



## What human resources will look like in 2030

Alley Pascoe, April 13, 2021

**A**lley Pascoe asks Australia's top HR experts to peer into their crystal balls and predict the future of the industry. This piece supported by Charles Sturt University, which has a huge range of study options available for those interesting in exploring new careers and opportunities.

It's almost surreal to think that just over a year ago, many of us were travelling to work five days a week on crowded trains, only to sit in offices with no fresh air for eight hours straight, often next to colleagues who refused to cover their mouths when they coughed.

To state the obvious: the way we work has changed dramatically in the last year. Many of us are now working remotely from home, wearing a steady rotation of activewear and spending our former commute time sleeping in, working out, or spending time with our families.

When you think of how much things have changed for the workforce in the space of a year, it's hard to imagine what the future will hold – so we asked two HR experts to do it for us.

“In the last 20 years, I've seen the HR industry transform from being all about recruiting, compliance, checklists and health and safety regulations to being about building and leveraging human potential in business,” says Karen Gately, who worked as a HR director for eight years before launching her leadership consulting practice 16 years ago.

“The old-fashioned command and control approach to leadership is dying out and the future of HR will be leading with authenticity.”

Dr Stacey Jenkins, the Acting Head of the School of Management and Marketing at Charles Sturt University, has also seen the HR industry evolve during her career and predicts more change to come.

“There’s going to be a growing focus on empathy, creativity and innovation in the HR roles of the future,” she explains. “Fostering a healthy work environment so team members are productive and engaged has never been more important.”

At work and beyond, change is inevitable. Here’s how to prepare for and embrace the imminent revolution...

## THE NEW NORMAL

In the thick of lockdowns last year, more than 32% of Australian employees were working from home, according to a [Roy Morgan survey](#). Looking to the future (and a [University of Sydney survey](#)), that number will only increase, with 75% of workers saying their employers are more supportive of working from home plans since COVID-19 hit. It may have taken a pandemic to normalise remote working, but commuters around the world are rejoicing.

“Flexible work practices are no longer a competitive advantage; they’re the baseline expectation,” says Gately, noting that productivity has skyrocketed since more people started working from home. “I don’t believe we’re designed to work in marathons; we’re better off working in sprints. For some people that means getting up early to walk their dog, doing a couple hours of work, having afternoon tea with their family, then doing some more work before dinner. Allowing employees to set their own schedule is far more effective than micromanaging them.”

## CULTURE CLUB

The biggest change facing human resources in the near future is managing remote workforces, finding new ways of working as a team and building culture from afar. While fostering a happy workplace has always been a part of the job description, HR representatives have had to completely overhaul the way they do so. “My biggest focus right now is culture,” admits Dr Jenkins. “I’m trying to be more in touch with how staff are feeling, more aware of their change fatigue and more available to provide motivation to keep them engaged.”

Top tip: to nurture culture while working remotely, don't make after-hours Zoom drinks compulsory, advises Gately. "Online happy hour is completely ineffective for introverts and can be draining for extroverts, as well. Making small talk to a screen is exhausting unless there's a purpose. I think the evolution of Friday knock-off drinks at the pub could be online trivia games or fancy-dress competitions – depending on the team," she says. "Getting people to laugh is a really powerful way of building team spirit."

## MENTAL HEALTH MATTERS

A recent study by [Oracle and Workplace Intelligence](#) found the increased stress of the COVID-19 pandemic has negatively impacted the mental health of 78% of the global workforce. Moreover, 76% of workers believe companies should be doing more to support the mental health of their employees. The future focus of HR is – undoubtedly – holistic wellness. Band-aid solutions like complimentary yoga classes and generic mindfulness brochures in the office kitchen will no longer cut it.



**Patrick wears a mask**

@PatJD



**EVERY COMPANY:** We'd like to promote mental health in the workplace.

**EMPLOYEES:** How about hiring more people so we feel less pressured & increase our pay so we can keep up with the spiraling cost of living so we're not so stressed out.

**EVERY COMPANY:** No not like that. Try Yoga.

6:43 PM · Mar 20, 2019



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“Workplace stress claims have risen since COVID-19, and organisations are having to rethink how they manage mental health issues when people are working in isolation,” says Dr Jenkins, who suggests hiring specific ‘working from home facilitators’ to look beyond the logistical challenges (technology, policies, safety and ergonomic spaces), and to the spiritual needs of staff members (mental wellbeing, balance and emotional resilience).

In addition to complimentary yoga classes, Gately says HR departments should build effective mental health and wellbeing strategies. “Team members need to feel trusted, valued and respected in the workplace – and all of those things can be done from afar when working remotely. Say thank you, celebrate achievements and foster a sense of purpose,” suggests Gately, who encourages leaders and HR representatives to practice what they preach when it comes to mental health. “If you do a staff survey and ask for honest feedback, then don’t deliver outcomes on said feedback, people will stop speaking up. It’s important for employees to feel like they’ve got a real voice and can influence the future.”

## DRESS CODES ARE OUT

Casual Fridays will soon be an everyday option, says Gately and Dr Jenkins (to collective cheers from every single person who has ever worn office-mandated stockings and circulation-cutting pencil skirts). “As we start to realise the power of authenticity, outdated dress codes will become a thing of the past,” reveals Gately, with the authority of someone with purple hair, a nose ring and visible tattoos. “Even in financial services we’re starting to see blokes putting their ties away, which is saying something.”

Dr Jenkins goes as far as saying ditching homogenous office dress codes will help teams with their aforementioned, all-important emotional wellbeing. “I’m a big believer in respecting diversity and allowing people to dress the way they want; whether that be a pretty dress or trackies and a hoodie,” she says (to another round of applause and cheers).

## DIVERSITY IS IN

Out with the old, and in with the long-overdue. As HR teams wave goodbye to dress codes, they’re eager to welcome real inclusion and diversity. “Of course, organisations need to have a diversity policy and strategy, but it needs to become a key strategic goal. We must take concrete steps to address unconscious bias, move past tokenism and embrace meaningful change,” explains Dr Jenkins, listing blind resume screenings as a practical way to do just that.

Real inclusion is more than having one woman or a POC on a board, says Gately. And to get to that point, HR representatives need to accurately assess candidates irrespective of agenda. “Thanks to unconscious bias, women are either seen as too soft or a cow. There is a growing awareness around these assumptions, but we’ve still got a lot of work to do,” she admits.

## EMPATHY IS EVERYTHING

For proof that empathy is becoming increasingly important in workplaces, one need not look further than our very own Parliament House. In the wake of serious harassment and abuse allegations this year, empathy training has become the solution du jour. But can empathy be taught? Dr Jenkins says yes: “If we can teach leadership and emotional intelligence, we can teach empathy. Of course, it should be taught from a young age, but I hope to see more leaders undertaking such training.”

In addition to empathy, Gates says accountability is key for people in positions of power. “If a leader – say Scott Morrison – doesn’t know that inappropriate behaviour is commonplace within their workforce, they’re not doing their job,” she explains. “Going forward, leadership needs to be seen as the service role it is, and marked by compassion, integrity, accountability and the absence of ego. For HR representatives, it will be our job to coach leaders and build their capability in these areas.”

## THE C-SUITE SHAKE UP

Looking into her HR crystal ball, Dr Jenkins clearly sees a people-centred approach taking over offices and transforming executive floors. “Going forward, HR managers will shape organisations and lead business strategy,” she says.

When it comes to picturing the boardrooms of the future, Gately sees HR directors sitting at the head of the table. “There’s a growing awareness that actively engaged teams with an emotional investment in the business achieve dramatically improved commercial outcomes,” she explains. “I believe HR directors will replace CFOs to become the 2IC to the CEO in the near future. Whereas now board directors come up through law, finance and sales, it’s rare for them to come from a HR background. That’s going to become far more common.”

## OPPORTUNITIES AWAIT

With greater responsibilities and ever-evolving roles, both Gately and Dr Jenkins agree the HR field will continue to grow in the future. Like all industries, artificial intelligence will make some parts of the job redundant, but the role of engaging a skilled workforce, developing leaders and fostering a purpose-driven culture is intrinsically human. “The next generation of HR workers need to be willing to evolve, have a curious mind and the ability to analyse data and pull insights to inform decisions,” says Dr Jenkins. “HR is such a growing industry,” adds Gately. “We have the knowledge and capabilities to create serious competitive advantages for organisations. We have the power to unlock people’s potential. We have the ability to change the world.”

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