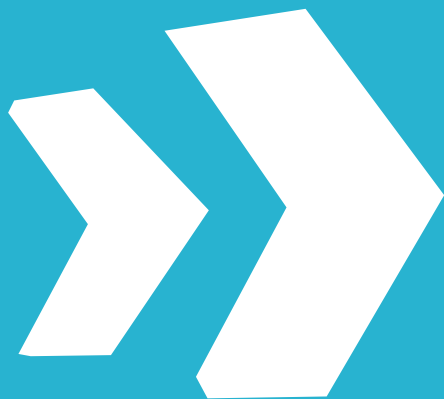


THE GREAT MIGRATION

**A report on post-pandemic careers and the
future of work**
by Escape the City



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

We set out to understand what’s happening in the world of work and what people want going forward. What we found is that what matters to people has changed.

The pandemic has changed our lives in many ways. Not only have we sheltered in place, gone months or years without seeing friends and family, but we’ve had to shift our working patterns considerably to meet the challenges of our time.

The whole world collectively braved an experiment where many professions were forced to work remotely and flexibly. The word “furlough” entered our collective vocabulary, and we were faced with looking a bit deeper at our lives and work to see where they did and didn’t align with what matters to us.

The result is that the world of work has accelerated its change significantly over the last 18 months. Where organisations were once wary of allowing work from home schemes, now there is little ability to resist it as part of a standard working life in many sectors.

The return to the office will trigger what we’re calling ‘the great migration’, which will see a significant number of job changes as things begin to unfurl. Job seekers will pursue alternative options that fit their needs better and cater to the preferences they’ve acquired over a disruptive 18-month period.

Being in the centre of the recruitment industry over the pandemic has meant we’ve watched the market shift from a job seeker’s market pre-pandemic, where there was an abundance of great open job opportunities, to an employer’s market in the height of the pandemic for the latter half of 2020, and then back to a job seeker’s market as we emerge from restrictions in Summer 2021. We have watched the number of open roles, applications and intentions change throughout the pandemic and are beginning to see what the new world of work and recruitment might look like once we’ve settled into life post-pandemic.

We surveyed 1500 of our Escape community to understand what they want in their careers, where employers are falling short, and how Covid-19 has impacted their careers and future plans. The following is a result of all of that data and insight.

Through our observations, we have identified four important themes. We map these themes throughout this paper; we believe they are at the crux of the shift we are seeing in the way we work, and are fundamental to the next phase in its evolution.

“The return to the office will trigger what we’re calling ‘the great migration’, which will see a significant number of job changes as things begin to unfurl.”

The four trends are as follows:



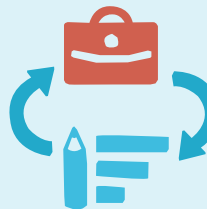
01 Flexibility is the basis of nearly all career decisions (the new frontier)

02 Diversity is more important than ever (and still needs a lot of attention)



03 Purpose is no longer a nice to have (and purpose-washing doesn’t cut it)

04 Career change is the new normal (and institutions aren’t keeping up)



In addition to these four trends, we identified a number of notable factors which have significant influence on career decisions and the attractiveness of an organisation to employees. We call them “pull factors”, and these factors are the ones driving such a high disparity between candidate numbers and open vacancies.

Pull factors are elements that draw people out of an existing career. They relate to aspirations, passions and direction. In our research we found these to include: seeking a career with a clear sense of purpose, looking for a role that makes it easier to stay healthy, seeking an organisation where they can have a direct social impact, and finding a position which allows plentiful levels of autonomy and independence.

Employees will leave their jobs for a myriad of personal, intellectual, emotional and physical reasons. It is clear from our research that purpose, health, inclusion, flexibility, and social impact are of the highest importance to the modern professional.

Identifying what drives job attraction is imperative; it enables employers and institutions to create an optimum environment to support individuals as they set out to shape the future. Having spent the last eleven years building a service that helps mainstream corporate professionals make brave career changes, we set out to delve further into what is fueling the current rising wave of change - by speaking directly to the professionals. Our hope is that by identifying these underlying challenges, we can work towards fixing them and, in the process, help others to find work that matters to them.

INTRODUCTION

Careers are changing. We are living through a work revolution.

The rise of the independent worker and the rise of the entrepreneurial economy are two defining trends of our time. Aspirations, expectations, and the reality of what's now possible are changing the employment landscape. At Escape the City, we call this new way of working The 21st Century Career.

Compared to the generation now reaching retirement age, today's working professionals want remarkably different things from their careers. This shift has widespread implications for employers, institutions and individuals alike.

Although new ways of earning a living are rapidly emerging, the mainstream education system and most big employers are still operating according to increasingly outdated paradigms.

The widening gap between people's aspirations and what most professional jobs offer is leading to an epidemic of disaffection. People want different things from their careers but the alternatives are often unclear and seem risky.

The aim of this report is to understand how the world of work has shifted. There will be particular focus on the desires of the employees, the impact of the pandemic on opportunity and the growth of the social impact sector.

Our hope is that this in-depth, empirical look at job seeker preferences will provide employers, educational institutions, and the media with evidence of a growing problem and, perhaps, a much needed incentive to support employees, students and individuals in a more intelligent and relevant way going forwards. We have developed recommendations for stakeholders as to how they might best support current and future employees in this endeavor.

For escapees themselves – as well as those considering a brave career move – we hope this report lets you know that you're not alone in your thoughts and journeys. We are all living through a work revolution, and you are the pioneers sitting at the helm.

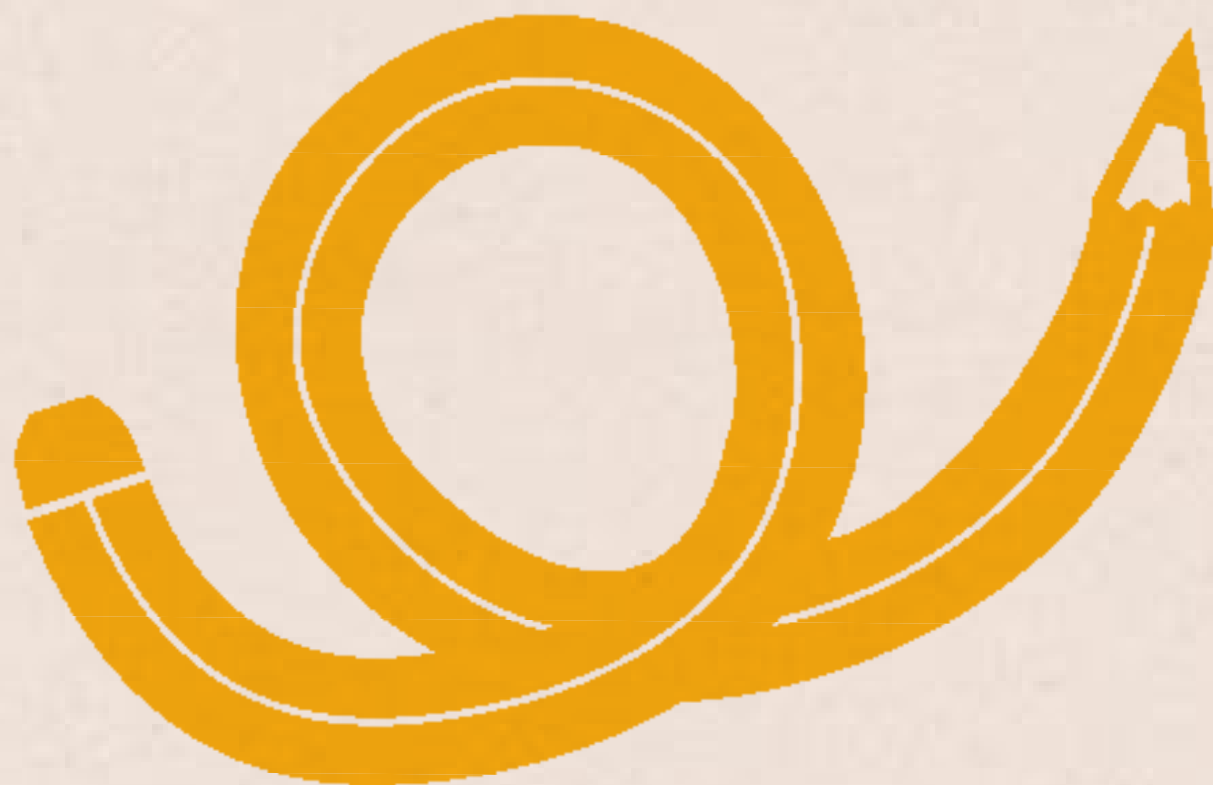
We remind readers that the findings are the result of averages: many will find their own experiences differ.



“People want different things from their careers but the alternatives are often unclear and seem risky.”

KEY TREND 1

FLEXIBILITY IS THE BASIS OF NEARLY ALL CAREER DECISIONS



Flexible working has been an aspiration of many workers over the past decade, as technology evolved and work was increasingly conducted online. Pre-pandemic, many organisations wouldn't allow home working, there was a significant lack of trust in employees' ability to work from home. Many employers saw it as an invitation to skive off and get away with doing less, creating a culture of presenteeism and 'facetime'. Working life was punctuated by long commutes, rigid schedules and an ever-increasing number of working hours. All of this was leading to rising numbers of people reporting burnout. So much so that in 2019, the World Health Organisation changed its definition of burnout from a symptom of stress to recognise it as an 'occupational phenomenon'.

Few organisations had adopted holistic, flexible working policies, with some more forward-thinking organisations allowing just one day per week to work from home as a benefit or perk for their teams. Fully remote employers were growing in number but were still the minority, with huge competition for those roles and a perception that only tech businesses and niche industries could operate in this way.

The pandemic has changed all of that. Homeworking and flexible working has leapt forward by probably ten years over 18 months. Given that the pandemic has lasted as long as it has, with many now used to a very different routine, it's unlikely that many will embrace a return to 'normal' full-time office work. The pandemic has fundamentally shifted how job seekers and organisations will approach this issue going forward. It will be a huge point of contention between employers and their teams and will significantly impact the attractiveness of organisations for job seekers.

What this means for employers

Flexible working is the new hot commodity. When asked what the most appealing work benefits were to candidates when assessing opportunities, the top 3 were all related to flexible working. Three quarters (**74%**) of professionals said that a flexible working location is the primary barometer they use when assessing whether or not they'd be interested in a new role. 3 in 5 people (**60%**) said flexible working hours was the most important factor, and **43%** said a 4-day working week.

Flexibility poses a difficult circumstance for employers. Given the range of preferences and circumstances of employees, it will be challenging to try to meet everyone's needs.

Organisations who at the start of the pandemic claimed an 'end to the office' are now calling workers back to their desks. This flip-flopping and lack of clarity around expectations and work patterns will generate a lot of movement in the job market for the rest of 2021 and likely into 2022. A McKinsey survey found, "Employees feel they've yet to hear enough about their employers' plans for post-COVID-19 working arrangements. Organisations may have announced a general intent to embrace hybrid virtual work going forward, but too few of them, employees say, have shared detailed guidelines, policies, expectations, and approaches." ¹

It's important to note that while flexible working is now an expectation, many people don't want to forgo the office entirely. When asked about their preferences for working flexibly in the future, **72%** of people said they'd want to work remotely at least part-time, **36%** said they wanted to work remotely full-time and **24%** said they wanted to work remotely full-time but from a coworking or shared workspace. Only **1.5%** of those we surveyed said they didn't want to work remotely at all going forward.

The most important thing we've found regarding flexible employment is the importance of clarity in the offering. The roles that are advertised with "flexible working optional" get far less interest than those who state clearly what their flexible working policy is. Many people have moved further from city centres during the pandemic and need clear expectations before they put in the effort to apply. Flexibility in location and working hours will be the magic combination for attracting the best people to organisations.

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said they didn't want to **work remotely at all** going forward.

The uncharted territory of hybrid working will be the norm, and the attractiveness of a role and organisation will be focused heavily on how the organisation balances the in-person and remote elements of a role.

Working remotely during the pandemic gave people a taste of autonomy and better work-life balance. **26%** of people told us that the best part of working remotely was that they were able to tailor their schedules to when they were most productive and felt that they were able to get more done in their own time than when they had to be in the office. Taking this new found autonomy away could have a negative impact on wellbeing and productivity.

With all the benefits of remote working, there were inevitably some drawbacks felt, too. Worryingly, most of the negative elements of working remotely were reported to be longer working hours or impacts on mental health. **76%** of people said the worst thing about remote working was the lack of connection with colleagues, and nearly half (**44%**) of people struggled with the lack of separation between work and life.

“If the job you are working isn’t the right one for you, the loss of the social aspects of work can have a real impact on your mindset and mental health. There is only the work to concentrate on and this can take a toll over a prolonged period.” - respondent from our census.

“Job seeker behaviour has fundamentally changed, and those who don’t embrace the new way of working will quickly find themselves struggling to keep up with those who do.”

How it can help employers to stand out

For employers who are willing to explore the shifts in the world of work and manage expectations around flexible working, they’ll be met with a far greater ability to attract and retain talent. We’re already seeing a huge increase in the number of applicants interested in fully remote roles, roles where organisations have adopted a 4-day week, or roles where there’s an emphasis on flexibility as a core principle of the organisation.

For smaller organisations that traditionally find it hard to compete with larger, more well-known brands, embracing this new emphasis on flexibility will allow them to stand out amongst their better-known counterparts. Job seeker behaviour has fundamentally changed, and those who don’t embrace the new way of working will quickly find themselves struggling to keep up with those who do.

For smaller brands with limited capacity for expenditure on traditional benefits, flexibility could become a cost-effective way of supporting employees. This could find them inundated with great employees who are happier, more productive and ultimately more loyal to their organisation than those who have more easily swappable perks.

Adopting more flexible working arrangements can support the agility of operations and increase the diversity of your workforce. Organisations are able to attract talent from further afield, whether from another town, county or country. With the rise of fully or mostly remote roles, we’re seeing more movement in the job market in terms of applicants widening their net to apply for roles beyond their locale. This is a great opportunity for employers to broaden their scope and recruit beyond those who live in the immediate vicinity. Again, this highlights the importance of clarity in job descriptions and advertisements. If it’s a fully remote role, taking time zones into consideration will be important.

There are also implications for those who aren’t looking for fully remote workers but who support flexible locations: if an employer advertises a job and clearly states that it’s a flexible role with a requirement to be in the office once every fortnight or once per week and they’re based in London, they could easily attract talent from across the UK who would be willing to travel occasionally to the office. Those people are able to enjoy the reduction in travel costs and the extra personal time gained by not commuting every week. This is one of the reasons that clarity and expectation management is crucial.

What it means for attracting the best people

The employers who maintain flexibility in their working arrangements will be those who attract and retain the best talent. With a change in expectations and a renewed sense of what a ‘good opportunity’ looks like, employers will need to think carefully about their tact for any return to the office. From the data we’ve seen, with attention focused on certain opportunities and not others, we suggest employers do the following:

Clearly articulate the flexible working policy: Be clear and precise about what expectations there are for staff, whether there’s complete flexibility or specified limit of days in the office or at home. Clarity will breed confidence, help manage expectations with staff, help retain your existing top performers, and help you attract the most appropriate people for new roles.

Consider community and connection as core to your plan: From the professionals we spoke to, 43% of people said they didn’t believe remote working was the best way to generate ideas or work collaboratively. We’d encourage employers to think about how they can facilitate connection. Initiatives such as remote team activities or providing a budget for teams to work in local coworking spaces will go a long way to help prevent feelings of isolation. Providing the option to make use of shared workspace can greatly reduce the inequality inherent in remote working.

Clearly define hours of work and help to create boundaries where there are none: Most remote workers are putting in extra time working from home. To mitigate the risk of burnout, employers should consider how they’re supporting boundaries for their teams. Our research found that 17% of people found having more time to relax, be with family, or exercise was an important part of working remotely. To maintain mental health and wellbeing, we’d encourage employers to explore introducing wellbeing hours every week (Betterspace is a great example of this), or experiment with a 4 or 4.5 day week. These interventions can help to stem some of the mental health risks associated with working remotely and the intense screen time. There’s a growing body of evidence to support the idea that fewer days can be a huge competitive advantage as well as facilitating a healthier and more productive team. We’d recommend Buffer’s insights as a fully remote team who are exploring the 4-day week. Our team at Escape the City have been experimenting with this and found huge benefits across wellbeing, productivity and connection between employees.

Use your flexibility as a competitive advantage:

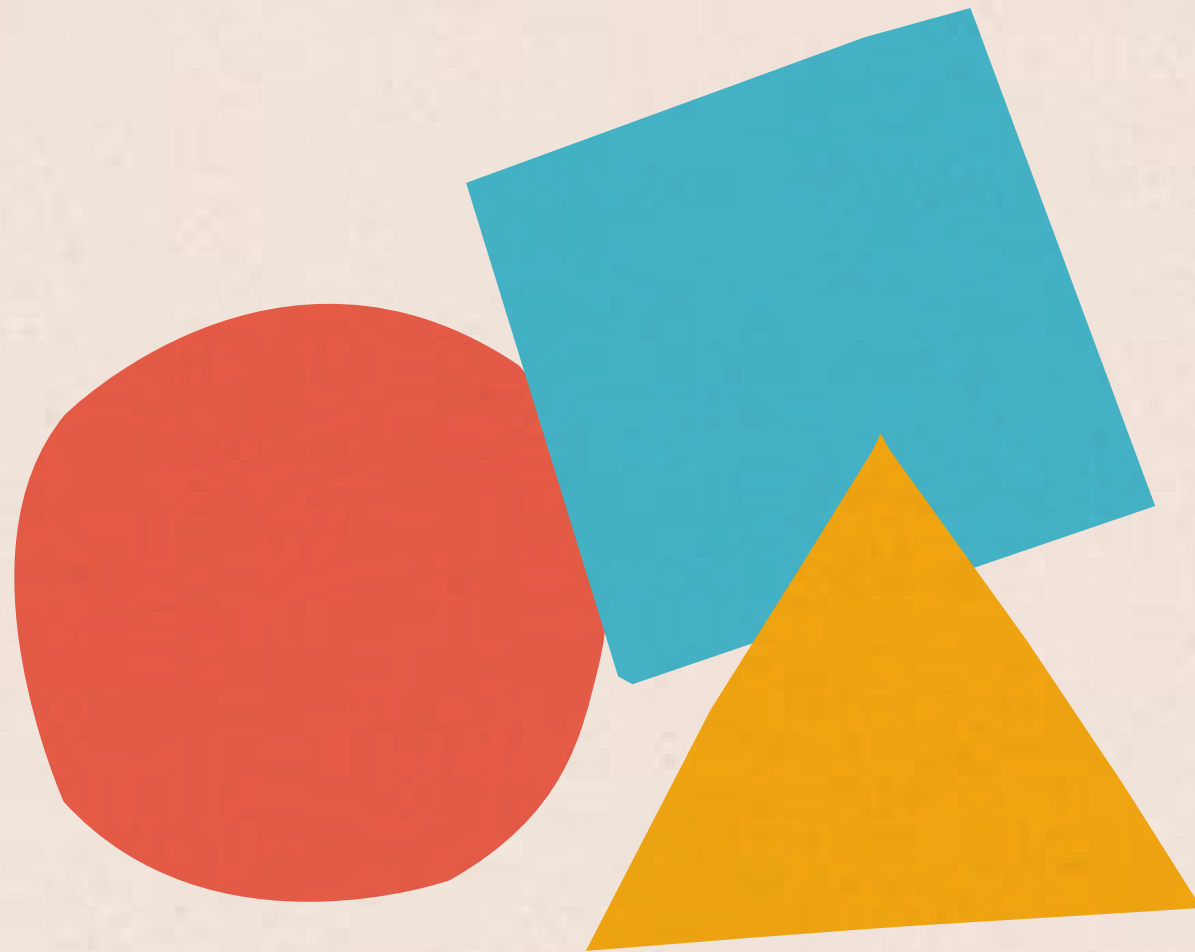


Flexible working as a benefit is hugely desirable for job seekers, 38% of people told us that not having to commute was the best part of working remotely. Employers should communicate that message heavily and clearly when advertising for new recruits, this will allow them to stand out from peers and in some cases attract candidates who wouldn’t usually consider a role. In many cases, flexibility can be more important than salary and can allow employers to attract talent at a level they wouldn’t normally be able to afford.

Summary
Flexible working is clearly here to stay. Changing the dynamics between employers and employees, this important trend is something that will change the world of work forever. Overall, nearly seven in ten (69%) employees say flexible working will play a bigger role in future decisions about their job or career choices.

KEY TREND 2

DIVERSITY IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN EVER



“When job seekers are looking for opportunities in the post-pandemic world, they are looking across a number of different aspects and touchpoints to understand how inclusive an organisation truly is.”

A 2018 Boston Consulting Group study found that companies with more diverse management teams have **19% higher revenues**, due to higher levels of innovation. This finding was especially significant for companies and industries where growth depends on innovation. It proves that diversity is not just an arbitrary number to meet; it's critical for organisational success². New research from McKinsey shows that companies whose leaders welcome diverse talents and include multiple perspectives are likely to emerge from the pandemic stronger³. If companies do not prioritise D&I (also known as DEI for Diversity, Equity & Inclusion) during the crisis, the impact will not just be felt on their bottom line, but will exacerbate inequalities in the long term.

There has been significant evidence around both the importance of diversity and the lack of it in many workplaces for years, but 2020 saw a step change in focus on diversity in and out of the workplace. The growth of the Black Lives Matter movement, as a result of the murder of George Floyd, saw significant changes in the number of people talking about race, sharing stories and experiences of what that has meant in their lives and work. It was a pivotal moment for change.

Some organisations have stepped up to embrace that change, while others have fallen behind. Organisations have been shamed for 'faux allyship', rushing to put out statements following George Floyd's death, condemning the actions of racism in policing whilst having issues of diversity and inclusion on their doorstep. While there has long been smoke and mirrors around such issues, the public are paying attention and holding organisations accountable for higher standards. It's no longer good enough to talk the talk, all organisations need to walk the walk.

From a job seeker's perspective, diversity continues to be a pivotal issue. Where terms like greenwashing and purpose-washing have come into clear focus over the past few years, we're now seeing diversity sitting alongside these. Organisations will need to consider diversity in all its forms across everything they do.

What diversity and inclusion really means to candidates

In our research, job seekers rated an organisation's approach to diversity and inclusion as very important to them, with an average importance of **8/10** and more than **79%** rating it as more than **7/10**. Our findings are echoed elsewhere, more than half of people surveyed by Weber Shandwick reported that their companies say all the right things about diversity, equity and inclusion, but do not do what they say. Of those participating in the same survey, **76%** said they want their employer to commit to fighting racism, discrimination and unconscious bias, and **82%** want a commitment to fair pay.

The number of factors that define diversity is truly vast. Throughout an individual's life, the unique biological and genetic predispositions, experiences and education shape who they are as a person. These nature versus nurture interactions are what diversify and evolve the human race, allowing individuals to connect and learn from each other.

While such idiosyncrasies are infinite, there are a number of factors commonly discussed, considered and tracked. When job seekers are looking for opportunities in the post-pandemic world, they are looking across a number of different aspects and touchpoints to understand how inclusive an organisation truly is. Only **23%** of candidates said they relied on what they already knew about an organisation, and over half (**65%**) of candidates do active investigation to understand how inclusive an employer might be.

Job seekers are becoming increasingly concerned with this important issue and are doing their research to understand how inclusive an employer is before making a decision to apply. Although the majority of candidates (**73%**) look on an organisation's website to get an understanding of how diverse they are, proof of diversity goes further than that. Over half (**58%**) of people will look at an organisation's social media and comms

content, **49%** analyse the job description to understand how inclusive they are, **42%** will look to reviews or diversity stats, and **36%** look for the inclusion of a diversity statement on the job description or website. Job seekers are looking for opportunities to be accepted and valued for their contributions, surrounded by an inclusive team and supported by policies which support and champion difference.

Having a diverse workforce is particularly important to minority groups. Nearly a third of employees and job seekers (**32%**) would not apply to a job at a company with a lack of diversity among its workforce. This figure is significantly higher for Black job seekers (**41%**) and employees when compared to their White counterparts (**30%**). It is also higher among LGBTQIA+ job seekers and employees (**41%**) when compared to non-LGBTQIA+ job seekers and employees (**32%**) (Glassdoor). So, whether you're hiring for diversity or not, diversity should be considered when evaluating your entire recruiting process.

We know that all organisations are likely to be expected to 'level up' to attract the best talent, and to create inclusive cultures and environments within their organisation. We also know that it goes beyond attracting the best talent, as any mismatch between the expectations generated at the hiring stage and once onboarded could cause further consternation.

What does this look like in practice?

More needs to be done to ensure that organisations clearly articulate the way that they tackle issues of diversity in their teams. Job seekers are very aware of diversity and how inclusive an organisation is and will be assessing them closely before deciding to apply for roles. Considering all aspects of diversity will be important to ensure they are attracting a broad range of individuals and, importantly, ensuring the promise matches up with the experience once in a role. Job seekers are looking for employers who champion diversity in all of its forms, including:

Age

Each generation has its own distinct differences defined by the unique social, political and economic changes that happened during their upbringing.

At work, such differences can pose challenges across generations. These challenges can turn into an unconscious bias known as ageism: the tendency to have negative feelings about another person based on their age.

Stereotypes of different generations can contribute to this bias. For example, baby boomers are seen as workaholics, Gen Xers are risk-takers, millennials care about meaningful work and now Gen Zers are concerned with environmental responsibility. These stereotypes can lead employers and teams to believe there are skill gaps and life milestones (like having children or retiring) that may prevent certain age groups from excelling within a role.

While ageism can affect any member of the workforce, 58% of workers notice age bias when entering their 50s⁴. On the other hand, people under 25 years old have to fight discrimination regarding their ability or commitment to a job.

For those who are concerned about ageism (particularly those who have previously been impacted by ageism) indicators include:

- The team page: what are the ages of people across the organisation? They'll be looking at leadership level down to junior level to get a sense of where they may fit in.
- Any obvious age references, whether it's to a favourite TV show or a cultural reference, to assess if they would fit into the organisation.
- Emphasis in the hiring process on 'years of experience' is likely to lead younger people not to apply, and may make older people feel they're too experienced or wouldn't be valued. Instead, emphasising the need for someone to have held a similar position before or the skills required for the job.

Criminal background

In the UK, Only 17% of ex-offenders are in employment within a year of release⁶. These individuals are often at prime working age but are struggling to find a company that will hire them with a criminal background.

While some countries provide incentives by offering tax breaks for companies that hire candidates with felony convictions, others allow employers to require criminal history on job applications, perpetuating issues of social bias. Today, it's still up to employers to decide whether or not they will allow an individual's past to prevent them from moving into a rewarding career in the future.

For anyone who has been affected by a criminal history, indicators include:

- Requirements to disclose criminal background as part of the application process.
- Any specific mention of being open to potential employees with criminal convictions.
- Work with charities or other organisations who support those with criminal convictions into work.

Education

Education varies greatly by location, school and system, and can be heavily influenced by national requirements and socioeconomic background. This means that no single individual will have the exact same education. Not only that, but high-level education can be unattainable for a significant part of the population. More people are choosing not to go to university as tuition fees rise, and instead are making use of apprenticeships and other schemes, yet many jobs still ask for educational requirements for many senior or even entry-level positions.

For those who are looking for educational inclusivity, indicators include:

- Where senior staff went to school or university.
- If there's a perception of elitism, whether that's through looking at a team page or individual team member's LinkedIn pages.
- Any mention of specific university requirements in job postings, especially for generalist or entry-level positions.
- A specific statement about the openness to potential employees who don't hold specific qualifications.

Ethnicity

Ethnicity is different from race. Rather than biological factors, ethnicity is based on learned behaviors and is associated with culture, history, nationality, heritage, dress, customs, language, ancestry and geographical background. Common examples of ethnicity include: Hispanic or Latino, Irish, Jewish, or Cambodian.

For those who ethnic diversity is important to, indicators include:

- What languages are offered or spoken in the organisation? How many languages are offered on their website, which language is the job description in, and is there the option of others?
- Which holidays are an organisation celebrating on social media?
- Imagery and language on the website showcasing the team, how are they described, what is emphasised?
- Any specific cultural references on the website or when describing the organisation which signals affiliation to a particular ethnicity or the celebration of diverse ethnicities within a team or organisation.



65%

of candidates do active investigation to understand how inclusive an employer might be.

Gender identity

Gender roles are social constructs that vary by culture and are assigned to individuals at birth based on their biological sex. Once a child is assigned their gender, they are more or less segregated into either the male or female gender binaries.

Rather than these distinct binaries, popular belief finds that there is a spectrum of gender identities that may or may not correspond to the individual's sex assigned at birth. A few common non-binary gender identities include: non-binary, transgender, gender-transition, genderqueer, gender fluid and demi gender. There are also ungender identities, such as agender, non-gendered, genderless and gender-free.

Such identities are defined by the individual and how they view and expect others to view themselves.

For those who value an inclusive culture with regards to gender identity, indicators include:

- Whether or not an organisation includes pronouns when describing staff on their website or in email signatures.
- A specific mention of gender identity and inclusivity in the workplace.
- Gendered language in a job advertisement.
- Support or lack of support for trans or cisgendered staff, or more broadly support for the transgender movement by the organisation.
- The levels of seniority of various gender identities and if there's a perceived equal split.

Ideologies

Ideologies are the conceptions an individual, group or culture have about different aspects of life. Most people have distinct economic, political and religious ideologies that are influenced by their family, upbringing, geographical location and education. Ideologies play a part in how often and how comfortably employees share their opinions with colleagues. Vastly differing ideologies may make individuals more cautious to start a conversation with a coworker if they know it could lead to a heated debate.

For those with strong ideologies, indicators include:

- Specific political affiliations, partnerships or charity partnerships, and mentions of these in social media or in content.
- Lack of bipartisanship or highly politicised topics mentioned on the site or in comms.

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Marital status

Marriage is a major event for many people. Not only that, but getting married, divorced, separated or becoming widowed can alter an individual's beliefs, geographical location, income, parental status, family, citizenship status, socioeconomic status, privilege, family and even behaviour.


Similar to gender bias, marital status bias can prevent highly qualified individuals from getting a job or excelling in their career. And while there are laws that prohibit employers from discriminating against an individual's gender, sex and sexual orientation, only some countries have specific laws prohibiting marital status discrimination in the workplace.

Indicators include:

- If asked at any level of the interview process if they are married or partnered
- A ban on recruiting people who have children may disadvantage married job applicants
- The team composition, if all employees are young and uncoupled or vice versa, this gives indicators about the cultural norms in an organisation

58%

of people will look at an organisation's social media and comms content



Parental status

While parental status can affect both mothers and fathers, in particular, pregnant women, working mothers and women of childbearing age face a motherhood penalty or 'maternal wall'. Stereotypes related to a woman's role and needing time off after childbirth and for childcare often place women at a disadvantage in their careers compared to men.

Not only that, but female candidates are more likely to be asked questions about their parental plans and responsibilities during an interview. Even though discriminating against parents and pregnant people is illegal, enquiring about a job seeker's parental status technically isn't illegal.

54% of women with a young child leave their job because they need to care for their child. For individuals who take a large chunk of time off to fulfil caregiving needs, it can be extremely difficult for them to explain the gaps in their resume and find employers willing to support them as they re-enter their career.

For those who have been impacted by this in the past, or who may be impacted in the future, indicators include:

- Specific mention of flexible working hours and location in job advertisements, specifically mentions of employees already making use of these and this being a normal practice in an organisation.
- The offer of childcare benefits as part of the remuneration package.
- Extended and generous parental leave.
- Whether or not an organisation specifically gives time off for miscarriage, this could be for both parents or at the very least for mothers.
- Adoption leave is equal to parental leave.
- A specific mention of a caregiver allowance.
- Life insurance and private healthcare for an employee and their families.

Neurodiversity

Neurodiversity is defined by the National Symposium on Neurodiversity as "a concept where neurological differences are to be recognised and respected as any other human variation. These differences can include those labelled with Dyspraxia, Dyslexia, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, Dyscalculia, Autistic Spectrum, Tourette Syndrome, and others."

Recognising differences in neurodiversity is important for candidates. Many neurodivergent candidates often won't apply if they don't see specific inclusive markers such as:

- In the hiring process, are reasonable adjustments made to assist candidates if they need more time or other support for interviews?
- Do they mention neurodiversity as being important to their organisation?
- Is the language used in job descriptions inclusive or rigid?
- Is the design of the office space made inclusively to meet a variety of individual needs? Is this mentioned in any communications on the website or elsewhere?
- Is there an overemphasis on 'culture fit'? Many neurodivergent individuals think differently so signs that an employer wants similarity and not difference from their staff can be off-putting.

Each individual has unique needs, so some of these may not apply for certain people, or there may be accommodations not listed here worth discussing.

Personality and thought-style

Bringing a variety of personalities and thought-styles together in a workplace can bring both stressful situations and genius creativity. To avoid the former, companies often hire for culture fit, which consequently halts the latter. Instead, we recommend companies hire for 'culture add', i.e. pursuing diverse personalities that work well together and challenge one another's ideas and thoughts.

Individuals will be looking for a number of indicators to understand how open an organisation is, including:

- An emphasis on employee involvement in decision making; the use of tools like Sideways 6 demonstrate this as a core value.
- If an employer mentions culture fit as a key criteria in a role description, or as part of the hiring process, e.g. 'the last round of interviews is a coffee with our founder to determine culture fit'.
- A mention that a team champions difference and values different opinions, working styles and backgrounds. Signalling that difference is **valued** and not simply tolerated.
- Any employee working groups within an organisation around diverse interests, such as sport, political affiliations, divergent thinking groups, demographic-based groups.



Physical ability and disability

People living with a disability are disproportionately impacted by unemployment. For those facing a seen or unseen disability, the policies an organisation has to support them is an important factor in their decision to apply. They'll be looking for a number of indicators to understand how disability-friendly an organisation is and whether or not an employer is able to meet their needs, including:

- Any certification or mention of being compliant for accessibility needs, such as being a Disability Confident employer.
- Mention of accessible offices in job descriptions and on career pages including accessible ramps, automated doors, visual aids, screen readers and accommodations for service animals.
- Options on the website for amendments to text size or font (use of a tool like User Way).
- A specific disability-inclusive statement on job descriptions and on their website.
- Allowances or reasonable adjustments in the recruitment process mentioned when applying for the role.
- Flexibility policies allowing for home working or flexibility on location.
- Mention of Disability Leave (specific time for employees who need time off due to their disability).



Race

Unlike ethnicity, race is biologically determined. Examples of race include: White, Black or African American, Asian, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander.

Nadra Kareem Nittle provides a clear example of race versus ethnicity for Thought Co., "Race and ethnicity can overlap. For example, a Japanese-American would probably consider herself a member of the Japanese or Asian race, but, if she doesn't engage in any practices or customs of her ancestors, she might not identify with the ethnicity, instead considering herself an American."

For those who are looking to join a team that is racially inclusive and diverse, indicators include:

- Looking at the team page, are there people who look like them? Are there people who look like them at leadership level?
- The inclusivity and diversity of any imagery used on social media and in communications.
- Specific mentions of racial inclusion and diversity. Not just a statement but examples of what they're doing specifically to champion diversity i.e. inclusion programmes, subgroups and committees, and public commitments to inclusion.

Religious and spiritual beliefs

Whether or not people discuss their religious affiliations at work, it's important to create a workplace that is understanding and accepting of everyone's beliefs. This is particularly important and relevant in countries where there is a predominant religion, like England which is largely Christian. Religion is one of the most often ignored aspects of inclusivity, with many employers neglecting to include policies and practices which appeal to those in religions outside of Christianity.

For those who value an inclusive religious culture in a potential employer, indicators include:

- If an organisation offers 'floating holidays' to allow employees to take time off for religious holidays (not everyone celebrates Christmas!).
- A policy respecting individuals who wear religious clothing at work to ensure they are treated fairly and equally.
- Space for private religious and spiritual practice so employees have a place to go during the day without having to leave work.
- Which holidays are celebrated or shared by the organisation on social media.
- Representation of different religious identities in imagery across an organisation's website.

Sex

Unlike gender identity, sex refers to the biological and genetic differences between male and female bodies. However, contrary to popular belief, biology of sex, similar to gender, has a spectrum of differences that cannot be classified simply as man and woman. Some people who are born with a combination of sex characteristics and reproductive organs are classified on the genetic sex spectrum called intersex.

For those who diversity of sex is important in a potential organisation, indicators include:

- Team structure and hierarchy to understand who is in the senior leadership.
- Whether there is a representation of different sexes across the organisation.
- Imagery across social media and communications, and in what context.
- Any perceived sexism through gendered language or behaviour in their communications and job advertisements.

Sexual orientation

Sexual orientation is defined by the Human Rights Campaign as “an inherent or immutable enduring emotional, romantic or sexual attraction to other people”. Common sexual orientations include heterosexual, gay, lesbian, bisexual, asexual, pansexual and questioning.

For those whom diversity of sexual orientation is important to them in a workplace, indicators include:

- Public support of LGBTQIA+ rights including social media and communications.
- Explicit policies supporting those of different sexual orientations and their rights within the organisation.
- Inclusive statements on their website or in job descriptions.
- Any internal employee interest groups for LGBTQIA+ rights within an organisation.

Socioeconomic status

Socioeconomic status (SES) is the measurement and categorisation of people based on their education, income and occupation. It is a strong indicator of privilege, as it impacts the opportunities and resources an individual has access to in order to excel. Additionally, SES is found to contribute significantly to mental health, physical health, stress, performance and functioning, both in the workplace and in life.

To understand how open an organisation is to different SES, indicators include:

- The background of individuals working in an organisation.
- Any emphasis on place of education as important to an organisation or for specific roles.
- Cultural references in any comms, on the website and specifically on team pages that indicate a certain socioeconomic class being prevalent.

Work experiences

Every organisation has their own unique mission, core values, policies, culture and benefits, which vary by region, industry, size and employer. Each time an employee moves into a new role, industry or company, they bring their previous work experiences and skills with them.

Often the benefits of varied experience can be lost in a super streamlined recruitment process, with many who have a range of experience excluded from roles if it's deemed 'random' or irrelevant to the role they are recruiting for. Older models of employment typically value specialists and linear career paths, but research increasingly points to the value of generalist and agility in talent. As increasing numbers of people go down the generalist and not specialist routes in work, there will increasingly be a mismatch between employer expectations and job seeker experience.

For those who are career changers or who may want to work in an organisation that values range, indicators include:

- Emphasis on years of experience or specific experience in job descriptions.
- Overly onerous application requirements.
- How applications are assessed.



Changing the way candidates are assessed

Diverse and inclusive teams start with an inclusive hiring process. Unfortunately, the hiring process that most organisations use, asking for a CV and cover letter, is fraught with potential bias and is where most diverse candidates are sifted out, often unconsciously.

Many EDI initiatives that organisations are implementing include unconscious bias training. However, a significant amount of research has been conducted that suggests that, while important, training alone is not enough to combat unconscious bias, as it is often overly reliant on self-awareness and the willpower to ensure biases don't creep into the hiring process in future.

Bias remains a big problem in candidate pre-selection, and it's even more challenging when it comes to diversity. For example, research has demonstrated that African American and Asian job applicants who mask their race on their CV have better success getting a job interview.

In a 2004 US study, around 5000 resumes with either African-American or white-sounding names were sent out to a variety of companies, measuring the number of interview invites for each. Half were assigned "remarkably common" African-American names, and the other half were assigned white-sounding names, such as Emily Walsh or Greg Baker ⁷.

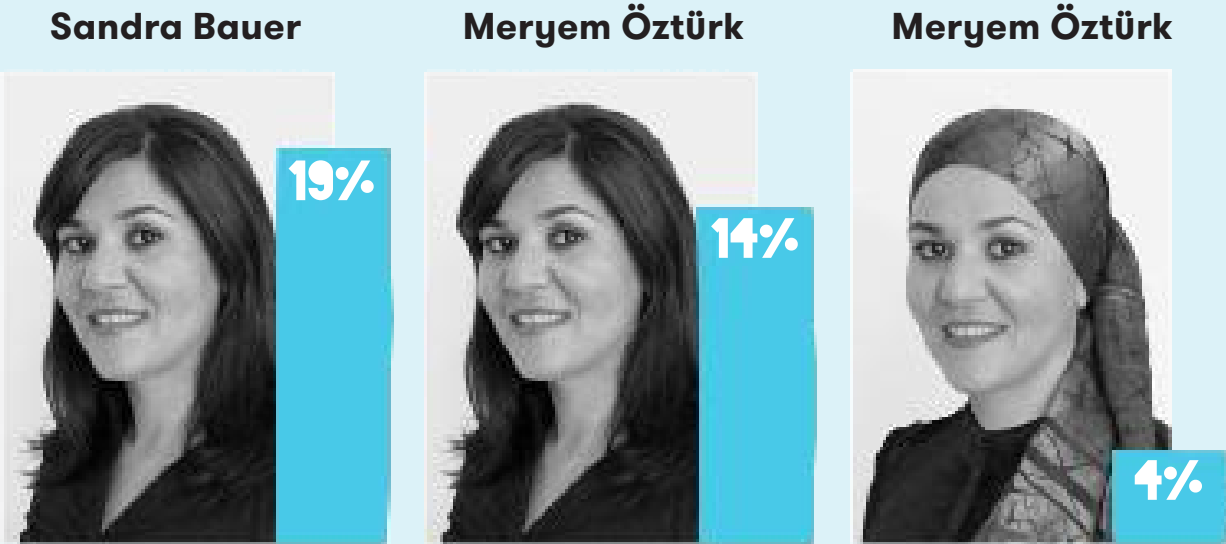
Job applicants with white names needed to send roughly 10 CVs to get one interview; those with African-American names needed to send around 15 CVs, and would need an additional 8-years experience to close this 50% callback gap.

A German study conducted a similar CV-based test. Job applications for three fictitious female characters with identical qualifications were sent out in response to job advertisements. One applicant had a German name, one a Turkish name, and one had a Turkish name and was also wearing a headscarf in the photograph included in the application⁷.

Callback rates for different candidates (Source: Applied)

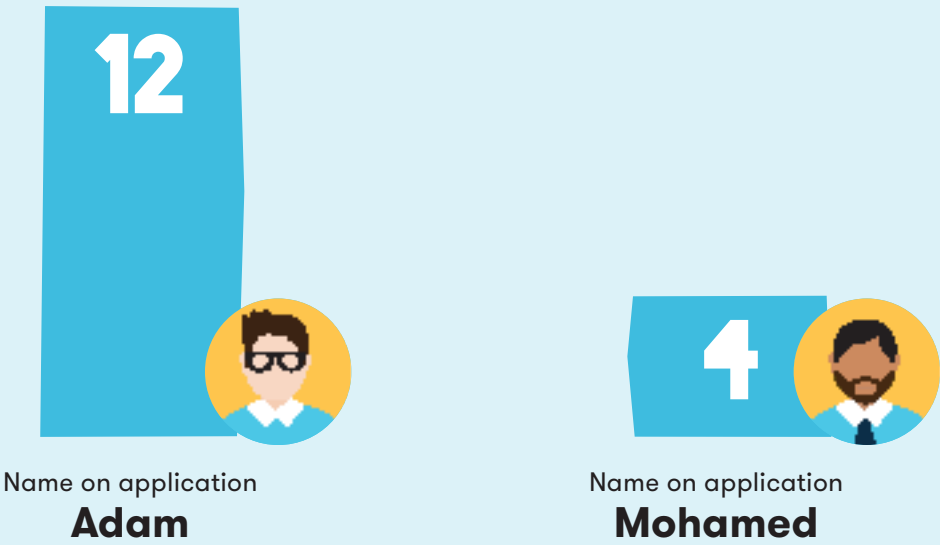
Here are their findings:

Callback rates for different candidates



Source: <ftp.iza.org/dp10217.pdf>

Responses from 100 identical applications



Source: Inside Cut UK (2017)

Research in the UK had similar findings. Inside Out London sent identical CVs from "Adam" and "Mohamed" to 100 open roles. Adam was offered 12 interviews, while Mohamed was offered 4. So, candidates with Muslim-sounding names were 3x more likely to be passed over for jobs⁷.

With unsettling insights like these, organisations are starting to place increasing emphasis on removing irrelevant information from the pre-selection process. Increasingly, organisations are using pre-employment assessment tools, including 'blind hiring' to reduce bias in the selection process and are focusing on job seeker's skills and characteristics rather than on their background.

These assessments can include everything from evaluating personality traits to cognitive abilities and their ability to manage certain circumstances. These assessments make it easier for hiring managers to evaluate potential employees based on job-related personality traits, skills, qualities and performance without introducing unconscious biases.

The next frontier of recruitment will be firmly rooted in alternative candidate selection, especially as the importance of diversity and inclusion increases for job seekers and organisations alike.

Walking the walk - not talking the talk

The importance of diversity and inclusive cultures isn't just about hiring, but also the experience once there. With an increased emphasis on employee satisfaction, organisations need to think holistically about how they operate and the message it sends out. Is it an inclusive message or an exclusive one?

There's a risk of the experience not matching up to the expectation; it's not about false allyship but rather an open and holistic approach to the issues we're facing. With job seekers looking for established and codified policies, benefits and approaches to inclusive cultures at the forefront of their decision making when applying and accepting jobs, employers will need to make sure they incorporate inclusive practices across the entirety of the organisation, including hiring, onboarding, workplace culture, external communications and offboarding of departing employees.

Given the growing importance of inclusion for job-seekers, these challenges won't be going away any time soon. Small businesses won't be able to hide behind being small; there will be a growing expectation that all organisations regardless of size operate inclusively, to whatever extent they are capable. If not, they not only miss out on hiring great people, but may also face backlash from customers and communities.

KEY TREND 3

PURPOSE IS NO LONGER A NICE-TO-HAVE



PURPOSE

Over the past decade, it's become popular to talk about purposeful work, with a huge boom in the career coaching industry and slogans around 'doing work you love' being adopted by larger corporations like WeWork. In that time, our perceptions of what purpose in work looks like has shifted significantly too.

More organisations are sharing their company values, talking about their purpose, and desperately trying to communicate their 'why' to their teams and the wider world. At the same time, job seekers have wised-up to the charade that many employers have been trying to pull. With claims of 'purpose washing' and hiding inappropriate behaviour behind public company values, there's a shifting tide in the attractiveness of such organisations both to job seekers and consumers.

As things have evolved, we've seen an increase in the number of purposeful organisations coming to the fore. With the growth of movements like B Corp, organisations are increasingly realising the importance of showcasing purpose beyond profit.

What started as a few fringe companies and the social enterprise movement has moved into an established sector of thousands of organisations and accreditations with emphasis on purpose and impact. Large companies like Ben & Jerry's, Patagonia, Etsy and The Body Shop are making commitments to their stakeholders and shareholders, and creating purposeful opportunities for their staff.

This approach to work will become even more mainstream with the introduction of The Better Business Act (BBA). The brainchild of B Lab UK, the BBA will amend section 172 of The Companies Act to ensure that company directors are responsible for advancing the interests of shareholders alongside those of wider society and the environment. This act of parliament would bring social and environmental responsibility to the very core of business.

According to research from B Lab UK, 72% of the UK public believe businesses should have a legal responsibility to the planet and people, alongside maximising profits. This is an opportunity for companies to lead the charge, and benefit from increased brand loyalty by upholding their responsibilities towards the environment and society⁸.

Research from Regenerate found that across every age, gender, regional and political segment, 53% of people were more likely to favour brands that are doing good in the world, versus just 11% of people who did not favour brands doing good⁹.

This opinion crosses from individual consumers right across to job seekers. Purpose is a crucial element in choosing work. Back in 2015, we asked our community how important social impact was to them in their career choices, and 71% of respondents wanted a career with a clear sense of purpose. In our most recent survey, that's increased to **89%** of respondents. When asked how important it is that a company is purpose-driven when deciding whether or not to apply for a job, job seekers rated it as **8.5/10**. This was the highest and most important factor of all those we measured, and is echoed in what we're seeing across the performance of jobs and the organisations who struggle to hire versus those who find it easy to attract and retain talent.

This has, of course, been impacted greatly by the pandemic. **61%** of those we surveyed said that the pandemic has affected their future career aspirations. With significant time for reflection, **73%** of those we surveyed said that it had made them reevaluate their path. **67%** said that it had changed what is important to them in their career decisions.

This data is juxtaposed with the 15% who said that the pandemic has made them crave better job security, and just 7% who said it had made them want to move towards a more stable career within a corporate environment.

A clear and authentic purpose is one of the primary indicators as to whether or not a candidate will apply for a role. With all of the major societal and global changes that have happened over the past 6 years, including a growing emphasis on climate change and inequality, job seekers are increasingly looking to spend their time working on the things that really matter to them.

“A clear and authentic purpose is one of the primary indicators as to whether or not a candidate will apply for a role.”

What people are really looking for in purposeful employers

When asked specifically how the pandemic has changed their priorities, half (49%) said the pandemic has made them want a clearer sense of purpose, and 38% said the pandemic has made them want to have a social impact in their job.

While impact-led career paths were once seen as niche and poorly paid, rising social consciousness, the rise in popularity of B Corporations and an increased awareness of what really matters to people, means that we expect purposeful work to be the new normal. But what does that look like in practice?

Purposeful work as defined by those who took part in our survey means working for an organisation that is purpose-driven and has social impact or responsibility inherent in their work. This could be a business solving a societal issue, a charity tackling a crisis, or an organisation that donates a percentage of its profits into doing something beneficial in the world.

For the majority of job seekers, they are looking for organisations that have a triple (or quadruple) bottom line: people, planet, purpose and profit. The majority of attractive purposeful organisations will encompass at least 3 of these, if not all 4 in the case of some social enterprises or mission-led organisations.

When asked which types of organisations they most wanted to work for 69% said a social enterprise and 67% said a non-profit or charity. Interestingly, when asked what kinds of industries people wanted to work in, over half (54%) said they'd like to work within sustainability or conservation, whereas just 13% of people said they'd like to work within finance or banking, 5% said manufacturing and 3% said law.

This was surprising. Given the uncertainty and financial distress that many have faced over the past 18 months, we expected to see more who would want to move towards greater job security. What this data shows is the opposite. Job security remains an important aspect to job seekers, with our community rating it as 8.1/10 important to them in their careers. However, it would appear that the pandemic has made some people reevaluate their paths in a way that they're willing to sacrifice some job security to hit some of the other factors that are important to them.

With an abundance of organisations emphasising their 'purpose', a need to differentiate true social purposes vs marketing slogans has become more important. The public finds it hard to tell purpose-driven companies

apart from those using purpose as a marketing tool. In research from Regenerate, just one in ten could identify companies doing good versus those just talking about it. 55% said they couldn't tell the difference⁹.

An organisation's ability to validate their purpose and communicate this clearly will be more important than ever in the post-pandemic world of work. As individuals reassess their circumstances and career paths, a shared purpose offers an opportunity to rekindle the relationship between employer and employee, and within teams.

Purpose is increasingly important as the pandemic has led some to become disengaged from their careers. An Aviva study found that 47% of those they surveyed in April 2021 say they have become less career-focused as a result of the pandemic, up from 36% in August 2020. With growing disengagement, the importance of work resonating beyond just a paycheck becomes critical.

The importance of environmental responsibility

Many countries around the world have declared a climate emergency. It's little wonder why when we're seeing the impacts of climate change all around us, from heat waves and wildfires in the Pacific Northwest in the US, in Siberia and in Turkey, to the severe flooding in Germany and China, it's clear that climate change is significantly impacting people around the world.

There is a growing awareness and acceptance of human impact on our climate, which is changing attitudes. Since Blue Planet first graced our TV screens in 2011, research papers on the topic of plastic pollution in oceans have quadrupled. Individuals are becoming more aware of their impact and expecting the organisations they work for, and purchase from, to do the same. Regenerate found that 76% of the UK public believe that business has a responsibility to protect the natural environment.

We've witnessed the backlash organisations face for not making commitments to reduce their carbon emissions, and an entire industry has been born to help companies become carbon neutral. As individuals seek to bring greater alignment between what they believe, how they conduct themselves in their personal lives, and what they do at work, a prospective company's approach to the environment is increasingly a key factor.

At least 12 peer-reviewed studies show that many job seekers are attracted to organisations with sustainable practices. Other studies show the same in relation to social practices more generally, like community involvement and ethical governance¹⁰.

"People are looking for an employer that takes proactive steps to make a difference related to the environment," says Bridget Jackson, Corporate Sustainability Director at PwC. "Being green builds pride, boosting retention of top talent."¹¹

Marks & Spencer launched its Plan A sustainability strategy in 2007, focusing on sourcing responsibly, reducing waste and helping communities. The high-street chain – which has ambitions to become the world's most sustainable retailer – believes Plan A has helped it attract the best talent. "It's increasingly a driver for people to apply to work for us, whether that's in stores, offices or within our sourcing network, but it's especially a key driver among graduates," says Sarah Findlater, Marks & Spencer's Head of Organisational Development. "We're finding that people want to work for companies that make a difference. Values of businesses are under increasing scrutiny and, therefore, becoming more important than ever before."¹¹

Plus, working for an employer with green credentials gives people satisfaction. "It helps motivate," explains Findlater. "The chance to make a difference to other people's lives and careers is particularly popular with colleagues. Across our workforce, those involved in Plan A activities consistently score higher in surveys on employee engagement than those who aren't."

A study by the Responsible Business Network asked career fair attendees to identify an organisation that was among their most attractive employment options. Job seekers reported greater attraction when they believed the organisation was more environmentally friendly, even when up against the most traditionally desirable employers at the fair¹².

Evidence of sustainability can lift a company's reputation and status. If a company genuinely cares about the wellbeing of the greater society, it stands to reason that it likely treats its employees well too.

Some people might be sceptical about this kind of value-laden message, even viewing it as a self-serving marketing ploy. Ultimately, job seekers want an employer whose values are a good fit with their own. If new employees find that the messages about sustainable practices that initially attracted them are really just a green veneer, many will become resentful and some will leave. Messages about sustainability need to match the reality that new hires will experience.

Another trend we've noticed over the past few years is a growing desire to work in the environmental/conservation sector.

When asked in 2015 which industries job seekers would be most interested in working in, 43% said charity and 39.3% said conservation. When asked in 2021, charity had risen to 58% and conservation had increased to 54%.

This marries with the data we're seeing with regards to how many applicants are attracted to certain types of organisations and roles. For example, a role posted in December 2020 for a Junior Sustainability Consultant with a £27k salary in London received more than 760 applications. Even in the talent shortage we're seeing today, organisations who are tackling climate change are attracting talented candidates where other industries are suffering and finding it difficult to stand out.

Purpose is not enough

One thing that has become clear is that an organisation having a 'purpose' in itself is not enough to satisfy a job seeker in 2021. We call this a moral tax. An expectation that there must be a cost in order to do meaningful work, i.e. sacrificing their wellbeing or salary. But in a job seekers market, this moral tax is no longer holding weight. One of the primary concerns that we've heard over the past 10 years is the idea that in order to pursue purposeful work, you have to sacrifice something else. And for many years this was often the case. There have been many instances where charities were paying people under the odds for their work, and we've also heard of instances of bullying within charities, and significant issues with how they treat their own staff while projecting the good they do for others out there in the world.

Even purpose-driven, profitable businesses like Brewdog have been exposed to have some less than satisfactory practices. With increased opportunities to work in purposeful businesses and well-funded organisations who also do good in the world, those who do not prioritise all of their stakeholders, including their staff, will find themselves ill equipped to attract and retain great people.

"If a company genuinely cares about the wellbeing of the greater society, it stands to reason that it likely treats its employees well too."

KEY TREND 4

CAREER CHANGE IS ON THE RISE



People are migrating, embrace the change

The past 18 months have fundamentally shifted how we live, how we work and our expectations of what work can look like. For those who have been able to experience the benefits of remote working and are suddenly expected to give them up, or for those who have experienced the negative impacts of remote work and are now expected to work remotely full-time going forward, this will cause what we're calling 'the great migration', something that will shape organisations for the rest of 2021 and well into 2022.

The UK is a couple of months behind the US in easing Covid-19 restrictions, so while the effects haven't fully been felt in the UK yet, they are certainly making waves in the U.S. The U.S. Department of Labor reported that a record 4 million people left their jobs in April 2021 alone - the highest number since they started collecting the data¹³. Likewise, a Microsoft report found that 41% of employees were considering leaving their current employer within the next year, with 46% planning to make a significant pivot or career transition. In our research, more than 85% wanted to change the industry they work in¹⁴. With the 'return to the office' on the table for many UK and European organisations over the coming months, we expect this to trigger a tidal wave of movement in the job market.

In the UK, July 2021 saw the highest number of open vacancies versus those looking for work since the late 1990s¹⁵. The result is that many more job seekers have options, and the best candidates will be able to more freely choose organisations that meet their needs and desires going forward.

The pandemic gave us extended periods of reflection and exploration, and exposed the fragility of daily life. Many individuals are reassessing their goals and what it means to spend their time meaningfully. This introspection, alongside lockdowns, is likely one reason many online courses, online learning platforms, and online boot camps experienced an influx in enrollment during the pandemic.

What's clear from the data is that most careers have been impacted by the pandemic in some way, from our survey over 53% said they wanted to change their careers entirely, with 79% wanting to work in a new field, 43% looking to retrain as a new profession, 31% interested in starting up their own businesses and 21% interested in transitioning to a freelance career.

Our data echoes other datasets. A poll of more than 4,000 people by Aviva found three out of five workers plan to learn new skills, gain qualifications or change their career altogether as a result of the coronavirus outbreak. Gareth Hemming, of Aviva, said: "As the pandemic has continued, an increasing number of people have given thought to what they want from their careers and now three-fifths of people would like to make changes to their working lives."¹⁶

While the acceptability of career changes has been steadily growing over the past decade, it has been rapidly accelerated by the pandemic. Much of this change is being driven by a desire for more autonomy and flexibility. After 18 months of remote working, talented employees who are able to perform their jobs virtually will not settle for requirements to be in the office full-time. Supportive and flexible work environments will be the most successful arenas going forward.

With huge numbers of people thinking of making a career change and a growing number of open vacancies, employers are faced with a significant challenge. They may find themselves struggling to fill roles that just a year ago were oversubscribed. Everyone is having to level up, and employers are no exception.

85%

of people wanted to
change which industry
they work in

Linked to the rise in career changers, the perception of a skills gap is growing. Or is it?

Increasingly, we're hearing talk of a growing skills gap in the UK workforce. As jobs become more technical in nature, organisations are finding it challenging to hire workers with matching skills and experience. According to research by Microsoft, more than two-thirds (69%) of UK business leaders believe their organisation is currently facing a digital skills gap. Additionally, 63% of UK employees felt they did not have the appropriate digital skills to fulfil their industry's new and emerging roles. The biggest barriers cited by employers were cost (37%), the lack of a skills investment strategy (28%) and a lack of knowledge on which skills initiatives to focus on (23%).

There are certainly skill deficits in some areas, specifically more complex technical skills like software development, digital marketing, and product management, but the idea of a more general skills gap is a complex picture.

In February 2021, we asked 100 of our employers what their greatest challenges were when hiring new team members:

- 69% cited attracting a diverse pool of applicants.
- 40% cited that it is hard to find candidates with the skills they are looking for.
- 26% said they were uncertain that the traditional interview process leads to hiring the best applicant for the job.

It's clear that there is at least a perceived gap between skills, applicants, and what employers are looking for.

“Increasingly, individuals are being pigeonholed by role title or industry, and this limited scope is adding to the workforce mismatch.”

Employers are missing out on talented people by neglecting range

More people than ever are changing careers, and we have a workforce that is increasingly becoming more generalised. Many individuals are focusing on building out their skill 'range' rather than honing in on one specific area. For most organisations, this range is valuable. With limited resources and a wide breadth of work to cover, adaptable and multi-skilled team members are often the linchpins of their organisations. With the idea of a 'career for life' quickly becoming an outdated concept, and new opportunities and skills emerging, employers are significantly limiting their talent options by only valuing a narrow group of specialists.

While many employers have eliminated specific educational requirements for roles, they often emphasise years of experience in one particular industry or role when advertising jobs, which rules out an increasing number of career changers who have other relevant experience and transferable skills. This means that while many have the skills required for a particular job, they aren't seen to have those specific skills. Increasingly, individuals are being pigeonholed by role title or industry, and this limited scope is adding to the workforce mismatch.

Additionally, the barrier for entry into many industries increases through the asymmetry in the number of years experience often required for entry-level roles.

Disproportionate demands and specifications serve only to discourage able applicants from applying and reinforce the, now outdated, notion that there is one traditional route into an industry. Businesses can address the skills shortage if they commit to train people. They must invest in talent by encouraging able juniors (regardless of their educational background) into roles in which they can learn and continue to develop.

The way we currently discuss the "skills gap" is dangerous. It encourages us to believe that the root of all labour-market problems lies in the low quality of labour supply—that is, in workers' lack of skills. However, pushing students and new workers to make expensive investments in generic skill categories unilaterally (or, worse, to just get "more education") is likely to result in inefficient investments, mistaken choices, and a large number of dead-end paths.

“There is a huge wealth of individuals across diverse communities with the skills and often the experience that employers are looking for, who are overlooked when using traditional channels or existing networks.”

There is an even more worrying aspect to this when considered in the context of gender diversity. Women are less likely to apply for jobs if they feel they lack the requisite experience or all of the skills stipulated within a job description. Men are more likely to apply regardless. Understood in these terms, an insistence on stringent specifications functions not only to constrict an already insufficient pipeline, it also serves to perpetuate gender disparity.

Rhetoric around the perceived 'skills gap' also excludes other demographics, such as neurodivergent talent. For example, just 1 in 5 people with autism in the UK are in work, but those aren't just unskilled workers¹⁷. 85% of graduates with autism find themselves unemployed today.

There is a huge wealth of individuals across diverse communities with the skills and often the experience that employers are looking for, who are overlooked when using traditional channels or existing networks.

We see some organisations placing significant emphasis on their desire to recruit 'diverse' candidates, and yet this doesn't appear to stretch to diversity of experience or skills. We urge employers not to discount candidates because they have different workplace experiences, as this can be a great strength, with employees from diverse backgrounds often offering new and innovative solutions, providing insights from different industries, and/or helping to attract new customers.

Instead of worrying about a skills gap, we should focus on the real challenge of stitching together supply and demand in the labour market. Thinking about the fundamental financial and institutional mechanisms necessary to make apprenticeships work or considering career changers as an important part of the recruitment pipeline is far more productive than perennially sounding alarms about under-skilled workers.

Employers are missing out on global talent by narrowing their scope to their immediate vicinity

Before the pandemic, jobs were posted and primarily linked to a specific locale and would tend to attract people in the immediate area. While this worked for the old model of employment, employers are now missing out on great talent by advertising their roles too narrowly, excluding those within their region, country or time zone with the necessary skills and experience. With societal shifts like Brexit, Covid-19, and changing job seeker expectations, employers will need to broaden their scope in order to maximise access to talent and to fill any skills gaps they have in their teams.

In our survey, we found that 63% of respondents said they were looking for remote roles. With such a high proportion of individuals looking for remote jobs, any organisations focusing too heavily on a location-based role will miss candidates who are interested in coming in on occasion or who want to work remotely part-time. Additionally, 48% of those we surveyed cited that the pandemic had made them change where they want to live. With mass migration out of city centres and into more affordable areas with better quality of life, organisations need to consider that their perfect candidate might be based in another part of the country or indeed abroad.

SUMMARY



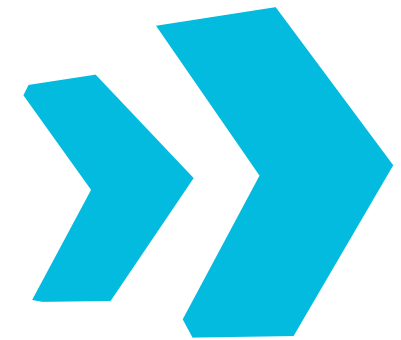
The journey towards the workplace of the future has been rapidly accelerated by the pandemic, with a decrease in office space, an increase in home working, widespread digitalisation and a rise in non-linear careers.

Many employees have enjoyed new working patterns which have seen their commutes reduced and – for some groups – enabled a better balance between professional and personal lives.

As we continue to move forward in this new world of work, things will inevitably continue to shift and adapt. What is clear is that most employees and job seekers aren't willing to return to 'business as usual'. With new expectations, a new realisation of what's possible, and a heightened awareness and sense of social responsibility, we believe that the world of work has fundamentally changed.

So what will happen next?

As the world reopens and adapts to a new normal, there are a number of factors likely to play a part in shaping the next phase of our working lives.



Employers will need to adapt to close the gap between job opportunities and job seekers

With growing numbers of people choosing to leave their jobs to change career entirely, the mismatch between market opportunities and candidates is likely to continue. There will be a growing need for employers to upskill and retrain existing employees to be able to maintain talent in their teams. They will need to broaden their scope to ensure they're able to fill their teams with great new people. This will require location flexibility and the active recruitment of individuals from communities they might not normally attract. If employers fail to do this, the whole market will suffer.

Technology will continue to change our realities

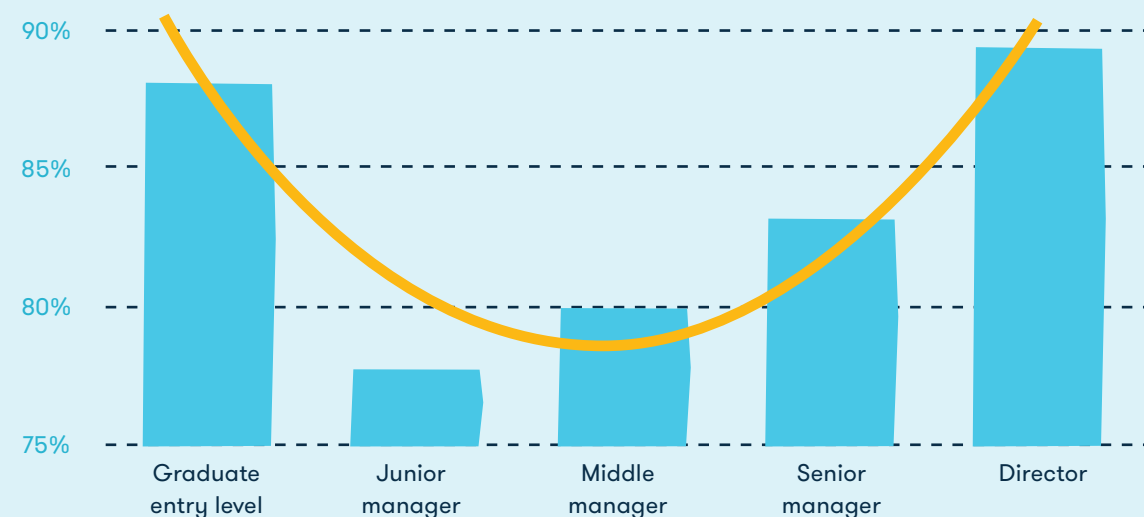
Lockdowns brought widespread adoption and an increased knowledge of technological connectivity, replacing the need for in-person interaction in some industries. As we continue to adapt to remote and hybrid working environments, workplace technology will expand and grow. Everything from VR offices to hybrid workplace solutions that connect in-person teams with remote colleagues, virtual perks, and remote team onboarding will continue to shape our reality.



Mental health will be at the forefront of career decisions

Throughout the pandemic we saw particularly high levels of strain, and even burnout, in decision makers and senior management. Managerial positions are likely to be most impacted by resignations, and these people will be looking for greater support and lower stress in future roles, potentially opening up a demand-gap for managerial positions. Across the board, individuals will be looking to actively avoid any mental health impacts they've felt throughout the pandemic and will seek opportunities that support their mental wellbeing. Whether that involves where they work, who they work for, or the support systems in place for those who experience ill-health, it will be a key factor in decision-making.

How often, if at all, have you felt close to burning out in the last year



Source: Censuswide survey for Spill (1,400 working adults), Jan 2021 ¹⁸

People will change where they live and where they work from

As hybrid and remote working continues its widespread adoption, we'll continue to see movement from a relocation perspective, as people seek to bridge the gap between their lifestyle aspirations and their current circumstances. With borders reopening and an increasing number of remote roles, we expect greater movement to occur across international borders, with increasing numbers of workers migrating to affordable remote-friendly cities and towns where they can set up for work. Brexit will create some challenges in this respect, but we also expect many countries to create pathways for remote workers to set up in their cities to bring in much needed income and tourism post-pandemic. There are already examples of this including the Barbados digital nomad visa, and an initiative by the state of Hawaii to attract remote workers. We may also see more of this on a short-term basis, as increasing numbers of organisations (like Ocado) allow their workers to work from abroad for periods of time as a benefit for their teams.

“Organisations will need to be wary of how they ensure equality between those in the office and those who work from home, everything from promotions, to benefits, to pay will need to be carefully considered.”

Hybrid working will cause serious rifts

Hybrid working and a return to the office will ignite tensions in some teams and will inevitably cause many to change jobs as individuals increasingly adapt their work to their needs. We expect to see an increasing number of legal challenges to requirements to come back to the office, especially from staff who are vulnerable to Covid-19 or who have health concerns. We are already beginning to see evidence of this as offices reopen and staff consult lawyers about their options moving forward. There are likely to be challenges about a 'right' to work from home, as well as increasing questions about what an employer can reasonably demand from an employee when it comes to physical presence in an office.

There is a risk that a two-tiered workforce will emerge. With many organisations adopting a hybrid work approach, there's likely to be a reemergence of 'facetime' in offices. Organisations will need to be wary of how they ensure equality between those in the office and those who work from home, everything from promotions, to benefits, to pay will need to be carefully considered. We are already seeing some organisations choosing to offer different salaries to those who work from home and those who come into the office, with remote workers being offered less than those in the office. This is a dangerous and slippery slope, and will likely cause further inequality for those who may have caring responsibilities, physical or mental disabilities, and those who cannot afford to commute or to live within a specific proximity of an office location. We strongly believe that such pay disparities will serve as a red flag for a significant number of potential candidates, distress current employees, and lead to costly legal and societal challenges for any organisation choosing to pursue such a policy.

Onwards and upwards

Much is likely to change moving into 2022 and beyond. We are living in an unprecedented time where there is no clear roadmap. We believe organisations will need to remain agile and, most importantly, be human in their interactions with both current employees and prospective ones. Providing clarity and creating working conditions that allow for trust, wellbeing, flexibility and good levels of income will put organisations in a strong position to grow and adapt as the world of work continues to change.

CALL TO ACTION



It's becoming increasingly competitive to hire as individuals become more exacting in their expectations and have greater clarity on the roles and organisations that will really work for them. In a noisy online world, here's what you can do to stand out and to build working cultures that will attract and retain great people.

Focus on the flexibility you can offer candidates

Flexibility is the new benefit that everyone expects. Organisations who require their workers to return to the office without offering significant levels of flexibility will find themselves losing a significant proportion of their existing workforce, and will find it more difficult to hire new talent. From our own data and experience, flexibility will be the most attractive benefit going forward, with three quarters (74%) of professionals saying that a flexible working location is the primary barometer they use when assessing whether or not they'd be interested in a new role. There's a greater need than ever to embed flexibility into your policies. Not only will this ensure your organisation remains agile and inclusive, but will also improve your attractiveness to potential new talent.

“Organisations who require their workers to return to the office without offering significant levels of flexibility will find themselves losing a significant proportion of their existing workforce”

Clearly articulate and communicate your 'return to work' plans

A Morning Consult survey reported that 39% of respondents said they'd consider quitting if their managers weren't flexible about working from home. A similar survey conducted by FlexJobs reported that 58% of participants agreed they would "absolutely" look for a new job if they couldn't continue remote work in their current role. For that reason, organisations looking to move back to the office full-time may find that many of their employees would rather quit than return to "normal".

Many employees who are trying to decide on their future plans don't feel they've received enough clarity from their employers, and are therefore looking for other options. A McKinsey survey found, "Employees feel they've yet to hear enough about their employers' plans for post-COVID-19 working arrangements. Organisations may have announced a general intent to embrace hybrid virtual work going forward, but too few of them, employees say, have shared detailed guidelines, policies, expectations, and approaches."

Be clear on what your next steps are, and how you intend to counteract any potential negative impacts. Even if things change in the future, you can share your immediate intentions and be open about the fact that they may change as the world does.

Your emphasis on authentic purpose matters

Gone are the days where culture meant snacks, standing desks, and a ping pong table. Leaders are tasked with finding ways to make culture stretch across time zones, work environments, and personal circumstances. While challenging, it's not only possible but necessary to help your employees maintain a sense of community and purpose. It's clear from our data that purpose is a defining characteristic of attractive work, but people are savvy about 'purpose-washing' and are keen to understand clearly why what they do matters. Consider purpose-mapping for each role, defining how that role helps the organisation achieve its mission and why it matters beyond company profits. Speak directly to this in job advertisements to help prospective employees understand why the role is important not only to the organisation but to the problem the organisation is trying to solve.

Look after the environment

Sustainability is a priority for job seekers in 2021, but they are wary of greenwashing. Claims about sustainability need to be backed up with action to be effective. Clearly communicate how your sustainability practices are connected to how the organisation works more broadly, and to a deeper care for all stakeholders in the organisation's ecosystem. Show job seekers how sustainability is infused in daily work activities, training programmes, reward systems, and operational practices and objectives. Your hiring practices are a great place to start. Sustainability messages can only add value if they reach job seekers. Use multiple channels to inform job seekers about your sustainability, such as on your careers pages, employee testimonials, recruitment handouts, conversations with recruiters, and job advertisements.

Your approach to diversity and inclusion needs to be holistic

From our data, diversity and inclusion is a critical part of a job seekers assessment of a potential job or organisation. An organisation's approach to inclusion has to be embedded across the business, going well beyond unconscious bias training. From advertising, to recruitment, to interviews, to language, all touch points that potential employees have with an organisation need to be looked at through the lens of inclusivity. Organisations will need to ask themselves: are we really moving things forward or are we just ticking boxes? As society expects more and more from the individuals and organisations within it, an intrinsic and clear desire to increase equality and inclusivity will be a decisive factor in the attractiveness of your organisation from both a consumer and employee perspective.

Broaden your horizons

Thinking beyond your immediate locale is essential to truly attract the best talent, wherever and whoever they may be. There are communities of talent across the UK, Europe and the world who would be great employees and candidates if given the opportunity. Think beyond your obvious channels for candidates too, ensuring that you're reaching people across a wide spectrum of experiences and networks. There's a wealth of talent and experience in diverse, regional and international communities that are missed opportunities if you're hiring too narrowly.

Adapt your hiring practices

With a growing number of career changers in the talent market, relying too heavily on a CV & cover letter as your first assessment means you're likely missing out on great talent. In our survey we asked individuals how likely they'd be to apply for a job if they didn't meet 100% of the criteria, the average was just 7/10. Demonstrate that you're measuring what really matters: their ability to do that role. Exploring alternative ways of hiring could increase both the quality of your candidates and the diversity of those candidates. There are many ways you might try hiring differently, focusing on the things that are truly important for the role.

Skills tests are a great way to identify the best candidates based on their performance in role-related tasks, and are much more indicative of how someone would perform in the role than a CV or cover letter. For an employer, skills testing allows you to feel more confident that you are not hiring the wrong person or basing your decision on gut feeling - and the great thing about skills tests is that organisations of all sizes and sectors can implement them.

You can also try personality assessments, assessment centres, job trials, or a series of questions about their suitability for the role or their previous experience with a specific skill.

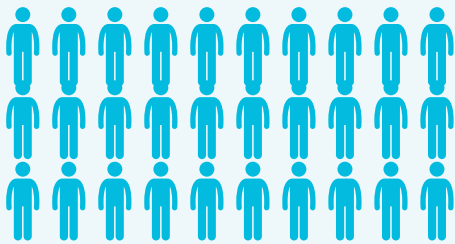
“An organisation's approach to inclusion has to be embedded across the business, going well beyond unconscious bias training. From advertising, to recruitment, to interviews, to language.”

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ESCAPE THE CITY SURVEY RESULTS

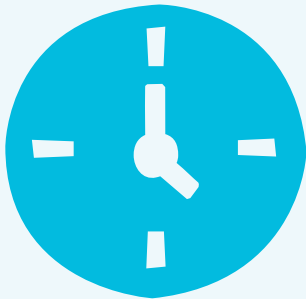
Graphs of breakdown

Sample size, breakdown of gender identity, location, broad age breakdown, nature of sample (subscribers of Escape the City).

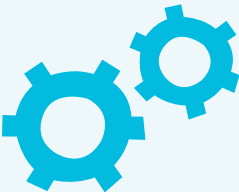


Survey size
1500 professionals

Age
51% 25 - 34 years old
28% 35 - 44 years old
10% 45 - 54 years old
7% 18 - 24 years old
3% 55 - 64 years old



Location
50% were London-based
29% were based in the UK, but not London
11% were based in Europe



Top 5 industries they work in
Tech
Consulting / professional services
Charity
Education
Finance / Banking



Top 5 work areas of work
Marketing & comms
Business Operations
Project Management
Sales / Business Development
Strategy & analysis
Finance

Type of organisation they currently work for
46% Corporate
19% Charity or non-profit
16% Startup
9% Scaleup
8% Government
1% Social enterprise

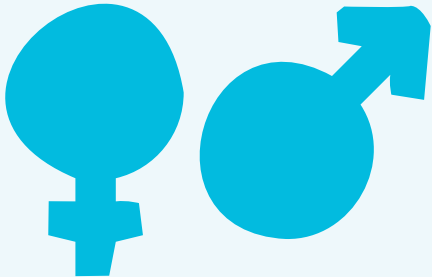


Average years of experience
56% have between 6 - 20 years of experience
10% have more than 20 years of experience
30% have between 3 - 6 years of experience
4% have less than 3 years experience



Size of organisation they currently work for
30% Large (1000+ people)
24% Medium (101 - 999 people)
22% SME or growing startup (10 - 50 people)
12% Scaling startup (51 - 100 people)
12% Microbusiness (1 - 9 people)

Gender identity
70% women
28% men
1% other / non-binary
1% prefer not to disclose



APPENDIX: KEY TAKEAWAYS



Escape factors

When asked which factors matter the most in their careers...

- 80%** said having a social impact
- 56%** said it was working for an exciting brand
- 43%** said it was working remotely
- 37%** said having an entrepreneurial opportunity
- 15%** said it was about escaping to the countryside
- 14%** said it was about living and working in an exotic location



Industries

When asked which industries they were most interested in working in...

- 58%** said they wanted to work in the charity sector
- 54%** said they wanted to work in conservation / green
- 53%** said they wanted to work in social enterprise
- 44%** said they wanted to work in Travel / Tourism
- 40%** said they wanted to work in food & drink



Where they wanted to work

When asked where they wanted to work going forward...

- 69%** said London
- 63%** said Remote
- 42%** said Europe (not UK)
- 25%** said East or South East England
- 22%** said North America



Type of organisation

When asked which type of organisation they'd like to work for...

- 70%** said they wanted to work for a social enterprise
- 69%** said they wanted to work for a startup
- 67%** said they wanted to work for a nonprofit or charity
- 56%** said they wanted to work for a scaleup
- 49%** said they wanted to work for a corporate organisation
- 32%** said they wanted to work for government



Size of organisation

When asked what size organisation they wanted to work for...

- 60%** said they wanted to work for a scaling startup (51-100 people)
- 53%** said they wanted to work for an SME or growing startup (10-50 people)
- 37%** said they wanted to work for a medium-sized organisation (101-999 people)
- 17%** said they wanted to work for a micro-business (1-9 people)
- 12%** said they wanted to work for a large organisation (1000+ people)

Career change

86% said they wanted to change the industry they worked in

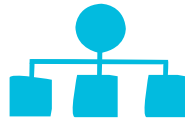




Desired Ingredients of work

When asked what mattered most to them in a career (out of 10)

- 8.5 important to have a career with a clear sense of purpose
- 8.7 important to do work that makes it easier for them to stay healthy
- 8.9 important to have more social impact through their work
- 8.3 important to have autonomy and independence



What they look for in an organisation

When asked how important certain factors were in a potential employer (out of 10)

- 8.5 that an organisation is purpose-driven (average)
- 8.3 that an organisation is environmentally conscious (average)
- 8.0 that an organisation prioritises diversity & inclusion (average)



Most appealing work benefits

- | | |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 74.2% Flexible working: location (work from anywhere) | 12% Extended maternity / paternity leave |
| 60% Flexible working: hours (ability to choose own hours) | 10% Share option schemes |
| 43% 4-day working week | 8% Lunches or breakfasts provided on-site |
| 40% Learning and development budget | 7% Remote working trips |
| 30% Wellbeing budget: exercise passes (gym, yoga, etc) | 7% Childcare support |
| 25% Unlimited holiday | 6% Team retreats |
| 23% Private health insurance | 5% Wellbeing budget: massages, float spas, etc |
| 21% Mental health support: free therapy (virtual or in-person) | 3% Ride to work scheme |
| 18% Increased pension contributions | 3% Free snacks in the office |
| 17% Additional days off (e.g. birthday, mental health days, duvet days etc) | 2% Charitable giving match scheme |
| 15% Days off to pursue hobbies / passions | 2% Discounts at popular suppliers |
| 15% Paid volunteering days | 2% Monthly book allowance |
| 14% Paid sabbaticals | 1% Season ticket purchase loan |
| | 1% Emergency loan scheme (0% interest loans in case of emergency need) |



How the pandemic has impacted careers

- 61% said their career had been impacted by the pandemic
- 21% were made redundant or lost their job
- 21% had missed out on advancement opportunities
- 11% were put on furlough for a prolonged period
- 8% had their pay reduced

25% said other:
→ of that 15% said their hours had increased leading to stress of burnout
→ 8% said they'd been unable to find work in the competitive environment

63% said their future career aspirations had been impacted

- Of those:
- 73% said the pandemic made them reevaluate their career path
 - 66% said the pandemic changed what they prioritised in their job search
 - 50% said the pandemic made them want to focus on things outside of work (family, etc)
 - 22% said the pandemic made them want to start a business
 - 15% the pandemic made them decide they wanted to go freelance
 - 7% said the pandemic had made them want to work for a corporate

62% said the pandemic has impacted their immediate next career step

- Of those:
- 53% want to change their career entirely
 - 28% said they want to do the same job in a different industry
 - 19% said they want to do a different job in the same industry

68% said the pandemic has changed what's important to them in their career

- Of those:
- 49% now want a career that allows them to be healthy in body and mind
 - 49% now want a clear sense of purpose in my work
 - 46% now want a better work-life balance
 - 37% now want to have a positive social impact
 - 33% now want a greater sense of freedom, autonomy, & independence
 - 31% now want the ability to work from anywhere in the world
 - 23% now want more creativity, innovation, entrepreneurialism
 - 15% now want more job security

48% said the pandemic had made them impact where they want to live

- Of those:
- 49% said they want to work remotely and travel
 - 43% said they wanted to move to a different country
 - 43% said they wanted to work remotely but live in one place
 - 39% said they wanted to move from the city to the countryside
 - 24% said they want to move to a new city
 - 3% said they wanted to move from the countryside to the city



On remote working

81% had been working remotely during the pandemic. Of those:

- 56%** said they like it, but not full time
- 41%** said they love it
- 11%** said they are ambivalent about it
- 3%** said they hate it



Best parts of working remotely

When asked what the best aspect was of remote working

- 38%** cited not having to commute
- 26%** said having the freedom to make your own schedule
- 18%** said that it gives more time to relax / exercise / spend time with family
- 12%** loved that you can work from anywhere
- 4%** felt they could save money by working at home



When asked if they wanted to work remotely in future

- 73%** said they'd like to work remotely but part-time
- 36%** said they'd like to work remotely full-time
- 24%** said they'd like to work in a coworking space
- 1.5%** said they don't want to work remotely at all



Negative aspects of remote working

- 76%** said they miss seeing and connecting with colleagues
- 44%** don't like the lack of separation between work and life
- 43%** don't think it's the best way to generate ideas and work collaboratively
- 17%** feel it's too easy to get distracted
- 12%** don't feel as productive at home
- 10%** miss having a routine
- 9%** find it challenging balancing work and family



Employer support during the pandemic

- 68%** said their employers had not done anything to support their remote working
- 74%** said that their employer hadn't provided any additional perks or budgets for wellbeing
- 63%** said they hadn't been given any additional time off
- 55%** said they hadn't been supported in getting a better home office set up (office tools, etc)
- 46%** hadn't had any social events through work online to maintain connection



Finding new roles

When asked what the biggest challenges were to finding a new role

- 32%** said the biggest challenge while job hunting is not hearing back from employers
- an average 50% hear back from employers when applying for a job**
- 30%** said that it was that employers don't see their skills as transferable
- 58%** of people who had applied for a role in the past year had applied for a job that would be a career change



On the hiring process

When asked if they felt a CV and cover letter was the best way to apply for a job, it was rated average as 5.5/10

Of those who felt it wasn't a good way of assessing candidates, they said:

- 70%** would like to answer a series of questions about their suitability for the role
- 63%** would like to complete a series of tasks which replicate the role
- 40%** said they would like to take a personality test or assessment
- 23%** said they thought taking part in an assessment centre would be better



ABOUT ESCAPE THE CITY

Escape the City helps talented professionals find exciting opportunities outside of the corporate mainstream.

The site was founded in January 2010 by two corporate professionals who wanted to 'do something different' with their careers. The idea for Escape the City was born out of a frustration at how hard it was to discover exciting, viable career opportunities outside of the corporate mainstream. Excited by the Internet's potential to reach a community of likeminded people, they set out to build a solution.

Escape the City's primary objectives are to provide its members with exciting, unconventional (but viable) jobs, as well as providing a world-class education through The Escape School. Since launching in 2010, the site has advertised over 16,000 job vacancies in startups, SMEs, social enterprises, charities, and businesses worldwide.

The Escape School was launched in 2012 in response to the huge demand from members for online and offline education to prepare themselves for a career transition. In September 2014, The Escape School launched 'Accelerators', three month intensive courses for individuals serious about making brave career changes.

Escape the City's vision is to be the platform where the world's professionals can mark themselves as available for work offers (without their boss seeing) and expose themselves to opportunities that match both their past experiences but also, crucially, their future aspirations.

The team is currently working on a global jobs board with thousands of opportunities, as well as running events and courses to help 1,000,000 people across the world do work that matters to them and the world.





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THANKS

