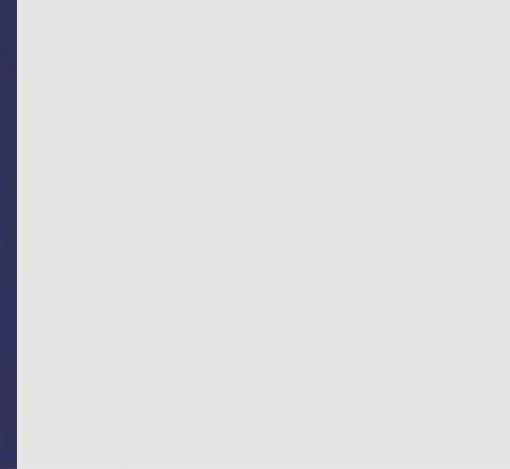


# A-Z of the Future of Work for HR

Everything you need to know about  
the tech and trends affecting work  
in 2025 and beyond



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# Welcome

As we enter the second half of the 2020s the world of work continues to undergo a seismic transformation. The convergence of technology, shifting societal expectations and the aftershocks of a post-pandemic era are reshaping how we work, where we work and how organisations thrive. For HR professionals this is both a moment of immense opportunity and a formidable test of adaptability.

Today's HR leaders are navigating a landscape shaped by generative AI, digital twins and extended reality. They're balancing the challenges of hybrid working, quiet quitting and job displacement while fostering inclusivity and wellbeing in increasingly complex ecosystems. The demands on HR are without parallel. Organisations expect not just operational efficiency but strategic foresight – anticipating trends, enabling adaptability and creating value through people and technology.

Yet, in a world overwhelmed with data and buzzwords, HR professionals need more than just awareness. They need clarity and actionable insights. That's where this eBook comes in. Think of it as your roadmap through the new world of work – a resource designed to cut through the noise and deliver the essentials of what's shaping work in 2025 and beyond.

In this guide you'll find an A-to-Z exploration of the technologies and trends reshaping HR's role, from agile working to the talent marketplaces, and from skills-first HR to the Internet of You. For each we define the term, contextualise it and show how each trend impacts your function and offers new ways to create value for your organisation and its people.

The pace of change may be daunting but with the right tools and insights it can also be exhilarating. So let's embrace this era of reinvention and position HR at the forefront of the future of work.

*Siân Harrington*

**Siân Harrington**

Editorial Director, The People Space



# Agile working

## WHAT IT IS

Agile working is a way of working that focuses on flexibility, collaboration and continuous improvement. It is based on the principles of agile development, which are used in software development and offer four key values:

- Individuals and interactions over processes and tools
- Working software over comprehensive documentation
- Customer collaboration over contract negotiation
- Responding to change over following a plan

Agile is iterative and incremental. This means that work is broken down into smaller chunks and these chunks are delivered in regular intervals, or sprints. At the end of each sprint the team reviews the work that has been done and makes any necessary adjustments. There are many different agile frameworks, such as Scrum, Kanban and Extreme Programming. Each framework has its own set of rules and practices but they all share the same underlying principles of flexibility, collaboration and continuous improvement.

## HOW IT IMPACTS HR

Agile is one of a number of new HR operating models being adopted by organisations who wish to break the three-pillar model of the centre of excellence, HR business partner and shared service centre made famous by Dave Ulrich. Instead of this more siloed approach, agile HR enables people to be quickly deployed to deal with priorities and critical issues and to test and iterate at speed.

“We cannot preach agility without being agile within HR,” the CHRO of a European retailer told [researchers](#) at global management company McKinsey. “We need to break up the silos and the Ulrich-style separations in our own organisation to be much more flexible and faster.”

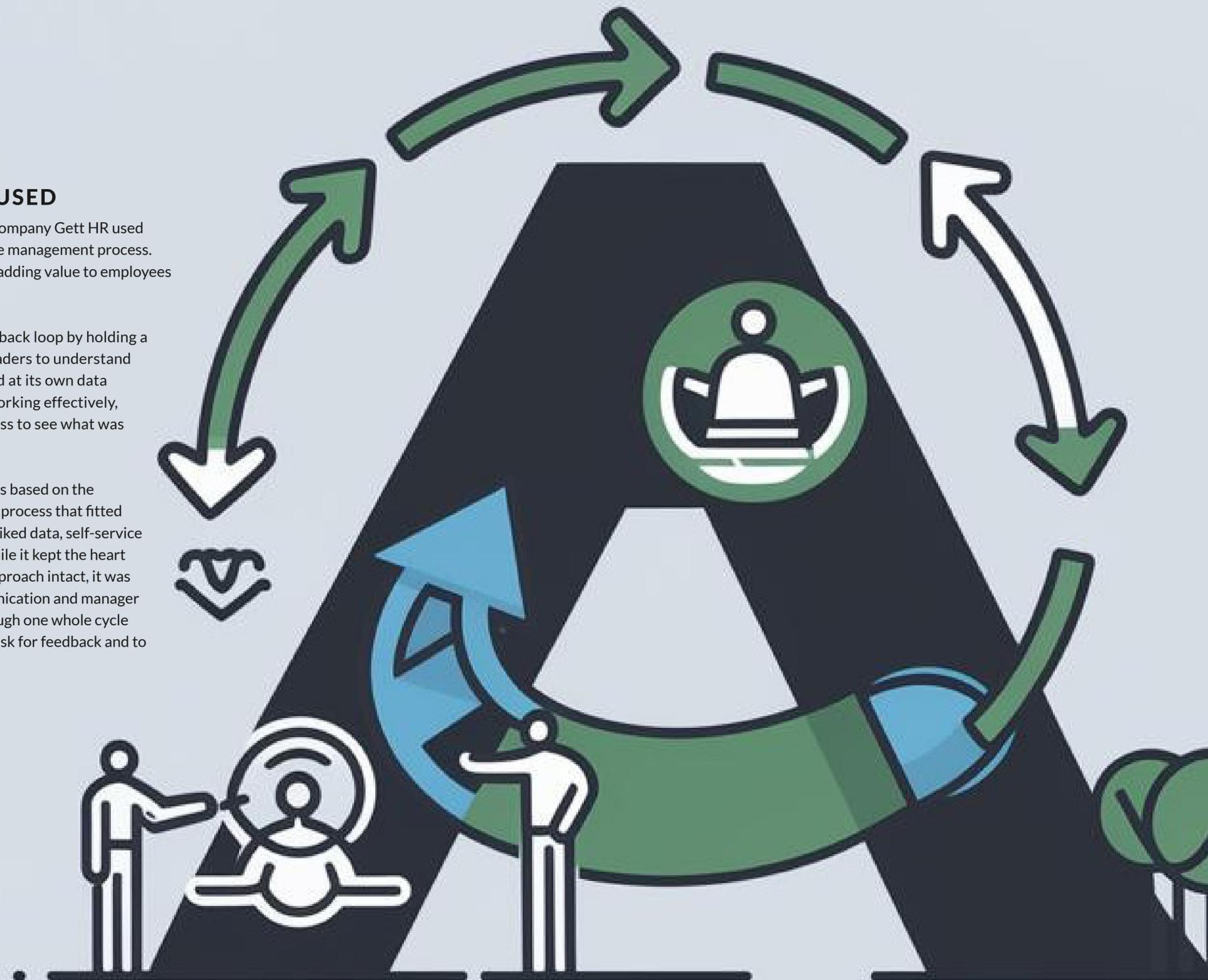
Agile HR is designed to be fast and flexible, enabling HR professionals to adapt to change quickly and respond to new challenges. It also helps HR become more collaborative in working with other departments such as IT, marketing and sales, to deliver value to the business and to change processes quickly with minimum risk.

## HOW IT IS BEING USED

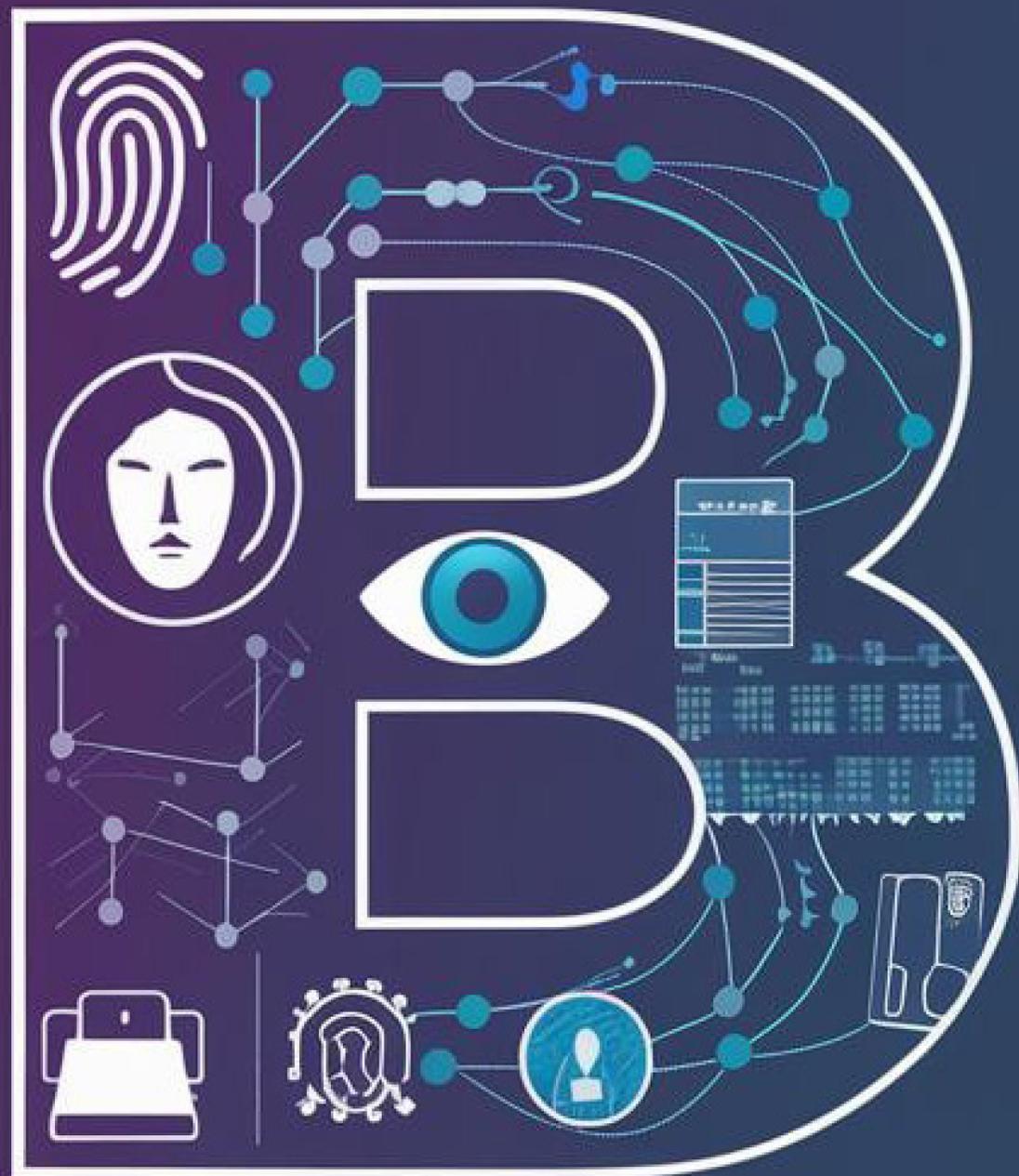
Corporate transportation tech company Gett HR used agile to overhaul its performance management process. The traditional process was not adding value to employees or their managers.

The [people team](#) created a feedback loop by holding a number of focus groups with leaders to understand what was working. It also looked at its own data to see why the system wasn't working effectively, looking at the end-to-end process to see what was causing friction in the system.

Gett then redesigned the process based on the feedback, testing and iterating a process that fitted its tech-savvy workforce which liked data, self-service and technology solutions. So, while it kept the heart of performance management approach intact, it was able to make changes to communication and manager understanding. After going through one whole cycle it went back to stakeholders to ask for feedback and to continue to iterate from that.



# Biometric technology



## WHAT IT IS

Biometric technology is the use of unique physical features such as face or palm to identify an individual. The ISO and IEC standards bodies define biometrics as “the automated recognition of individuals based on their biological and behavioural characteristics.”

To be recognised, an individual must have been previously seen and their biometric data recorded. This is known as enrolment. Samples of biometric data, captured from an individual, are stored to allow comparison with samples captured during subsequent encounters. Most of us will have come across their use for security purposes, such as using a fingerprint or iris in your eye to unlock a mobile phone, authenticating customers when they log into their online banking account or verifying customers to process payments.

## HOW IT IMPACTS HR

Biometrics can be used for a variety of purposes including accessing facilities, which helps to improve security and prevent unauthorised access. They can be used to track employee time and attendance to ensure employees are accurately paid for their work and are not abusing company time. Another use is fraud prevention for employees who work with sensitive data as biometrics are difficult to counterfeit. Finally this technology can be used to improve employee engagement. For example, companies can use biometric data to track employee stress levels and provide them with resources to help them manage stress or to personalise the offer.

However, there are some major considerations when thinking about using biometrics in HR, not least privacy concerns. For example people may worry that their biometric data could be used to track their movements or to identify them without their knowledge or consent, or that their biometric data is not secure or that it will be used in ways that they do not approve of. Also biometric systems can be expensive to implement and maintain.

## HOW IT IS BEING USED

This is a tricky area for organisations due to the sensitive nature of the data acquired, as a number of companies have found. While consumers appear happy to use biometrics for banking and to pay, employee applications are proving more problematic.

Shoe retailer Mansfield implemented mandatory fingerprint scanning for employees to access cash registers, arguing it was the most secure method to prevent fraud. However, an employee sued the company in Amsterdam for privacy infringement. The court ruled Mansfield’s use of biometric data unlawful under Dutch Data protection laws, stating that the company failed to consider less intrusive alternatives and did not demonstrate the proportionality of the biometric processing.

In 2021, Walmart settled a \$10 million lawsuit with 21,677 current and former Illinois employees. The case involved the use of palm scanning devices without obtaining written consent, violating Illinois’ biometric laws. This highlights the importance of compliance with legal requirements and the need to justify the use of biometric data in terms of purpose and proportionality.

# Communication: (Async v Sync)

## WHAT IT IS

Asynchronous communication is how you communicate when your colleagues are not altogether. It is a vital process in today's world of work where some of your people may be working asynchronously - ie working on a team that does not require everyone to be in the same location or online simultaneously, such as in a remote/hybrid environment or where team members are located across different time zones. When you work asynchronously, individuals can maximise their productivity without waiting for others to complete tasks.

Synchronous communication is the exchange of information in real-time. In other words, an interactive 'live' interchange between people, such as in the office in person or via a video conferencing platform.

## HOW IT IMPACTS HR

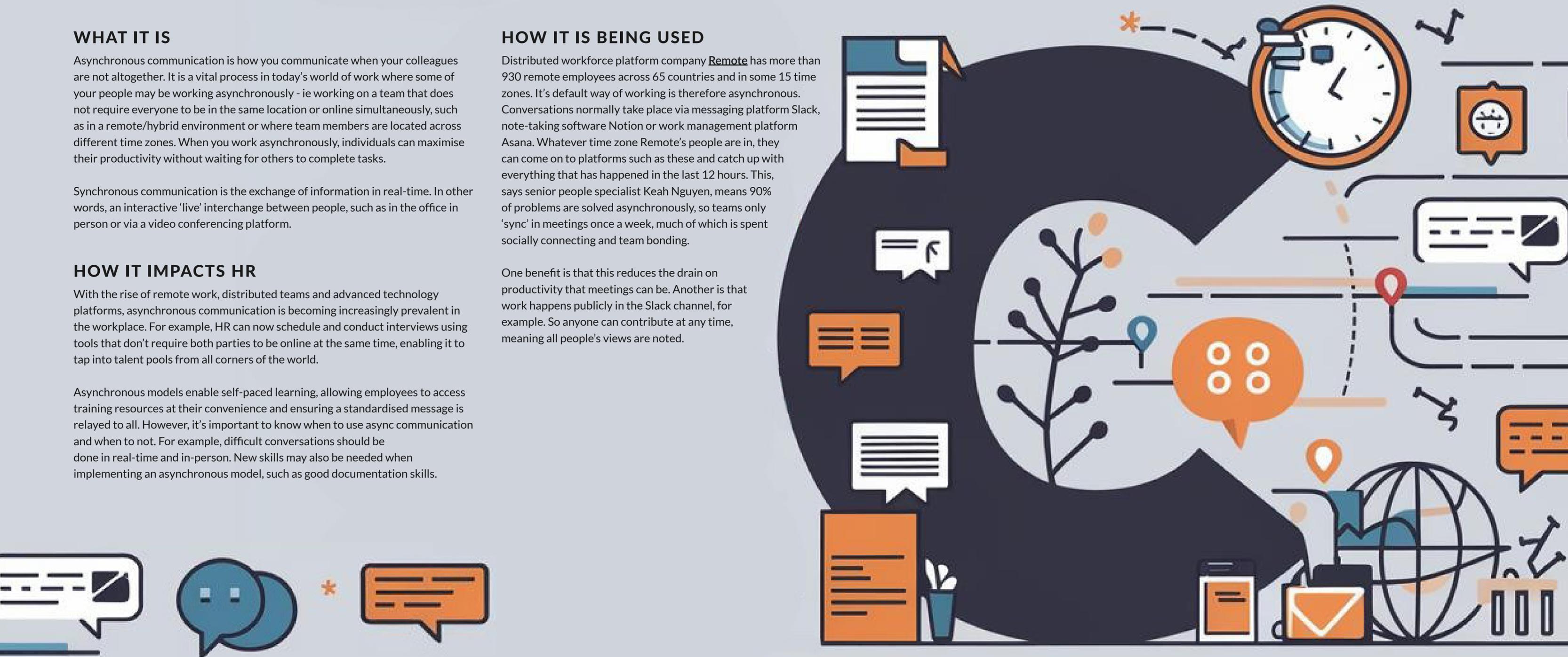
With the rise of remote work, distributed teams and advanced technology platforms, asynchronous communication is becoming increasingly prevalent in the workplace. For example, HR can now schedule and conduct interviews using tools that don't require both parties to be online at the same time, enabling it to tap into talent pools from all corners of the world.

Asynchronous models enable self-paced learning, allowing employees to access training resources at their convenience and ensuring a standardised message is relayed to all. However, it's important to know when to use async communication and when to not. For example, difficult conversations should be done in real-time and in-person. New skills may also be needed when implementing an asynchronous model, such as good documentation skills.

## HOW IT IS BEING USED

Distributed workforce platform company **Remote** has more than 930 remote employees across 65 countries and in some 15 time zones. Its default way of working is therefore asynchronous. Conversations normally take place via messaging platform Slack, note-taking software Notion or work management platform Asana. Whatever time zone Remote's people are in, they can come on to platforms such as these and catch up with everything that has happened in the last 12 hours. This, says senior people specialist Keah Nguyen, means 90% of problems are solved asynchronously, so teams only 'sync' in meetings once a week, much of which is spent socially connecting and team bonding.

One benefit is that this reduces the drain on productivity that meetings can be. Another is that work happens publicly in the Slack channel, for example. So anyone can contribute at any time, meaning all people's views are noted.



# Digital twin

## WHAT IT IS

A digital twin is a virtual replica of a physical object or system. It can be used to simulate the behaviour of these objects and systems or to predict how they will perform under different conditions. This helps with identifying problems, optimising design or predicting maintenance needs, for example.

To understand this, imagine you have a toy car. You can play with the car in the real world but you can also make a digital twin of the car on your computer. The digital twin is a copy of the car but it's made of code. The digital twin has all the same parts as the real car but it's also connected to sensors. These sensors can tell the digital twin how the real car is moving. For example, if you're driving the real car down the road, the digital twin will know how fast you're going and how much the car is turning. You can test different ways to drive the car. You can see how the car would behave if it was hit by another car. You can even use the digital twin to design a new car.

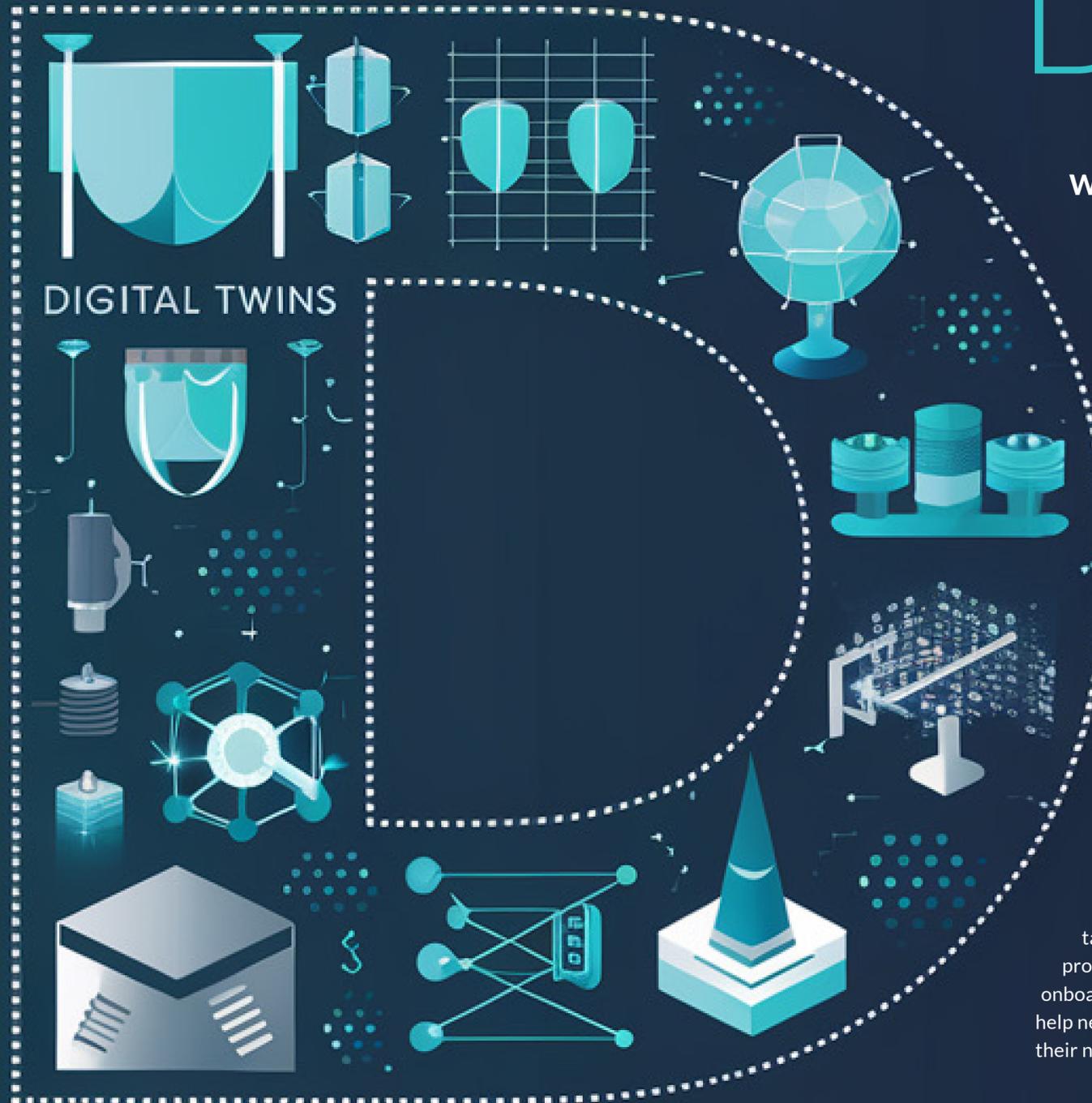
## HOW IT IMPACTS HR

HR can use digital twins to create virtual representations and simulations to analyse the performance of their workplace, thus gaining the insights to inform decisions. For example, a digital twin can be used to optimise recruitment by simulating the recruitment process and identifying the most effective ways to attract and hire top talent. This information can then be used to improve the recruitment process and make it more efficient. Another use is creating personalised onboarding experiences for new employees. This information can be used to help new employees learn about the company culture and get up to speed on their new roles.

## HOW IT IS BEING USED

There are many examples of digital twins being used to improve product performance. For example, Siemens uses digital twins to improve the performance of its wind turbines. This information is used to identify potential problems and to make adjustments to the turbines' operation.

However, perhaps the most interesting for HR is how digital twins are being used at IBM. It has developed a digital HR business partner, HiRo, to help guide people through processes, built on its Watson Orchestrate platform. For example, in recruitment the digital HRBP learns criteria for promotion, ensures all managers submit applicable candidates, gathers supporting evidence, highlights gaps where employees are missing key criteria, suggests salary increases and loads data into HRIS and payroll systems. When piloted in IBM's North American business it cut the promotion process from eight weeks to four and saved 12,000 hours across the HRBP community.





# Five G (5G)

## WHAT IT IS

5G is the fifth generation of cellular network technology. It offers significantly faster speeds than previous generations of cellular networks, being designed to support a 100x increase in traffic capacity and network efficiency. It also offers lower latency, which means signals go to one place and back much more rapidly. 5G is the first cellular technology that is designed specifically to connect things that are not just mobile phones. It's about hyperconnectivity.

5G is far more responsive to requests that you give to the internet and it is far more reliable and scalable. This means that 5G can be used to transmit large amounts of data in real time, which has a number of potential implications for HR. However, there have been some obstacles that are impacting the widespread roll out of 5G, from many countries in the West reducing their reliance on Chinese infrastructure providers who have been leading the way in 5G and safety concerns within the US airline industry to leafy trees affecting signal strength!

## HOW IT IMPACTS HR

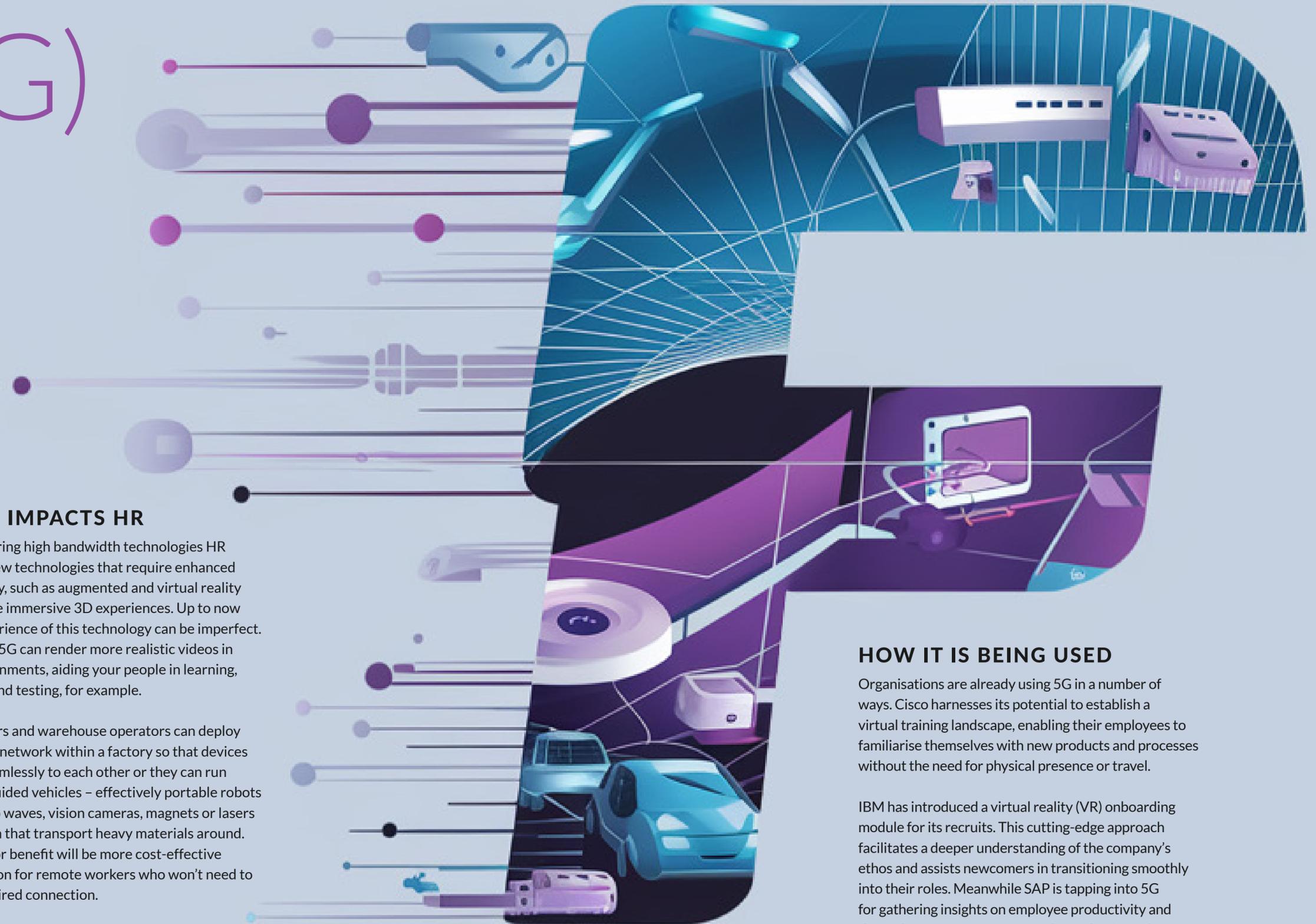
With 5G offering high bandwidth technologies HR can exploit new technologies that require enhanced quality display, such as augmented and virtual reality which provide immersive 3D experiences. Up to now the user experience of this technology can be imperfect. Devices with 5G can render more realistic videos in virtual environments, aiding your people in learning, onboarding and testing, for example.

Manufacturers and warehouse operators can deploy their own 5G network within a factory so that devices talk more seamlessly to each other or they can run automated guided vehicles – effectively portable robots that use radio waves, vision cameras, magnets or lasers for navigation that transport heavy materials around. Another major benefit will be more cost-effective communication for remote workers who won't need to be tied to a wired connection.

## HOW IT IS BEING USED

Organisations are already using 5G in a number of ways. Cisco harnesses its potential to establish a virtual training landscape, enabling their employees to familiarise themselves with new products and processes without the need for physical presence or travel.

IBM has introduced a virtual reality (VR) onboarding module for its recruits. This cutting-edge approach facilitates a deeper understanding of the company's ethos and assists newcomers in transitioning smoothly into their roles. Meanwhile SAP is tapping into 5G for gathering insights on employee productivity and their whereabouts, aiming to enhance both employee engagement levels and safety parameters.



# Generative AI & LLMs

## WHAT IT IS

Generative AI and large language models (LLMs) are both types of artificial intelligence (AI) that can be used to create new content like audio, art and text, all by learning from a set of data without explicit instructions. This is where it differs from traditional AI systems that follow predetermined patterns and rules.

There are some key differences between generative AI and LLMs. Generative AI is a broader term that refers to any AI system that can create new things, such as images, text or music. It uses what it has learned to create things that are similar to things it has seen before. For example, if you give a generative AI program a bunch of pictures of dogs, it can learn to recognise what makes a dog a dog. Then, it can use that knowledge to create new pictures of dogs. The new pictures might not be exactly the same as the pictures it was trained on, but they will still look like dogs.

LLMs are a specific type of generative AI that are trained on massive datasets of text and code, which allows them to generate text that is similar to human-written text, ie text that is both coherent and informative. They are specifically designed to work with language. The most well-known examples of generative AI are ChatGPT – a chatbot that generates human-like text, DALL-E – a program that can create images based on text descriptions, and Google’s Gemini – an LLM that generates different creative text formats.

## HOW IT IMPACTS HR

There are many applications for **generative AI in HR**. ChatGPT developer OpenAI’s research estimates that 80% of jobs today can incorporate generative AI technology and capabilities. For example, it can automate the recruitment experience by screening CVs and generating job descriptions. It can personalise the candidate experience by generating personalised emails, sending targeted messages and creating tailored assessments. It can be used to create **virtual assistants** that can help with tasks such as scheduling appointments, answering questions and providing support. And it can help HR professionals draft any form of content, from contracts and templates to vendor briefs.

It is vital to remember, however, that generative AI ‘hallucinates’. In other words, it can produce a confident response that is not correct. For example, it may suggest links to research that look correct but which do not in fact exist. It can also magnify any bias or disinformation that is in the dataset it picks from. We therefore recommend that, at this stage, generative AI is only used for idea generation or first drafts and a human should always check the output!

## HOW IT IS BEING USED

In February 2023, UK energy firm Octopus started using generative AI to handle customer enquiries. Trained on a large dataset of customer emails and queries, the AI generates accurate and helpful responses by accessing various sources, including customer records, product data, and news articles. By May 2023, the AI was managing 34% of customer emails, equivalent to the work of 250 human customer service professionals. CEO Greg Jackson noted that the AI achieved an 80% customer satisfaction score, compared to 65% from trained workers. Despite its efficiency, Jackson assured that it wouldn’t result in job losses, as a team supervises the AI’s responses, drafting personalised replies for review before sending.





# Hybrid working

## WHAT IT IS

Hybrid working refers to a flexible work model that combines remote work with in-office presence. This approach allows employees to split their time between working from home or other remote locations and working at a central office. The hybrid model aims to offer the best of both worlds: the convenience and flexibility of remote work along with the collaboration and resource access of a traditional office environment. Hybrid working is designed to adapt to various employee preferences and needs, supporting a better work-life balance, enhancing productivity and maintaining a cohesive company culture.

This model has gained significant traction in recent years, particularly in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, which accelerated the shift towards remote and flexible work arrangements.

## HOW IT IMPACTS HR

There is much debate on the impact of hybrid and remote working (see R) on productivity, collaboration and innovation. Hybrid working has gained traction due to technological advancements and the COVID-19 pandemic, sparking debate on its impact on productivity, collaboration and innovation.

A July 2023 Stanford study found hybrid working has a zero to mildly positive impact on productivity (1-3%) as it saves workers 2-3 hours weekly from commuting, with 40% of that time reinvested in work. Hybrid workers are also more productive at home due to fewer distractions. Additionally, hybrid work improves employee recruitment and retention, raises happiness (equivalent to an 8% pay increase in the US) and is preferred by 75% of employees to be in the office for 50% of the time or less. However, organisations without clear hybrid work norms risk a 12% higher employee turnover.

In the UK, a May 2023 CIPD study found 83% of organisations offer hybrid work, with varying policies on required in-office days. Effective management is crucial for productivity gains, and HR professionals face the challenge of ensuring fairness and optimal implementation.

## HOW IT IS BEING USED

US retailer Target has fully embraced hybrid working. Its global headquarters transitioned to virtual working in 2020, leading to a reimagined workplace model. CHRO Melissa Kremer highlights this as an opportunity to blend onsite and virtual collaborations. Target formed a 'future of work' team to guide the strategy, gathering feedback from global HQ locations. Employees personalise their work patterns with a 'flex for your day' approach rather than a fixed remote-onsite ratio. In 2024 Target required workers to attend the office but only for four weeks a year, a total of 20 days. Managers and teams identify when work needs to happen onsite.

Investments in office modifications and technology include Zoom-ready conference spaces, open-format floor plans and a 'flex floor' concept in Minnesota for collaborative efforts. Enhanced communication tools like Slack and the Purpose Network keep teams connected and resources for health and wellbeing are provided. Target aims to foster an inclusive, collaborative, and caring environment through its adaptive hybrid work strategy.



# Internet of you



## WHAT IT IS

The Internet of You (IoU) is a term used to describe the collection of data about you that is collected and stored online. This data can include your personal information, such as your name, address and phone number, as well as your online activity, such as the websites you visit, the apps you use and the things you search for.

Professor Tomas Chamorro-Premuzic calls it the “You of Things” as opposed to the Internet of Things (**see our previous A-Z**). Without your data there is no artificial intelligence. It is all our data that fuels algorithms. The IoU is a powerful tool that can be used to improve your life in many ways. For example, it can be used to personalise your online experience, provide you with targeted advertising and help you stay connected with friends and family. However, the IoU can also be used to track your behaviour, invade your privacy and even discriminate against you. So it’s important to take steps to protect your privacy.

## HOW IT IMPACTS HR

We’re basically talking about personal data collection here so in effect the IoU pervades HR and will only become more important as organisations adopt more algorithm-based technologies that rely on the analysis of large amounts of personal data to infer correlations or derive information deemed useful to make decisions. For example understanding who is at most risk of leaving your organisation. Or using generative AI, which is trained on a massive dataset of text and code that includes information about people and their online activity. Or personalising onboarding and benefits. Or seeing how employees interact with internal tools to improve the employee experience.

What is important, of course, is that data is used ethically and responsibly. HR professionals should always be transparent with employees about how their data is being collected and used and how decisions are being made by algorithms. And that it complies with the latest legislation in their jurisdictions!

## HOW IT IS BEING USED

Johnson & Johnson (J&J) has a mission to have the world’s healthiest workforces. It leverages the Internet of You (IoU) by using data collected from employees to personalise wellbeing programmes. The meQuilibrium – or meQ – app is free to Johnson & Johnson employees in the US and Puerto Rico and harnesses the science of behavioural psychology to help reduce stress and also improve resilience, agility and productivity. Through customised, actionable how-to tips, users can learn how to adopt behaviours that can help keep them healthy and energised, like advice on how to practice mindfulness throughout a hectic day.

The company’s digital health platform, Healthy & Me, is available to employees in the US (and their spouses or partners) who can earn an annual \$500 discount on health insurance simply by earning and redeeming points for performing such good-for-you tasks as taking a health risk assessment, tracking physical activity or scheduling preventative screenings like mammograms or colonoscopies. To ensure employees understand how data is used from platforms such as this the firm has clearly signposted and accessible information in its ESG hub and data privacy policy.

# Job displacement

## WHAT IT IS

Job displacements refers to the involuntary loss of a job due to factors external to the worker, such as technological advancements, economic downturns, company restructurings, outsourcing or changes in industry demand. Displaced workers are those who have been laid off or lost their jobs because their employers closed or moved, there was insufficient work for them to do or their position or shift was abolished. This concept is distinct from voluntary job changes or departures and emphasises external forces as the primary reason for job loss. Job displacement can lead to periods of unemployment, reduced income and the need for retraining or skills acquisition to secure new employment.

## HOW IT IMPACTS HR

Rapid technological advancements have made job displacement a pressing concern. AI, machine learning, automation and robotics can perform tasks traditionally carried out by humans, from manufacturing to data analysis. A decade ago AI application was nascent but today many industries have integrated AI and automation into their core operations, reducing demand for certain job roles. Additionally, globalisation allows jobs to be outsourced to cheaper locations, while the gig economy and lean business models favour temporary positions, causing job instability.

HR's challenge is ensuring the workforce has the skills and training to transition into new roles while maintaining motivation and morale. HR professionals must anticipate future skills demands to keep employees relevant and employable. They must also continually reinvent their skills to avoid displacement by automation. IBM, for example, announced that 30% of back-office roles will be automated, with CEO Arvind Krishna stating that hiring in areas like HR will slow down as tasks are replaced by automation.

## HOW IT IS BEING USED

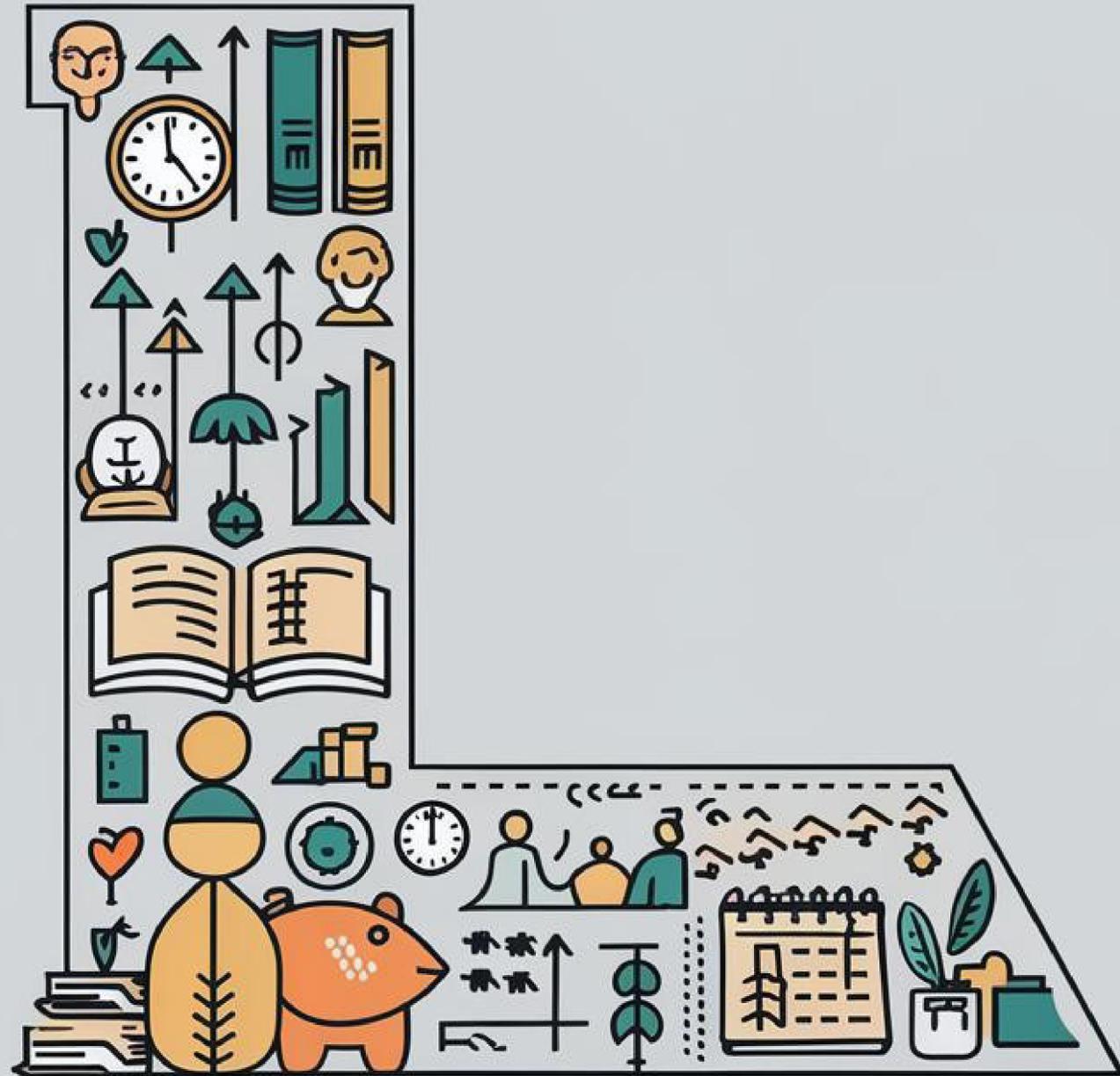
At Weetabix, the HR team proactively prepares employees for job displacement due to technological advancements. They maintain ongoing communication with employees about technological changes and their impacts, ensuring everyone is aware of upcoming changes and can prepare accordingly. HR invests in training programmes to upskill employees, enabling adaptation to new roles created by automation and robotics. This includes training on new technologies and processes, ensuring smooth transitions into updated roles.

The HR team also engages in transparent discussions with unions about changes in job roles and working conditions. Pre-emptive communication helps manage expectations and reduces resistance. By consistently discussing technological advancements and their implications, HR ensures employees are not surprised by changes, contextualising them within the broader scope of the company's evolution, making them more palatable. For example, Weetabix has integrated robotics into its supply chain, automating tasks like warehouse management. Continuous dialogue with employees about how these changes affect their roles ensures workers are not caught off guard by the implementation of new technologies.





# Longevity literacy



## WHAT IT IS

Longevity literacy is the understanding and application of strategies to live a healthy, purposeful and financially resilient life in the context of increasing life expectancy.

Today it is expected that many people will live to 100. As they live longer, they need to adapt to extended periods of retirement and active living. Longevity literacy focuses on three pillars: quality of life, purpose and financial resilience, ensuring individuals can thrive throughout their extended lives.

## HOW IT IMPACTS HR

As global life expectancy rises HR must address the challenges and opportunities of an ageing workforce. According to the United Nations, global average life expectancy will reach about 81 years by 2100, following an increase from 46 to 73 between 1950 and 2019. By 2050, there will be 2.1 billion people over 60 years old, and most individuals will outlive their retirement savings by eight to 20 years. In the next decade 40 million baby boomers are expected to retire, taking significant undocumented knowledge with them.

Meanwhile Mercer research finds more than four in 10 (44%) of under 40s want to retire by 60 while Standard Life's 2024 research reveals that the number of 55-64-year-olds unretiring and going back to work has almost doubled since 2023 (jumping from 6% in 2022 to 11% this year) due to financial concerns.

Addressing these demographic shifts involves retaining institutional knowledge, adapting to a multigenerational workforce and supporting continuous learning and career development. By fostering longevity literacy, HR can help employees remain engaged and productive, reduce turnover costs and enhance overall organisational resilience. Additionally, addressing the needs of older employees through flexible work arrangements and retirement planning can mitigate the risks associated with an ageing workforce.

## HOW IT IS BEING USED

HR departments are implementing longevity literacy by promoting lifelong learning, offering reskilling and upskilling opportunities and ensuring financial wellness programmes are accessible to all employees. Flexible work arrangements, such as job-sharing and phased retirement plans, support older employees in remaining active in the workforce. Furthermore, regular training and transparent communication about retirement plans and financial resilience help employees prepare for longer life spans, ensuring they stay motivated and connected.

Newham Council is one which has secured Age-friendly Employer status, reflecting its commitment to a multi-generational workforce. As of May 2023, nearly 40% of its 4,300 employees were aged 50 and above. The Council's Ageing Well Strategy aims to improve the health and wellbeing of residents over 50 and reduce health inequalities. Newham joins nearly 200 organisations in the Age-friendly Employer pledge, which includes making job adverts appealing to older people and fostering discussions about age-related topics like menopause.

Meanwhile in the US the Boston Red Sox is a 'Certified Age Friendly Employer.' It actively employs people over the age of 50, with over 30% of its workforce in this age group. The Red Sox emphasises age and generational diversity as part of its commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion.

# Metaverse

## WHAT IT IS

Definitions of the metaverse differ but basically it is collective virtual shared space – a single, universal and immersive world facilitated by the use of virtual reality and augmented reality where users interact with a computer-generated environment and other users. Futurist Bernard Marr says “really it’s a catch-all term for ‘whatever the internet evolves into next.’”

The concept took a big leap forward when Facebook rebranded to Meta and said it would be concentrating efforts on building the metaverse. However, as the concept of the metaverse evolves, it is increasingly a subject of debate. Is it a revolutionary leap in technology or just an overhyped dream? The World Economic Forum plumps for the former and has tied up with Accenture and Microsoft to foster a secure, ethical and inclusive Metaverse with practical applications, secure infrastructure and global significance.

## HOW IT IMPACTS HR

The metaverse has the potential to be used in human resources in a number of ways, including for recruitment, where it can be used to create virtual job fairs and interviews to enable companies to reach a wider pool of candidates and to assess their skills and fit for the role in a more immersive way. It could also be used to create virtual onboarding experiences for new employees. This would help new employees to learn about the company culture and to get up to speed on their new roles in a more engaging way.

Other ways to use the metaverse are to create virtual training experiences for employees so they can learn new skills and to practice their skills in a safe and controlled environment, for collaboration using virtual workspaces where employees can collaborate on projects and to create virtual performance reviews so managers and employees can have more engaging and productive performance conversations.

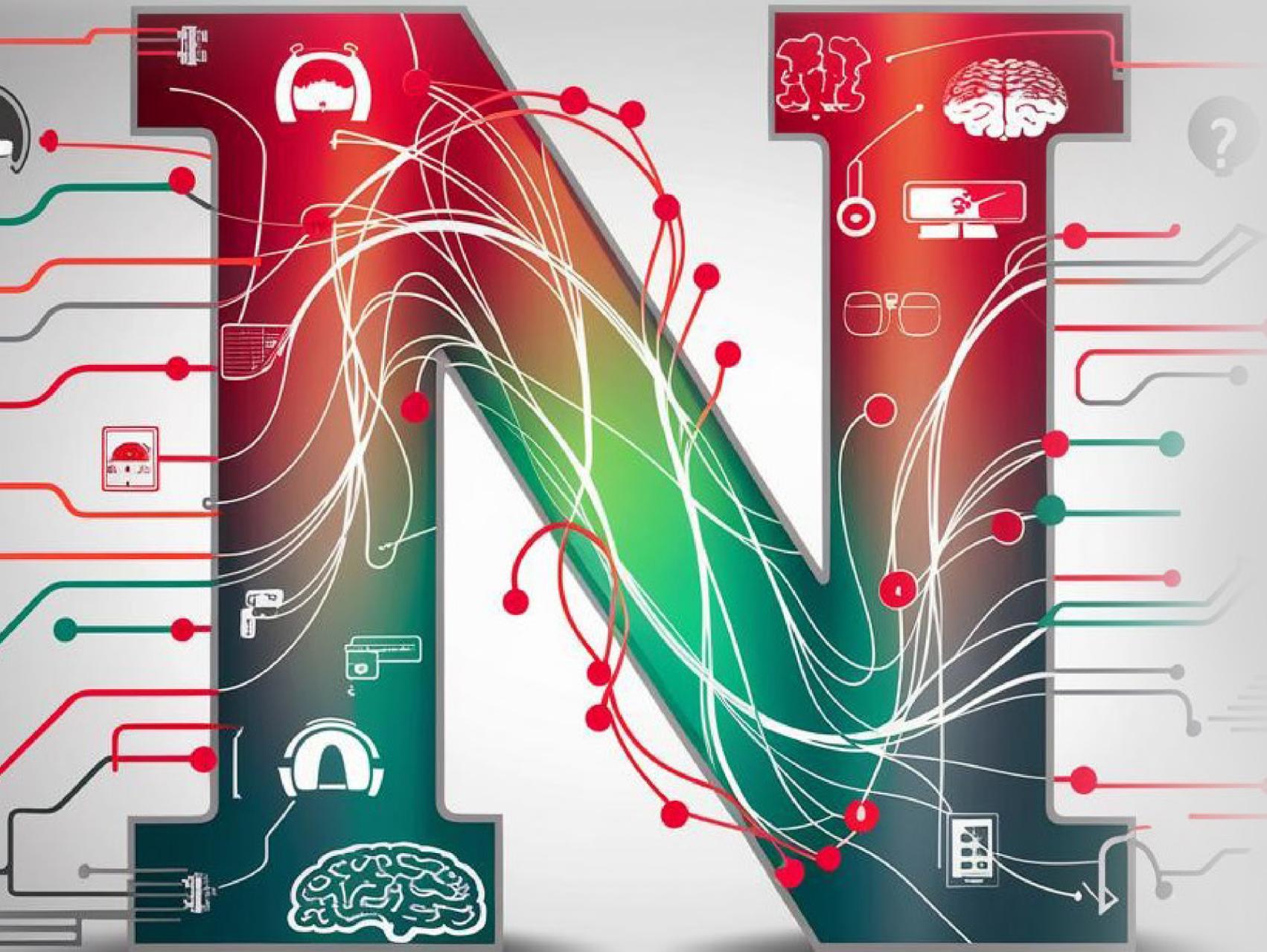


## HOW IT IS BEING USED

Consulting firm Accenture invested heavily in its Metaverse Continuum Group in 2022, though announced it was laying off 19,000 positions, or 2.5% of its entire workforce, a year later – raising some question marks over its tech focus. The Group helps companies experiment through creating virtual environments, such as Changi Airport Group’s ChangiVerse virtual airport.

Accenture itself has used the metaverse to create workplace experiences where its people can participate, contribute and feel like they belong, regardless of where they work. Before the COVID-19 pandemic it built its ‘Nth floor’ metaverse for people to gather. After the pandemic hit it created a virtual campus called One Accenture Park within the Nth floor metaverse to help new employees personally connect with the culture and foster professional relationships. In 2022 150,000 new hires worked from the metaverse on their first day at Accenture.

# Neurotech



## WHAT IT IS

Neurotech, or neurotechnology, is a broad term that refers to any technology that is used to interact with the brain. This can include technologies that are used to measure brain activity, such as EEG and fMRI, as well as technologies that are used to stimulate the brain, such as transcranial magnetic stimulation (TMS) and deep brain stimulation (DBS).

This can be the stuff of Dystopian novels, raising questions about mental privacy and human autonomy. For example, some people are concerned that neurotech could be used to manipulate people's thoughts and behaviour. According to the United Nations, neurotech research and patents have soared at least 20 fold over the past two decades, with devices getting more powerful. For example, entrepreneur Elon Musk's company Neuralink last year received Food and Drug Administration approval to begin human testing for a tiny brain implant that can communicate with computers.

## HOW IT IMPACTS HR

So firstly, HR needs to proceed with great caution here. And we are some way behind using neurotech in the workplace today. But here's some food for thought. This technology could be used to measure brain activity and identify patterns that are associated with high performance. This information could then be used to develop training programmes that help employees to improve their performance.

It could be used to stimulate the brain in ways that reduce stress and anxiety, to help employees to be more productive and to have a better quality of life. It could be used to personalise learning by measuring brain activity and identifying patterns that are associated with different learning styles. As neurotech continues to develop, we can expect to see even more innovative ways to use it in organisations but ethical concerns need to be addressed before it can be widely used.

## HOW IT IS BEING USED

As this is an emerging field there are few examples of its use in organisations in the public domain. However, according to an HBR article last year thousands of companies in industries such as construction, trucking and aviation use neurotech devices to ensure that their employees are wide awake. One example is SmartCap, whose flagship tool is fatigue-tracking headband with embedded EEG sensors that can be worn alone or integrated into a hard hat or cap. The LifeBand operates by collecting brainwave data and analysing it using SmartCap's LifeApp software. This software employs unique algorithms to evaluate the user's level of fatigue on a scale ranging from 1 (extremely alert) to 5 (falling asleep involuntarily). If the system identifies that a user is becoming excessively tired, it promptly alerts both the individual and their supervisor.



# Platform working

## WHAT IT IS

Like an open talent marketplace, platform working involves sourcing talent via digital platforms. However, unlike open talent marketplaces, platform working focuses on connecting organisations with external talent, offering freelancers, gig workers and independent contractors access to short-term projects and assignments tailored to their skills and expertise.

While projects in open talent marketplaces tend to be smaller and more specific, allowing employees to contribute their expertise on short-term engagements while remaining full-time employees, projects in platform working can vary in size and complexity, ranging from small tasks to full-fledged projects requiring dedicated effort from platform workers. Organisations gain access to a diverse pool of talent for specific needs, without committing to full-time hires.

## HOW IT IMPACTS HR

Platform work is becoming increasingly popular as it offers a number of benefits to both workers and employers. For workers, platform work offers flexibility, freedom and the opportunity to work on their own terms. For employers, it is cost-effective as they are paying only for the specific expertise needed, potentially at lower rates than full-time employees and can tap into niche talent not readily available within the organisation.

However, it takes a different mindset in recruitment, with the focus on finding specific skills, not full-time roles. There is also the need for new approaches to manage relationships with independent workers as well as compliance considerations, such as navigating labour laws and regulations for non-traditional work arrangements. Platforms can also generate data on skills, performance and trends, informing talent strategies. But be mindful of reputational issues – platform workers often have little job security and no benefits, which has led to legal challenges in a number of countries.

## HOW IT IS BEING USED

Software-as-a-service company Crownpeak's traditional recruitment model struggled to keep pace with its rapid growth. Time-to-hire reached three months, hindering the company's ability to fulfill project needs. It turned to Upwork's global marketplace, shifting from role-based hiring to skill-based sourcing. This saved Crownpeak 90% time-to-hire (nine versus 90 days) and hundreds of days overall. Upwork's profiles, talent badges and job success scores simplified screening and freed up the talent acquisition team for other tasks. Visibility into rates and availability helped budget projects and Upwork's diverse talent pool allowed Crownpeak to fill critical skill gaps.









# (New) Talent in HR

## WHAT IT IS

The modern workplace has gone rogue. Hybrid models, diverse talent pools and tech-driven expectations are leaving traditional HR models gasping for air. That's where the new guard comes in. Job titles like chief culture officer, people experience director, chief DEI officer and head of remote have already gained popularity and as the role of HR broadens we can expect to see more titles appearing. And with this will be a redefinition of how HR adds value to the business.

## HOW IT IMPACTS HR

As the focus of HR shifts from compliance to fostering a thriving work environment – a shift that can only be strengthened as more of HR's role is automated – then HR professionals will need skills more often attributed to marketers or computer scientists. In 2020 the Cognizant Center for Future of Work and Future Workplace came up with 60 new HR jobs after talking to nearly 100 senior HR and learning professionals. It narrowed this down to 21 HR jobs of the future including chief purpose officer, work from home facilitator, human bias-offer, VR immersion counsellor and chatbot and human facilitator. New roles are laser-focused on specific, critical areas like DEI, gig management or employee adventure, surpassing the generalist approach of traditional HR.

Many play to the need for more data-savvy approaches to HR. You may have heard of people analytics directors but what about HR data detectives? Both crunch numbers to predict turnover, track talent trends and inform strategic actions. And how about an algorithm bias auditor? What's clear is the future of HR is not a singular captain steering the ship. It's a diverse crew, each member skilled in navigating the complexities of the modern workforce. These roles will not just reshape HR, they'll redefine how companies value and empower their greatest asset: their people.

## HOW IT IS BEING USED

OK, so we're all fed up with the discussions over what HR should be called. So we don't want yet more titles in HR. But... just look at roles we take for granted in business today that didn't exist a decade ago. Social media manager. SEO specialist. Podcast producer. Blockchain analyst. So this is not as far-fetched as you may think.

Pearson research finds one in five workers are in occupations that will shrink and that seven in 10 workers are in jobs where there is uncertainty about the future. So while we've probably all met a chief culture officer or employee experience director by now, how about a chief happiness officer? Search LinkedIn and you will find a growing group of people using this title, including in HR, and at least a handful of people listed as chief purpose officer. And wellbeing director is becoming common (although often linked in with diversity and inclusion).

But, of course, a title on a business card can only do so much. Ultimately the true test of these new HR roles lies in the ability to translate innovative titles into tangible results. From boosting employee engagement to driving data-driven insights, these positions hold immense potential to transform the modern workplace. Whether they succeed or merely become trendy labels hinges on one crucial factor: the ability of those who hold them to deliver outcomes that truly matter for the business and its people. The future of HR won't be defined by fancy titles but by the impactful actions that follow.



# Untapped talent



## WHAT IT IS

Untapped talent refers to individuals with abilities and skills that are yet to be fully recognised or utilised. These individuals may possess hidden potential or lack the opportunities or resources to showcase their talents. They could be people who have unconventional skills or come from non-traditional backgrounds such as self-taught skills in coding, art or music, or those who have gained valuable experience through life circumstances that wouldn't show up on a traditional resume. It also includes people who face systemic barriers to opportunity such as individuals from marginalised communities, those with **disabilities** or those who have been in prison. In the widest sense it can also include people who are underemployed or in unfulfilling jobs – those who may have skills and talents that are not being used in their current role.

## HOW IT IMPACTS HR

The underutilisation of untapped talent represents a significant loss both economically and socially. In the UK, the disability employment gap of 38.2% in 2021 indicated a potential loss of £28 billion annually. In the US, the unemployment rate for people with disabilities was 7.6% in 2022, compared to 3.5% for non-disabled individuals, contributing to an annual economic loss of \$455 billion due to the racial wage gap.

Globally, the International Labour Organisation noted 670 million women were willing to work but couldn't find employment, while youth unemployment hit 22.9% in 2020, affecting marginalised groups significantly. Additionally, only 8% of UK prisoners found employment within six months of release, and the US saw a 27% unemployment rate for formerly incarcerated individuals. These figures highlight the vast potential and economic costs of untapped talent. HR's role is crucial in addressing these issues through anti-discrimination laws, inclusive hiring practices, skills training, and challenging traditional notions of success and talent.

## HOW IT IS BEING USED

Founded in 2011, GitLab is the world's largest all-remote company, with over 1,300 employees in 67 countries. GitLab supports non-linear workdays, allowing team members to work during their most productive hours. All decisions and processes are documented and accessible to everyone, fostering trust and belonging. Performance is measured by results rather than hours worked, promoting accountability and autonomy. To combat isolation, GitLab holds regular online events, retreats and informal social interactions. The company appointed a head of remote to guide organisational design, communication and change management, ensuring remote work implications are considered in all decisions.

GitLab's approach focuses on empowering teams and removing obstacles to their success. This strategy has resulted in GitLab consistently ranking among the happiest workplaces, with low turnover rates and high employee engagement. The company has experienced rapid growth and profitability, achieving unicorn status in 2021.



# Visualisation of data



## WHAT IT IS

Data visualisation is the graphic representation of data. By using visual technologies, businesses can make compelling and engaging connections with employees and stakeholders. The human brain can process images 60,000 times faster than text. A team of neuroscientists from MIT has found that the brain can process entire images that the eye sees for as little as 13 milliseconds. So using visual tools and technologies is the perfect way to communicate messages to a wide range of audiences.

## HOW IT IMPACTS HR

Data visualisation can be used in a basic way, through using visual tools including screencasts, instructor videos, digital whiteboards and apps. Technologies including augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) are fast developing. But perhaps the most exciting use is in the interpretation of unstructured data. Says data visualisation vendor Zagami, which launched out of Oxford University in 2016: "HR challenges do not have numeric solutions. There is no case of, the answer is X. Rather, HR disciplines, from talent, performance and rewards to diversity, inclusion and fairness, need to look at trends in data sets, not precise answers. As such, HR analytics, as a discipline, needs tools for exploration and discovery, not algorithms and statistics. The ability to explore an HR data set to discover insights is an inherently visual exercise."

## HOW IT IS BEING USED

Major League Baseball team, the Pittsburgh Pirates, invested in player analytics to analyse data on thousands of players from the college system and around the world to find the best talent available at any point in the draft. It worked with Zagami to provide an interface which allows it to search quickly, compare, group and interrogate player stats at draft time in a way that was just not possible with Excel or other BI solutions. The results of the analysis were communicated by the informatics team to decision makers in the front office using data visualisation so that it makes it easy for the front office team to get key pieces of information to make timely decisions.



# Wellbeing

## WHAT IT IS

OK, so we know employee wellbeing has been an important trend for some time and that the COVID-19 pandemic put it centre stage. But with the rise of chronic stress and mental health issues as well as work-from-home, it can only become a more important trend. Today employee wellbeing is not just about physical health. It encompasses a holistic approach that considers an individual's physical, mental, emotional, financial and social wellbeing within the context of their work environment. It addresses factors like access to healthcare, healthy workplace practices, preventative measures; work-life balance such as flexible work arrangements, manageable workload and adequate time off; meaningful work, opportunities for growth and positive relationships with colleagues; financial security including fair compensation, benefits packages and financial literacy resources; and psychological safety, feeling comfortable expressing oneself and freedom from harassment or discrimination.

## HOW IT IMPACTS HR

Prioritising employee wellbeing is a **strategic investment** for HR professionals. By focusing on wellbeing, organisations can attract and retain top talent as a positive workplace culture is a significant draw for job seekers. Happy and healthy employees tend to be more productive and innovative, which directly benefits the company's bottom line. Furthermore, a focus on wellbeing reduces absenteeism and presenteeism as employees take fewer sick days and are more engaged while at work. This also leads to lower healthcare costs for both employees and employers. Emphasising wellbeing strengthens company culture, building trust among employees, fostering collaboration and creating a positive work environment. Addressing employee wellbeing is also crucial in managing the challenges of remote and hybrid work, ensuring that employees remain engaged and supported regardless of their work setting.



## HOW IT IS BEING USED

Organisations are implementing various strategies to enhance employee wellbeing. Personalised wellbeing initiatives cater to individual needs and preferences, making support more effective. Data-driven insights help HR understand wellbeing trends and tailor interventions accordingly. A holistic approach addresses not only physical and mental health but also social, financial and environmental factors affecting employees.

Technology plays a significant role, with wearables, AI-powered tools and digital platforms supporting wellbeing initiatives. Additionally, proactive measures aim to prevent issues like burnout and mental health problems before they arise, ensuring a healthier and more resilient workforce. By prioritising employee wellbeing, HR professionals can foster a culture of health, happiness and high performance, ensuring long-term organisational success.

# XR- Extended reality



## WHAT IT IS

Extended reality (XR) encompasses digital technologies that enhance a user's physical reality, including augmented reality (AR), virtual reality (VR) and mixed reality (MR). XR creates immersive experiences by overlaying digital content onto the real world (AR), fully simulating environments (VR), or combining elements of both (MR). These technologies provide users with interactive and engaging experiences that blend the physical and digital worlds.

## HOW IT IMPACTS HR

XR is revolutionising HR by transforming several key functions. In recruitment XR facilitates virtual job fairs and immersive interviews, broadening the candidate pool and enabling better skills assessment. For onboarding virtual experiences help new employees understand company culture and roles in a more engaging way. XR also enhances training by providing safe, controlled environments for learning and practicing new skills which improves retention and competency. In terms of collaboration virtual workspaces allow global teams to work together effectively, fostering a sense of connection among employees. Additionally, XR creates engaging environments for performance management, promoting productive conversations between managers and employees. These applications of XR in HR not only increase efficiency but also enhance the overall employee experience.

## HOW IT IS BEING USED

Several companies have integrated XR into their HR practices. PwC utilises a VR platform called Virtual Park for recruitment and onboarding, enhancing candidate and new hire experiences. Interested candidates can design their own avatar, navigate the Park and participate in PwC events. It's a chance to delve deeper into PwC, connect with people across various departments, offices and levels, and gain firsthand insights. Plus, they can network with professionals from different business areas and engage with the student recruitment team in one-on-one and small group discussions.

In 2022 Samsung Biologics hosted a virtual recruitment fair in the metaverse, reaching a broader audience. Participants were provided with an extensive information about the company, job positions and the corporate culture.

These examples show how XR can improve engagement, learning outcomes and communication while reducing costs associated with training and onboarding. However, challenges such as high development costs, accessibility issues and privacy concerns regarding data collection must be addressed as XR technology continues to evolve. As organisations adopt these innovative solutions XR is set to transform how HR engages with employees and tackles traditional HR challenges.

# You - New roles in HR

## WHAT IT IS

As we noted in *T (new Talent in HR)* the role of HR is evolving rapidly in response to technological advancements, demographic shifts and the changing nature of work. Traditionally focused on recruitment, payroll and employee relations, HR is now becoming a strategic partner in shaping organisational culture, driving innovation and ensuring long-term sustainability. New roles within HR are emerging to address the challenges of a modern workforce, including roles that focus on employee wellbeing, data-driven decision-making and the integration of human-machine collaboration. Jeanne Meister, managing partner of Future Workplace, highlights this transformation, predicting that over the next decade, HR will see the creation of numerous new positions that blend traditional HR responsibilities with cutting-edge technology and a deeper focus on employee experience.

## HOW IT IMPACTS HR

This shift in HR's role significantly impacts how HR professionals operate and the skills they need to succeed. Some roles are already becoming more prevalent, for example head of employee experience, but what about chatbot and human facilitator, VR immersion counsellor or HR data detective? Roles like director of wellbeing are becoming critical as companies recognise the importance of holistic employee health as a strategic business priority. Similarly, the emergence of the human bias officer reflects the growing need to address issues of fairness and equity, particularly as organisations increasingly rely on AI and data-driven processes.

The future of work leader is another role that exemplifies HR's evolving focus, as it involves setting strategies for upskilling and reskilling the workforce to meet the demands of a rapidly changing business environment. These roles highlight the expanding scope of HR, requiring professionals to develop new competencies in areas like technology, data analysis and ethics.



## HOW IT IS BEING USED

Standard Chartered's approach to the future of work is a prime example of how organisations can effectively navigate the changing landscape of HR. With a head of future workforce & advocacy strategy, the bank has strategically focused on reskilling and flexible working to enhance performance and productivity. A key element of its strategy involves categorising jobs into "sunset roles," which are being phased out due to technological advancements, and "sunrise roles," which represent emerging opportunities. Through initiatives like the Discover learning platform and targeted academies, Standard Chartered equips employees with new skills to transition into these sunrise roles, ensuring job security and significant cost savings. For example, retraining employees for roles in cybersecurity rather than letting them go as their old roles become obsolete.



# Zoom fatigue



## WHAT IT IS

Zoom fatigue refers to the tiredness, worry or burnout associated with prolonged use of virtual communication platforms like Zoom, Microsoft Teams and Google Meet. This phenomenon gained prominence during the COVID-19 pandemic as remote work and virtual meetings became widespread. **Zoom fatigue** is caused by various factors, including reduced physical movement and the cognitive effort required to interpret nonverbal cues in a virtual environment. These elements combine to create a taxing experience that can significantly affect an individual's mental and physical health.

Prolonged eye contact and viewing one's reflection are unnatural and can lead to heightened self-criticism and stress. The stationary nature of video calls reduces physical mobility, while the necessity to consciously interpret nonverbal communication adds to the cognitive load. Additionally, multitasking during video calls and the blurred lines between home and work life contribute to overall fatigue.

## HOW IT IMPACTS HR

Zoom fatigue has a profound impact on HR practices and employee wellbeing. As virtual meetings became a staple of the workday during the pandemic employees experienced increased stress and burnout, directly affecting productivity and job satisfaction.

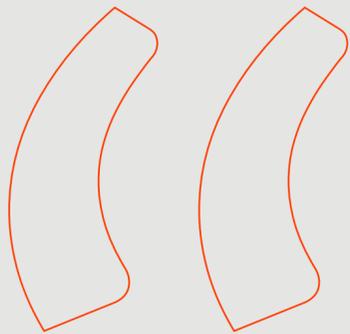
Research from Stanford highlights several causes of Zoom fatigue such as the unnatural amount of close-up eye contact, the cognitive strain of continuously viewing oneself and the limited physical mobility during video calls. These factors can lead to increased stress levels, reduced job satisfaction and higher burnout rates.

HR professionals must address these issues to maintain a healthy and productive workforce. High levels of Zoom fatigue can result in decreased employee engagement, higher absenteeism, and lower overall performance. Moreover, prolonged exposure to stressful virtual environments can exacerbate mental health issues, leading to long-term consequences for both employees and organisations.

Addressing Zoom fatigue is not only about improving current working conditions but also about ensuring the long-term health and resilience of the workforce. Effective management of Zoom fatigue involves implementing strategies such as regular breaks, promoting alternative communication methods and encouraging a healthy work-life balance.

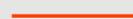
## HOW IT IS BEING USED

Companies are implementing various strategies to combat Zoom fatigue and improve employee wellbeing. During the pandemic Citigroup introduced "Zoom-free Fridays" to give employees a break from video calls at the end of the workweek. The company also designated "Citi reset day" to encourage employees to take time off and recharge. Buffer implements scheduled breaks during long meetings and encourages employees to turn off their cameras when possible to reduce the cognitive load and strain of continuous video interaction. By adopting these practices, organisations can help alleviate Zoom fatigue, ensuring employees remain engaged and productive in a remote work environment.



“HR needs to lay the road for the business, not merely fill the cracks after the business has gone ahead. We can't lay the road if we're not out there, finding out what's happening in technology, what's happening to people, what is happening to jobs and employment. We need to be ahead of the curve.”

**Leena Nair**, former CHRO at Unilever



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**Produced by:**

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