
- Task automation
- Email spam filtering
- Automated data insights
- Sales and financial forecasting
- B2B account identification
- Document creation

Marketing

- Automated emails
- Personalized recommendations
- Behavior trends and anomalies
- Optimized ad bidding
- Customer segmentation
- Lead nurturing
- Analyzing social media sentiment
- Content creation

eCommerce

- Dynamic pricing
- Better search filtering
- Personalized product recommendations
- Abandoned cart emails
- Purchase predictions
- Fraud detection and prevention
- Chatbots
- Content creation and branding

Generating text and images is only a small slice of Al's potential.

The heavy lifting happens behind the scenes in data processing and task automation. We believe this is the real productivity opportunity, both within People and Culture tech (HR tech) and "WorkTech" more broadly.

But tech must be treated with tact. Underutilization is common when businesses rush to get the latest toys with no game plan. And there are reputational risks for organizations that misunderstand Al's purpose and limitations.

1 Training and education

People and Culture must proactively build capability among employees to use tech to its full potential.

This includes training on using technology in daily tasks, collaborating with others, accessing resources and quality-checking output from generative AI tools.

2 Defining the rules of engagement

We believe People and Culture leaders will be charged with establishing safeguards for safe and effective technology use in 2024. This means getting up to speed through training, reading up on regulations and best practices, and reaching out to technology vendors for advice.

3 People and Culture tech

More than 1 in 2 People and Culture leaders – 56% – say their tech solutions and strategies are already outdated. If you're going into 2024 with dreams of digital transformation, choose tools that:

- Facilitate employee feedback, recognition and well-being
- Automate admin tasks so you have more time to interact with people
- Contribute to, and prove your contribution to, organizational goals
- Integrate with other team's systems, giving you access to performance metrics



Should "People and Culture" become "People, Culture and Machines"?

As the lines between human creativity and technological capability blur, some workers are worried tech could replace part or all of their function. This is a thorny problem with deep roots.

14% productivity increase

Stanford and MIT analyzed 5,000+ customer support agents using generative AI and noted a 14% productivity increase (like the Nielsen/Norman study).

The researchers observed the biggest benefits at the low end of ability as AI disseminated information down the experience curve. The researchers note: "In addition, we show that AI assistance improves customer sentiment, reduces requests for managerial intervention, and improves employee retention."

The key takeaway for People and Culture leaders is that when employees understand the tools at their disposal and use them responsibly, they are more productive, engaged, and satisfied in their roles.

Harvard Business School professor and AI expert Karim Lakhani summed it up perfectly when speaking to HBR.

Al is not going to replace humans, but humans with Al are going to replace humans without Al.





Targeted action on DEI

Diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) efforts need to go well beyond compliance with anti-discrimination laws. People and Culture leaders must build a system that includes, empowers and respects all individuals. It needs to be authentic. And it needs to happen now.

In 2022, big companies including Meta, Amazon, Twitter (as it was), Lyft and Stripe shrank their head count by double-digit percentages. The layoffs disproportionately affected People and Culture teams, particularly those working with diversity and inclusion.

Revelio Labs, The Washington Post and Reuters analyzed 2 years of layoff data from 600 companies. They found that not only were DEI roles more likely to be cut, but the attrition rate is accelerating.

Not surprisingly, bad things happen to employee engagement and satisfaction when a business turns its back on DEI.



44% of employees agree colleagues feel alienated by their organization's DEI efforts



42% feel their organizations' DEI efforts are divisive

- Companies with DEI teams tend to have more diverse new hires, and higher employee satisfaction.
 - Revelio Labs

Don't let your people down by dropping the ball on DEI

An overwhelming 80% of employees expect their CEO to take a public stand against discrimination, according to the 2023 Edelman Trust Barometer. Discrimination is the third-most expected priority behind employee treatment and climate change, ahead of the wealth gap and immigration issues.

As an advisor to the C-suite on all things, well, people and culture, you are both the architect and builder of a system for advancing DEI in your organization. In 2024, People and Culture leaders will reinvent their DEI policies, push back against resistance, and give employees opportunities to contribute to a culture that values every individual

Framework for systemic DEI

Even with the best intentions, ad-hoc DEI activities come across as inauthentic. In 2024, People and Culture leaders will be working to systematize DEI by building on an unquestionable foundation of authenticity.



Equitable practices

- Pay equity
- Equal access to education
- ✓ Data-driven (unbiased) hiring
- Inclusive benefits
- Analyze promotions and progression
- Conduct an equity audit

Organizational voice

- Clear communication on DEI issues
- Proof points
- Employee advocacy
- Transparency around DEI results
- Authenticity, not visibility
- Opportunities for employee feedback

Informed action

- Skills-based hiring
- Exploring alternative talent pools
- Accessible work schedules
- Measuring and reporting DEI metrics

Productivity, profit and purpose

Aligning an employee's work to the organization's mission and values, removing productivity barriers, and fostering a productivity culture go a long way to encouraging people to give their best efforts. Datadriven, mission-oriented productivity is going to make a big difference in 2024.

Productivity is complex. When people work harder, output rises, and profits increase. That's the idea, anyway. But in reality, there are uncountable factors contributing to productivity. Many of them reside in individual employees' attitudes, abilities and environment.

As People and Culture leaders evolve into strategic advisors, there will be a lot of pressure to prove and improve productivity.

The productivity paradox

OECD data paints a pretty grim picture of labor productivity worldwide. Their data shows that productivity, counted in GDP per hour worked, has more or less stagnated since 2015. Zooming in on individual productivity, the picture is entirely different. Gallup's latest State of the Workplace poll shows that a record-high 44% of employees are stressed on a daily basis. We're burnt out. Overworked. Disengaged and disaffected after years of challenges – at least, that's how it feels.

While national productivity is stagnating, individuals feel they're working harder than ever. What's going on?

Rather than being contradictory, these situations are directly linked. EY looked into the topic in 2021 and found: "Geopolitical tensions – and the uncertainty they create – put pressure on CEOs and their leadership teams to constantly re-evaluate supply chains, talent decisions and approaches to building enterprise resilience."

This pressure is undoubtedly handed on to managers in the form of higher expectations, and managers in turn demand more from employees. In other words, big-picture stress becomes individual stress by osmosis.

The solution, in EY's words, is purpose-led growth.

CEOs should initiate a purpose-led strategic reset to capitalize on the upcoming economic rebound.

While sector-specific issues vary, a purpose-led growth strategy can address critical issues of trust, trade, technology and sustainability while putting people at the center of every decision.

This puts People and Culture leaders in an interesting position. Pressure to boost productivity will only increase, and it's up to you to ensure employees don't become the victim of a ruthless growth-at-any-cost mindset.



How's your balance?

2024 will see People and Culture leaders balancing productivity and profit demands with employee well-being. You'll need access to reliable workday data and a people-first mindset to be effective as the translator between business goals and individual outcomes.



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Demand	Action	Outcome
		 Remove productivity barriers to streamline processes
		Benchmark individuals and teams
		Track productivity trends
Higher employee productivity	Analyze productivity data	 Eliminate distracting and unproductive behavior
		Gain insight into coaching needs
		 Empower employees to self- manage and self-improve
More value-adding innovation		✓ Values alignment
	Connect employee KPIs to organizational growth targets	Employees feel a sense of purpose
		 Collaboration between and within teams
		Removing knowledge silos
	Recognize and reward innovators	 Enthusiasm to contribute ideas
		 Opportunities for employees to break the daily grind
		✓ Employees feel valued
	Create feedback and input opportunities	 Less hesitation to speak up on management and organizational issues
		 Decisions driven by people, not process
Lower staff costs	Recognize high performers and support struggling employees	✓ Less turnover
		Lower hiring costs
		Higher employee engagement
		Greater customer satisfaction
	Monitor employee well-being signals	✓ Less absenteeism
		Lower medical costs
		More sympathy among managers
		Better resourcing decision-making
		Better customer service

Sustaining sustainability initiatives

Sustainability will become even more important in 2024, both socially and operationally. People and Culture leaders must actively promote, monitor and report sustainability initiatives if organizations hope to meet ESG targets.

Environmental, social and governance (ESG) initiatives are part of purpose-driven growth. People and Culture's role in ESG varies, but we're increasingly seeing greater attention going to proving and improving sustainability outcomes.

Your role in sustainability initiatives spans policy, people and program delivery



Policy

Governments and regulators in the EU, UK and US are rolling out sustainability disclosure guidelines that affect private companies. Whether your remit includes the entire ESG report or assisting the Chief Sustainability Officer with disclosure, there will be a steep learning curve in the coming years.



People

IBM surveyed 16,000 people and found that two-thirds were more likely to apply for and accept jobs from companies that demonstrated environmental sustainability. If your organization wants to attract and retain good people, sustainability must become part of everyone's every day.



Programs

From managing office utilities to ensuring employees aren't subjected to climate-related risks, People and Culture's remit in delivering sustainability programs is wide. While it may not be up to you to design the programs, sustainability results are increasingly part of the People and Culture scorecard.





Empowering and engaging employees

Mending manager-employee relationships

Managers are struggling. Employees are stressed. People and Culture must become a mediator and facilitator, helping to bridge widening trust gaps for the good of the entire organization. In a world of never-ending change, it's not going to be easy.

There's a big problem brewing. Employees are losing faith in managers, and managers are losing their grip on everexpanding roles.

While trust is teetering over the edge of a deep crevice, 18% of employees are actively disengaged, and a further 59% are on the way to checking out. Trust and engagement are linked. This is where you come in.

Managers are missing something

One of the main challenges in modern workplaces is that managers need more guidance in their adapted roles. According to Gallup, more than half (57%) of hybrid managers received no training in handling the hybrid environment. Although (spoiler) training isn't necessarily the answer, there's a lot of middle ground between "no training of any kind" and "mandated coaching".

More training isn't the only answer

Three-quarters of People and Culture leaders feel managers in their organizations are overwhelmed. Guidance on managing a changed workforce can help, but it won't solve the problem. You need to facilitate deeper change.

Managers are burning out...



54%

54% of managers are suffering from work-induced stress

5

An average manager has 51% more responsibilities than they can effectively manage

...and it's damaging their reputation



Only 1 in 2 employees is confident in their manager's ability to lead their team to be successful in the next two years



21% of US employees trust their organization's leadership

Step 1

(Re)set expectations

How it helps

Managers are 1.4x more likely to thrive after resetting expectations.

Your role

Re-scope the manager's role to align their strengths with organizational goals.

Step 2

Selfdetermination

How it helps

Autonomy (and the opportunity to bow out) increases the likelihood of success by 2.3x.

Your role

Management isn't for everyone. Let managers learn whether this is the right move.

Step 3

Build good habits

How it helps

Establishing sustainable habits improves job manageability by up to 71%.

Your role

Help people managers to reflect on, analyze and adapt their habits.

Step 4

Fewer steps

How it helps

Freeing up time to manage (instead of work) has the same benefit as re-scoping roles.

Your role

Work with managers to remove barriers and simplify processes.

5 bridge-building initiatives you can use in 2024

1 Get both sides of the story

It's important to understand both perspectives before advising any action, whether through mediation and conflict resolution, or informally via an open-door policy.

2 Identify the root cause

Use data, insight and experience to trace trust gaps to the source. It's often the case that misunderstandings arise from a culture of opaque management – but workday data doesn't lie.

3 Develop a roadmap

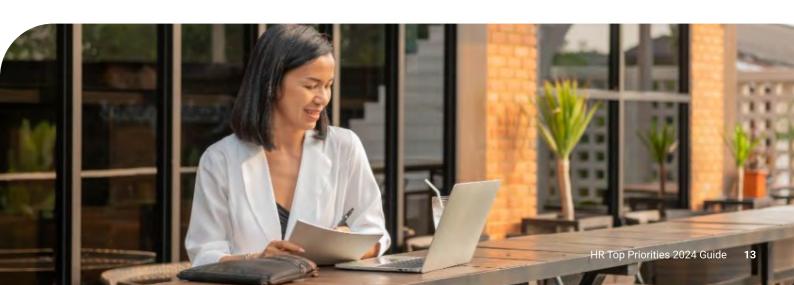
Your guidance will help managers and employees improve communication. Set milestones, check in, and give each a role in mending the relationship.

4 Establish feedback systems

Employees need to be comfortable giving feedback, and managers need to be comfortable feeding back to you. How this works depends on the individuals, but communication is non-negotiable.

5 Monitor outcomes

Workday data will tell you whether your initiatives are working. Monitor signals like absenteeism, schedule adherence and productivity to gauge employee-manager relationships.



Overhauling the employer brand

Positive workplace culture is about more than air hockey tables and corporate retreats. Organizations attracting and retaining the best people in 2024 will have systems to connect employees to each other and embed a sense of purpose beyond the job title.

Employer branding is a combination of culture and promotion. Candidates see straight through an inauthentic brand, but that doesn't mean you can't boast (within reason) about great experiences.

Employees now seek out organizations and roles that align with their personal values and offer a clear sense of purpose. Which makes this next stat concerning: in August 2023, only 33% of employees (in the US) felt connected to their company's purpose. Connection is at all-time low levels, and we're seeing the outcome in the Great Resignation and the proliferation of quiet quitting.

What employees expect	How you can prove you have it	
A good work-life balance	 Demonstrate work-life balance through workday data Work with managers to nip burnout in the bud Implement well-being programs 	
Flexible work arrangements	 Design, champion and communicate flexible work policies Widen the recruitment pool to find the best people Use workday data to facilitate and demonstrate non-traditional schedules 	
© Competitive compensation and benefits	 Establish salary KPIs and review processes Offer equitable benefits Promote, or ideally codify, learning and development opportunities 	
Opportunities for growth and development	 Discuss progression pathways with candidates Share 'success stories' Set clear KPIs for new employees Track turnover and retention data 	
A supportive and inclusive work environment	 Define Document DEI initiatives Measure employee engagement metrics Establish lines for feedback 	
A company that is committed to social responsibility and sustainability	 Measure DEI outcomes, ideally in a transparent report Educate managers on the importance of mental health and well-being Guide leaders on the tangible benefits of sustainability action 	

Burnout is kryptonite for employer branding

If you thought manager burnout was bad, employee burnout is worse. Estimates range from 25% to 75% of employees experiencing burnout.

Bringing burnout under control is your first and most effective priority for building a standout employer brand in 2024. Before attracting top talent, the groundwork needs to be in place for current employees – including managers – to thrive.

Steps you can take to douse burnout in 2024

- Analyze workday data to identify burnout risk factors
 - Signs include unscheduled weekend work, overtime hours, absenteeism and frequent distractions.
- 2 Help managers promote work-life balance
 Using your new understanding, help managers to
 intervene when the early signs of burnout appear.
- 3 Empower employees to self-manage
 Giving employees tools to manage their workloads
 helps establish agency, which boosts engagement
 and reduces burnout risk.
- 4 Provide mental health support

 This could involve employee assistance programs
 (EAPs), mental health resources and stress
 management programs.

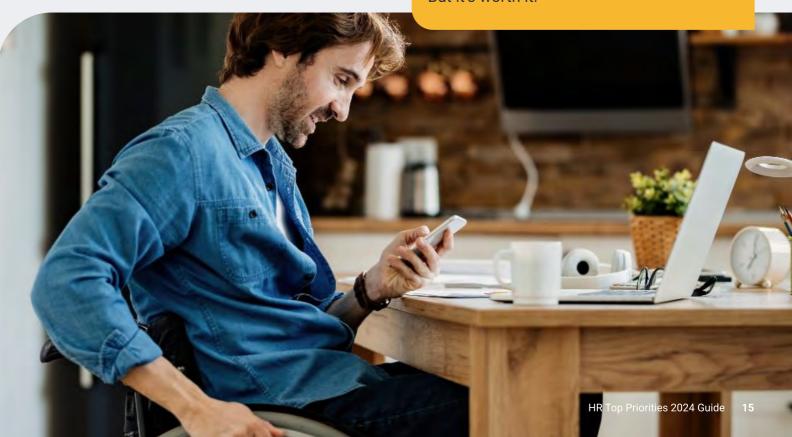
- Destigmatize mental health conversations

 It might take time for employees to feel comfortable talking about mental health or seeking support through EAPs.
- Introduce flexible work arrangements

 Test the waters with remote work or asynchronous scheduling. Monitor the results and use data to design a proper policy.

Key takeaway

Building an authentic and enticing employer brand that meets evolving employee expectations requires a coordinated effort between People and Culture, leadership and employees. It starts with taking a potentially uncomfortable look in the mirror. But it's worth it.



The future of work

When People and Culture leaders plan for the future of work, they don't just look at big-picture trends. They also analyze nitty-gritty details, prepare for the awkward growth stage, and plant seeds that may not flower for a while.

Effective planning comes down to how you define "future" in "future of work". If it refers to some far-off time when everyone works from everywhere, using AI for everything, the challenges brewing today will catch you off guard. Let's pull the focus back to a future that's within reach.

Planning for the future of work, today



Connecting with current challenges

Effective workforce planning begins with breaking down current organizational challenges to rebuild a pathway to success.

- Consult with all levels of the organization to understand current challenges
- Audit processes and systems to remove barriers
- ✓ Consider how culture affects operations
- Set meaningful, ambitious targets that are achievable in 2024
- Measurement your progress



Anticipating talent needs

It might be hard to think about talent requirements 3-5 years ahead when you're struggling to find the right people today. But, short-sighted hiring leads to short employee turnover cycles. Strategic People and Culture leaders hire for cultural fit and future contributions.

- Analyze skills shortages against organizational goals
- Collect organizational data to understand current gaps
- Look for latent capacity in existing resources
- Establish criteria for new hires that go beyond skills and experience

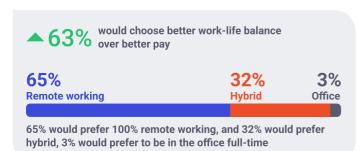
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Training and development

You can't pin all your hopes on new hires. But you can train the eager people already on your team to fill capability gaps.

- ✓ Follow the first 3 steps above
- Build a business case for targeted training
- Work with managers and employees to design development pathways
- Set up regular check-ins to assess progress
- Monitor data to adjust course as needed

Remember: Working from home is just working



Despite hybrid and remote work's demonstrated success, managers still struggle to trust that people are productive when they're out of direct eyesight. But, like it or not, people want more flexibility.

Gallup put it a little more bluntly in October 2023, publishing an article titled "The Future of the Office Has Arrived: It's Hybrid".

However, when we zoom out, remote working opportunities are one star in a constellation of disillusionment. Ultimately, engagement matters more than where people work. Gallup's latest data shows that engagement influences stress levels 3.8x more than work location. Although people are asking for remote working opportunities, the louder cry is for guidance.

81%
employees say it's important for managers to help with setting priorities...

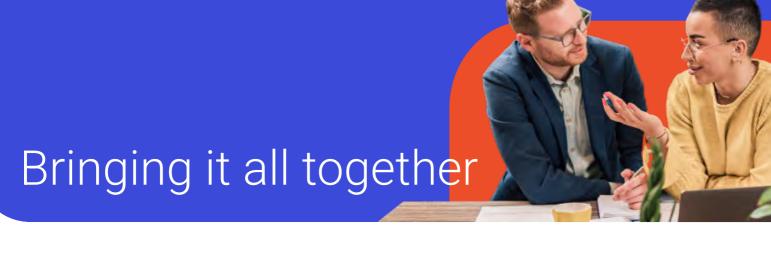
74%
managers say they need more guidance from top-level leaders
were dear guidance in one-on-ones

80%
managers say they need more guidance from top-level leaders
benefit if leaders were clearer

When so many companies are bogged down in the conversation about where and how people will work in 2024, visionary People and Culture leaders are living in 2034 having conversations about why people work.

to prioritize their own workload

about organizational priorities



Goals and game plans for a productive 2024

You might have noticed three sections missing from this breakdown of People and Culture priorities:

- Employee engagement
- Hybrid work
- Hiring and retention

There are good reasons for each.

Firstly, employee engagement sits above, beneath and between everything People and Culture leaders do. Instead of focusing specifically on engagement, we suggest it's more effective as a long-term goal. Your north star. Engagement isn't something you can achieve, but it is something you can influence through measurable objectives like reducing turnover, easing manager stress and rolling out DEI initiatives.

Secondly, hybrid work might only be a priority for some organizations. For some, it's an outcome of cultivating an employer brand. For others, it's old news as they transition to 100% remote and asynchronous work in 2024. All the other priorities still apply wherever your organization is on the spectrum of fully on-site to fully remote.

And finally, hiring and retaining the best people is a priority for People and Culture in 2024. Just as it was in 2023, 2022, 1992 and 1902. Yes, the talent pool is unfamiliar. Yes, employee demands have evolved. Yes, hiring is more difficult in a global shortage of good people. But if you cultivate a thriving culture, offer wise strategic advice, build a rock-solid employer brand and implement data-driven strategies, then hiring, training and retaining top-performing people will be a slam dunk.

About Time Doctor

Our mission is to support organizations by providing adaptable accountability and productivity analytics tools that harmoniously fit into any company culture, location, and size.

We believe in creating an environment of transparency, We strive to offer businesses peace of mind, build trust, and increase workforce productivity and work-life balance to enhance profitability and scale.



Align, engage, empower for HR success—your roadmap awaits.

