

11 Trends That Will Shape HR in 2021

Gartner's Brian Kropp says 2021 will be another year full of reinvention.

HRExecutive.com | By: Jen Colletta | 12-15-20



This year has upended the priorities of most HR leaders, as they had to quickly navigate everything from remote-work culture to legal concerns about the COVID-19 vaccine. The changes and challenges 2020 brought are setting up next year to be another of transformation, according to Brian Kropp, chief of HR research at Gartner.



Brian Kropp, chief of research in the Gartner HR practice

Kropp recently shared his top predictions of the trends that will shape the world of HR in 2021:

1. Shift from managing the employee experience to managing the life experience of your employees.

One of the major experiences during the pandemic has been the experience of looking into the personal lives of our employees. We have seen the struggles that they have faced when it comes to working from home, from balancing raising kids and working, and from caring for their family members. What we have also learned is that if we help employees support their personal lives more effectively, not only do they have better lives, but they perform at a higher level as well. 2021 will be the year where employer support for mental health, financial health and sleep will become table stakes of the benefits offer given to employees.

2. More companies will adopt stances on the societal and political debates of the day.

Seventy-four percent of employees expect their employer to become more actively involved in the cultural debates of the day. And CEOs will respond. More CEOs will move beyond making statements about the issues impacting society and will evolve to making significant budget investments in supporting these issues.

3. The gender-wage gap will increase in 2021 as employees return to work at the workplace.

Men are more likely than women to return to work at the workplace. And those who return to the workplace are more likely to get higher raises and promotions than those who continue to work from home. The combination of these two factors will worsen the gender-wage gap in 2021.

4. The significant increase in employee-monitoring technology will be met with new regulations limiting what employers can track about their employees.

During the pandemic, more than one out of four companies has bought new technology to passively track and monitor their employees. However, many of these same companies haven't focused on how to balance employee privacy with the technology. In addition, more employees are voicing frustration and disappointment over being monitored. In response, in 2021, new regulations will emerge that start to put limits on what employers can track about their employees.

5. Flexibility moves from location to time.

While letting employees work remote has become commonplace across 2020 (and will continue into 2021 and beyond), the next wave of flexibility will be around giving employees flexibility over "when" they work. Next year will see a rise of new jobs where employees no longer have an agreed-upon set of hours to work and instead just focus on a set of outputs to achieve, regardless of how long it takes them to achieve those outputs.

6. As the labor market improves and recruiting ramps back up, the two-class system within companies, between knowledge workers and everyone else, will only intensify.

Recruiting will become increasingly automated for high-volume, non-knowledge-based roles, prioritizing applications based on a sometimes-biased set of criteria and leading candidates to feel increasingly dehumanized. Meanwhile, knowledge workers will be catered to with increasingly high-touch recruiting methods and roles that are more frequently tailored to individual needs.

7. Leading companies will make bulk purchases of the COVID vaccine to distribute to their employees.

This degree of support to their employees will be leveraged as a key differentiator in the talent market to attract and retain talent.

8. Employers will be sued over COVID vaccine requirements.

Several companies will be sued in 2021 for requiring their employees to have proof of a COVID vaccine before allowing them to return to the workplace. The corresponding litigation fights will slow return-to-workplace efforts even as vaccine usage increases.

9. Mental health support becomes the norm.

Over the last several years, employers have offered new benefits to support their employees, including expanding parental leave. Because of the pandemic, employers have realized the criticality of mental health. Employers will work to de-stigmatize mental health by expanding mental health benefits, creating “collective mental health days” and supporting other initiatives to improve the mental health of their employees.

10. The buy-versus-build talent calculus will shift to more buy and rent and less build.

As the speed of in-demand skills accelerates, companies will shift their investment away from build strategies and focus more on buying and renting talent than they have ever before.

11. States will start to compete to attract individual talent to their borders rather than competing for companies to relocate to their states.

Local states and cities will start to use their tax policies to create incentives for individual employees to relocate to their jurisdictions rather than giving tax credits solely to large companies to relocate to their jurisdictions.