Shifting Workplace Power: How a Pandemic, Evolving Demographics, a Tight Labor Market, and Changing Workplace Relationships Shifted Employees' Demands and Preferences

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Employees have spread their wings. This manuscript will analyze various factors that have had a unique impact on the American workforce that have led to a workplace power shift. Factors considered include the impact of the pandemic, current employee developments, and an historically tight Labor Market. Furthermore, generations and the evolution at the workplace of changing workplace relationships are analyzed. Technology's role in these shifts will be considered. Furthermore, Chris Argyris' maturity theory adds new insights to understanding changing workers' demands and desires. Throughout this document, HR's challenges and opportunities are presented.

Keywords: business, management, human resources, leadership

USA PANDEMIC-ERA WORKPLACE

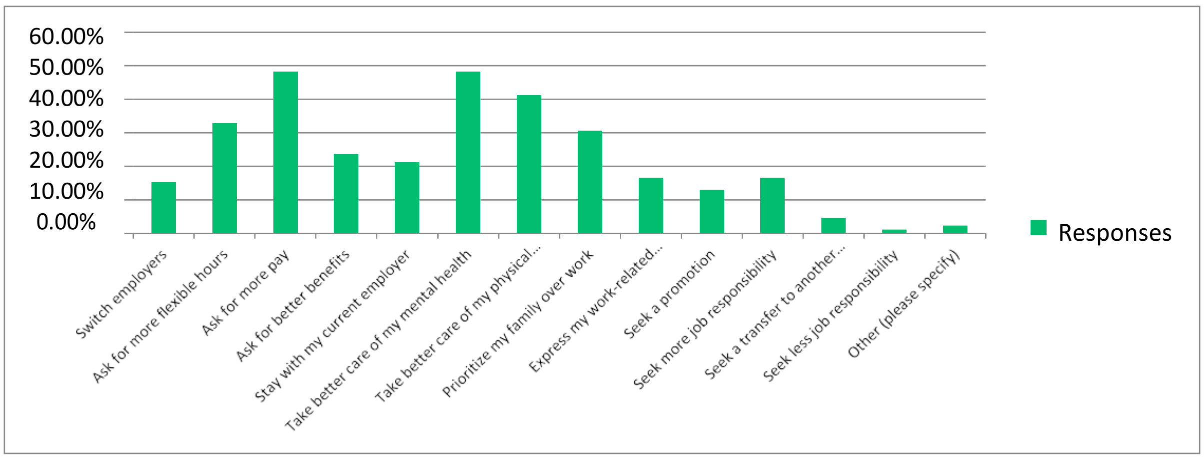
COVID has upended the labor market. Part of how this has been demonstrated is that employees are using their leverage (Rogers, 2022) at the workplace in ways not seen for decades or ever before. Employees are trying to reclaim what they gave up before the pandemic. They are emboldened by a series of related events: soaring company profits, a renewed respect for "essential" workers.

Two years on from the start of the Coronavirus pandemic, the workplace remains in a state of severe disruption. The economy has more than a million jobs more than workers to fill them. Employees are quitting in large numbers. Wages are rising at an annual average of about 5%. The recovery in the labor market has been historic, with the unemployment rate now at 3.5% as of August 11, 2022 (Smart, 2022). This trend has continued as noted in the December 2022 jobs report. The unemployment rate was 3.5%. Most noticeable was that if discouraged workers and those holding part-time jobs for economic reasons were taken into consideration, their numbers declined to 6.5%, which is the lowest reading in a data set that goes back to 1994. The unemployment rate therefore is tied for the lowest rate since 1969. Wage growth was up 4.6% from a year below. That was slightly below the 5% estimate for that time. Leisure and hospitality sectors led the job gains followed by health care, construction, and social assistance. The relative strength in the job market continued to stay robust notable despite the Federal Reserve's efforts to slow the economy at this time (Cox, 2020, January 6).

Companies in many industries are finding employees impossible to replace (Kulgren, Eckhouse, Shanker, 2021, October). The post pandemic workforce is expected to be different than the one that existed before COVID-19. United States talent shortages reached a 10 year high (White, 2021). Older workers are retiring. And there is not enough talent to fill the void. Additionally, there are changing needs and expectations by employees (Castrillon, 2021). Furthermore, the workforce is experiencing what has been called “the great resignation”. These attrition rates are the highest among midcareer employees. However other research shows that they are also high for tech and healthcare industries and for the Generation Z (Cook, 2021). Companies are working on talent retention programs to offset this (Cook, 2021). Most of the individuals who quit attained positions elsewhere.

In conjunction with this author’s research, many employees’ workplace desires and needs changed. Based upon the nearly 100 respondents, university undergraduate and MBA students, most stated that they would ask for more pay, and many stated they would ask for more flexible hours. Furthermore, most also stated that they would take better care of their own mental health, followed by taking better care of their physical health. A notable 30% also stated that they would prioritize their family over work. These findings correspond to other reports during this time. That shows shifting employee perspectives on work and their role at the workplace.

FIGURE 1
BECAUSE OF EVENTS DURING THE PANDEMIC, HOW MUCH MORE LIKELY ARE YOU TO DO THE FOLLOWING? (PLEASE CHECK ALL THAT APPLY.)



Additionally, the competition to gain employees and companies has led to higher pay. Since the pandemic compensation package changes and wage growth have become the norm. This has impacted inflation. Employees at companies with between 501,000 workers have benefited the most from across-the-board raises. Wage growth is most impressive for Generation Z and millennial workers (Bruner, 2022). Furthermore, very recently Amazon, Intel and other companies acknowledge that rejecting remote work would cost them talent (Palmer, 2022, February). Therefore, the remote work that occurred by necessity for many employees during the COVID-19 pandemic has changed the norm. Leadership will need to be excellent and targeted for employees (Moore, 2021). Another factor that has impacted the pandemic workplace is employee burnout. Arianna Huffington has stated that, “not since the Industrial Revolution have, we really rethought work…Addressing employees’ well-being should be high on employers’ priority list because it’s a business imperative.” It is expected that Human Resource Management Departments, and their companies, will establish new policies to promote the wellbeing of their workers in a post pandemic world. There is a realization that humans work better and are more productive when they have time to recharge and recover (Abril, 2021).

The Future of American Work and the State of the Labor Market

As the pandemic grew, more companies allowed non-essential, non-manufacturing, and other positions for which it was possible to work from home: the remote option. That flexibility was appreciated by many American workers. Flexible-work options are critical for employees. Most employees think their company

(78%) and their manager (80%) understand their need to manage life and work demands. 72% employees: their employer supports flexible-work options related to work schedule (i.e., schedule flexibility, flextime). In research 66% employees state the same of work location (i.e., remote work, distributed work) (Catalyst, October 2021).

The total of employment vacancies fell to about 10.7 million through the last day of June 2022. 1.8 open jobs per available worker. The job openings and labor market turnover survey (JOLTS) by the Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics showed that hiring slowed during June dropping 2% to 6.37 million. Yet, the level of quits had little change, but were well-off record levels seen earlier in 2022. Additionally, separations edged lower falling by 1.4% to 5.93 million (Cox, 2022, September 2). The unemployment held at 3.5% (BLS, 2022, August 11) and shifted to 3.7% in late August 2022. As of November 2022, there were approximately two jobs for every job searcher in the United States (Cox, 2022, November).

If a wide-spread recession occurs there would be fewer new job opportunities for workers. However, there are approximately two job openings for every unemployed person giving workers significant leverage to pick and choose (Munk, 2022, May). Pay raises are planned.

Inflation and a tight labor market had led to an average annual salary increase reaching 4.8. The highest pay increase in decades. Research conducted by Pearl Meyer, May 2022 survey of Chief Human Resource Officers and corporate boards: The fear of losing workers is driving pay increases more than inflation. There is concern for retention, as wages are increasing in many places. By October 2022, wages increased 7.7%, on an annual basis, according to ADP. This was down slightly from the September '22 pace (Cox, 2022, November). Additionally, companies added 127,000 positions in November 2022, which was a sharp decline from the prior month.

Job creation may be slowing. Leisure and hospitality, along with services firms grew, while manufacturing, professional & business services, financial activities, information services, and goods-producing industries declined in November 2020. However, pay increased 7.5% as of November 2022 compared to the year prior. Despite the declines in some industries, the wage increases show that the labor market is still strong. Additionally, companies may be reassessing the short-term value of layoffs. As recovery from the pandemic occurred, trying to hire and retain great candidates became very difficult and expensive. Businesses are now less likely of letting go employees even during difficult economic times. Furthermore, research has shown that when layoffs began, many employees voluntarily quit due to a sense of lower job security (Hurst, 2022).

It is expensive to recruit and train new employees. Many companies have planned more pay raises for midyear. Total increases are over 4% for 66% of survey participants. Total increases equal over 6% for 25% of organizations. The consulting firm is recommending to companies: Not necessarily offer midyear increases in the form of salary, such as to offer retention bonuses or one time merit bonuses (Rosenbaum, 2022, June).

THE GREAT RESIGNATION AND AMERICAN FUTURE WORK

There is an empowered workforce. "The Great Resignation" exists. Reasons for this often focus on why people quit: low pay, few opportunities for career advancement, an inflexible work schedule (Smith, 2022). Additionally, a demand for better working conditions exists (SHRM News Alert, 2023, January 3). The pandemic has led to an empowered workforce (Carter, 2022). During the pandemic employees had to be treated as mature adults. As of November 2022, 4.2 million employees quit their jobs, as compared to the highest number of 4.5 million recorded one year earlier (SHRM News Alert, 2023, January 3).

Research has shown that 50% of employees want to make a variety of career moves among those who plan to make a change. 41% employees, in recent research, stated that requesting location flexibility is the main reason; asking their employer for a raise and/or promotion was second (39%). Looking for a job in a new industry ranked third (33%). Seeking another job in the same industry was listed most frequently next (32%). Roughly two in five employees are considering quitting their job because their company (41%) or manager (37%) has not cared about their concerns during the pandemic. Employed men are far more likely than employed women to say this (Catalyst, October 2021).

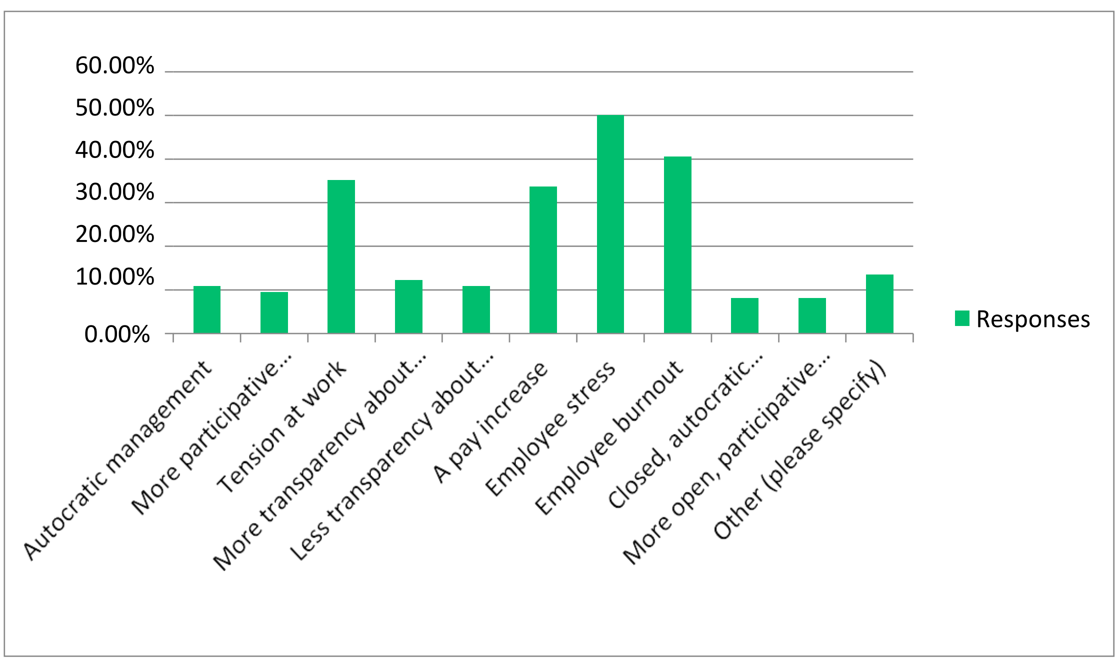
Flexibility is a significant preference for workers. 76% of employees, in research, stated that they want their company to make work permanently flexible in terms of things like schedule and/or location. Employees perceive that their *employer thinks* they are more innovative (72%) and work harder (75%) in the office or on-site (How Employee…, Catalyst, 2021, October 19).

Working parents are particularly likely to want to make a career change, including exiting their jobs. In a study, 64% of parents with children ages 3-17 intend to make career changes due to COVID-19. 40% of those who are not parents of children ages 3-17. In a study, 27% of parents with children 3-17 who intend to make career changes stated that they plan to quit their current job to start their own business. 10% of those who are not parents of children ages 3-17 gave that reason (Catalyst, October 19, 2021).

A concern is that 40% of workers are considering quitting their jobs soon. More than 4 million people left their jobs each month in the USA so far in 2022. According to new research, this trend isn't going to quit anytime soon. McKinsey and Co. report in USA, Australia, Canada, Singapore, India, United Kingdom found two factors: Pandemic-induced burnout, and better odds of securing a higher-paid role in a tight labor market (Smith, July 20, 2022).

Recently, this author has researched undergraduate and MBA students at a small, private university in Western Pennsylvania to ascertain the students' perceptions of a post-pandemic workplace. Nearly 100 respondents, which includes working adults, were asked changes management and leadership actions that they experienced during the pandemic. The results are shown in Figure 2 below. One respondent commented that in a private small business there was intense pressure to make sales and if that that did not occur, blame was placed on various reasons and there was high stress. Another respondent noted that in sales and due to the supply chain, it was difficult to tell customers when merchandise would receive and that person experienced, at work, those potential clients who had financial difficulties during the pandemic and could not make purchases.

FIGURE 2
IF EMPLOYED AT ANY TIME DURING THE PANDEMIC, DID YOU EXPERIENCE ANY OF THE FOLLOWING. (PLEASE CHECK ALL THAT APPLY.)



Midcareer employees show interesting workplace actions. Attrition rates are the highest among midcareer employees. Also high for tech and healthcare industries and for the Generation Z. Companies are working on talent retention programs to offset this (Cook, 2021).

The "Great Reshuffle"

The Great Reshuffle refers to the fact that 47 million people quit their jobs in 2021, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Most took jobs in another company. About 48% of people who quit have pursued new opportunities in different industries, the report found (Smith, 2022). "The Great Reshuffle" (Fox, 2022). "People aren't tolerating toxic bosses and toxic cultures anymore, because they can leave and find other ways to make money without being in a negative situation." During the pandemic, new business applications grew by more than 30%. There were almost 5.4 million new applications in 2021 alone. People value flexibility as much as a 10% pay raise (Smith, 2022).

EMPLOYER HR ACTION SHIFTS

"It's everything from embedding flexibility in our credo to re-assessing how we value our employees and provide them with the resources they need to do their job … all employers have the capacity to make these meaningful changes." "But we have to start taking action, as opposed to sitting back and hoping that things are going to return to a 'pre-pandemic norm' — because all signs point to the fact that they won't" (Smith, 2022). It is more essential than in the past that employers, HR Departments, managers, and leaders know their employees. This includes working parents who have experienced unique challenges during the pandemic.

Among those who intend to make career changes as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, working parents are more likely than working non-parents to say they intend to: Ask for location flexibility (51% parents vs. 34% non-parents); ask their employer for a raise and/or promotion (47% vs. 22%); quit their current job to start their own business (27% vs. 10%). Working parents are much more likely than non-parents to say they are considering leaving their job because their company (54% vs. 29%) or manager (51% vs. 25%) has not cared about their concerns during the pandemic (Catalyst, October 2021).

As evidenced by a number of recent union negotiations, employee sick and family leave are major priorities for the labor force since the pandemic began. That Delta's nearly 15,000 pilots threatened to walk off the job due in part to disagreements about time off and scheduling. The freight rail system unions have a major demand about worker leave. The increased attention and awareness of the importance of employee health has contributed to these occurrences. Although many companies offer paid leave to employees, the United States does not require paid leave for employees. The patience of employees is lessened because at a number of the sites the companies have had record profits during the pandemic. For example, come on man seven Class I freight companies made more than $27 billion in operating income in 2021, an average of about $4 billion per year. One of the rail unions involved in recent negotiations, the brotherhood of maintenance of way employees estimated the total cost of seven days of paid sick leave for the seven major freight rail companies would be approximately $226 million to $237 million a year in 2023 and 2024. That was based on estimating workers using an average of four of the seven days a year (Frey, 2022, December 10). Furthermore, Starbucks workers planned a 3-day walkout at 100 stores in December 2022. Despite the labor disputes and negotiations at many Starbucks locations, the company's revenue rose 3% in July-September 2022 (Starbucks…, 2022).

THE GREAT REALIZATION: RETHINKING WORK: WORK FROM HOME

Sahadi (2022) found that work from home is commonplace. "Among Americans with jobs that can be done remotely, 59% of employees are still working from home all or much of the time, according to research by the Pew Research Center. This is well above the 23% who did frequently before the pandemic. The biggest reason --76%--state that working from home is their preference. Furthermore, among those who have a workplace outside of their homes, 61% said they are choosing to work from home. 60% of workers with jobs that can be done from home say they would like to work from home all or most of the time when the pandemic is over. That is up from 54% in 2020." Only 12% of current office workers prefer full in-person work. In that study, 66% of Gen Z stated that they want in-person feedback from their managers, rather than receiving a written report or chatting over zoom (Sahadi, J. 2022, February 16). In contrast though, among Generation Z who were surveyed in the fall of 2020, 69% said they would like to work remotely at least half of the time (Janin, 2022).

"The hybrid workforce is not going to go away, but the situation where employees refuse to come to the workplace at all is not likely to hold," said Johnny C. Taylor Jr., president, and CEO of The Society for Human Resource Management. "By the end of 2024, we believe that the number of fully remote workers will go to about 20%. But that still means 80% will be working in the office in some way," Taylor said. "Employers are likely to demand that you meet them midway," Taylor Jr. said of work location flexibility; but that midway point may be defined by employers differently — three days in the office, two days at home; two days in the office, three days at home. Some firms may define it as four days in the office. Recent data from New York City shows some shifts in the work arrangements, and the resilience of hybrid formats (Munk, 2022, May 22).

Fully remote workers report greater satisfaction with the following: their pay; recognition from colleagues; opportunities for advancement; a greater degree of autonomy that they have over their work. In-person workers score more highly on one measure; that is, 68% consider their job to be very meaningful to them. This is compared with 60% among remote or mostly remote workers and 54% among workers who work mostly in-person (Wronski, 2022). In contrast, a recent CNBC/Momentive Workforce Survey of more than 9,000 workers across the U.S, 65% say they are now working fully in-person from their office or workplace. Additional findings were that 14% are working mostly in-person; 9% are working mostly remotely; 11% are working fully remotely. Interestingly, workers who are currently doing their jobs fully from home or mostly from home are happier than those who are working fully or mostly from the office. More than half (52%) of fully remote workers say they are very satisfied with their jobs. This is compared with 47% of workers working mostly from home; 40% of workers working mostly from the office and 47% of workers working fully from the office (Wronski, 2022, June 1). "Among Americans with jobs that can be done remotely, 59% of employees are still working from home all or much of the time according to the Pew Research Center. 23% before the pandemic. The biggest reason --76%--state that working from home is their preference. Those who have a workplace outside of their homes: 61% said they are choosing to work from home. 60% of workers with jobs that can be done from home say they would like to work from home all or most of the time when the pandemic is over. That is up from 54% in 2020. 12% of current office workers prefer full in-person work" (Sahadi, J. 2022, February 16). Productivity has remained strong despite many employees working from home. In a survey, employees were asked whether their productivity felt higher during the pandemic than it was before. The results showed that 54% of people thought their productivity had risen for every hour they worked compared to before the pandemic. In the research, nearly 90% thought that their productivity had either stayed the same or improved while working from home. These results correspond with previous studies about the productivity gains from remote work (Gaskell, 2021).

Many companies are facing greater-than-expected resistance for their employees to return to the office. Ford Motor company was surprised at how few employees came back to the office. Ford employee polls suggested they wanted a mix of remote and in-office work. In January 2023, Disney's CEO, Bob Iger told hybrid employees that they were required to return to corporate offices four days a week, starting in March. This policy is relatively strict compared with other large companies. Many of the large companies have implemented a two or three day-mandated in-office policy for hybrid workers. For example, in September 2022 Apple required its employees to return to work three days a week (Sherman, Whitten, 2023).

There were 37.4 million people quitting their jobs in 2022, according to the Gartner research and consulting firm (Munk, 2022, May 22). Hybrid, remote work, and location may matter. It is predicted that U.S. employee annual voluntary turnover is likely to jump nearly 20% in 2022 from a pre-pandemic annual average. Correspondingly, 43% of companies are offering hybrid models. Perks include four-day workweeks, sabbaticals, and work from anywhere (Fox, 2022, May). Companies located in small cities with populations under 300,000 showed that paid, full days worked from home dropped to 27% in spring of 2022; it was approximately 42% in October 2020. For companies in the ten largest US cities, COVID day's work from home shifted to roughly 38%; compared with 50% in October 2020. Employees in the same profession can have vastly different work arrangements (Greenberg, 2022, August 1).

Eight, ten, or twelve-hour shifts in exchange for more days off are commonly offered to nurses in many organizations. The growth of the four-day work week in other business sectors is another interesting phenomenon in the pandemic-era workplace. Employers are challenged to become more competitive. 80% Americans aged 22 to 35, who had recently resigned from their jobs, supported a four-day workweek. 32% of them stated that they would have stayed if their company offered that option (Carter, 2022, July 5). Additionally, 63% of businesses that offer their employees autonomy and flexibility found that it was easier to attract and to retain employees. Companies with four-day work weeks with 10-hour days found that employee retention and happiness improved. Other nations that work fewer hours per week have more productivity than the United States. These include Mexico, Luxemburg, Ireland, Norway, Belgium. For example, Microsoft Japan reduced costs by 23% a month in electricity charges while testing a four-day workweek (Carter, 2022, July 5).

Meanwhile, employers are being challenged to become more competitive. Pay, benefits and flexibility are key considerations for companies looking to avoid "The Great Resignation" and lean into what has been called "The Great Realization." Working longer hours does not necessarily make an employee more productive (Verma, 2022).

ORGANIZATIONAL SOCIALIZATION

"Onboarding" is the evolutionary journey a new employee takes when adjusting to a new organization, position, and group of people. This is when and how new people learn the "real" culture of the organization. This process includes how the incumbent workforce guides the new employee and cements the culture time after time (Vrouvas, 2019). Organizational socialization (OS) needs to be studied, understood, planned and structured in companies, particularly in a pandemic and post-pandemic setting. There are three stages of OS: getting in, breaking in and settling in (Cebollero, 2019). This is also termed "Onboarding" (Vrouvas, 2019). This process happens before the employee joins the organization and is like a "preview" of the organization. Individuals are thinking about what it would be like to be members of the organization and picture themselves in their new roles (Cebollero, 2019). Generally, the company will update the careers section of its website with details about its corporate environment, including answers to frequently asked questions and photographs of staff members at work and play. Businesses can help new hires become more familiar with their new workplace by sending them a welcome package with an employee manual, HR forms to complete in advance and a proposed schedule of activities for day one (Vrouvas, 2019). Now is when organizations have an enthusiastic individual who wishes to join their team, and that individual will come with certain values, attitudes and behaviors. If employees are faced with a toxic OS process, this will eventually cause that individual's collapse (Cebollero, 2019).

"Breaking in" occurs within the first few weeks. The new employee receives guidance from a more seasoned employee. The new employee has to prove their commitment to be considered a full member of the organization (Cebollero, 2019). For the best job performance, new employees need to build long-lasting, supportive relationships with coworkers and managers to further bond them with the company. Daily meetings should occur where supervisors tell new hires their expectations as well as getting feedback about the orientation process. After the first day, savvy managers schedule periodic follow-ups with new employees to touch base, judging their acclimation and looking for any concerns the new hires might have. Companies develop a three- month plan that has recent hires experiencing socialization strategies such as job-shadowing, mentoring, and enjoying company-sponsored social events (Vrouvas, 2019).

Then, the "Settling in" phase occurs when the new employee understands what the organization is about and begins to identify themselves with the organization. They become a contributor in reaching the organization's goals and objectives. If this isn't done well, it can lead to employee turnover (Cebollero, 2019). This socialization process can be a key to retaining key talent during volatile times. Guided by the

HR managers, organizations can heighten the employee socialization to help cement their engagement and loyalty.

Evolving Demographics: Generations Spread Their Wings

Considering generations and their desires at the workplace can enlighten managers as they struggle to attract retain and engage employees. Although no stereotyping is intended, research about different generations in a pandemic and post-pandemic workplace can provide valuable information. Three generations, Generation X, Generation Y (millennials), and Generation Z will be considered here.

Generation X

Generation X makes up 35% of the U.S. workforce, as of 2017 (Moss), and number 53 million in the workforce. They are expected to outnumber Baby Boomers by 2028 (Kane). Called "Free agents," early in their careers, they have been skeptical about employer loyalty for workers. They have also been economically skeptical. They work to live, not live to work (Chuang, Stauffer). In research, 68% reported being happy at work (Eisenberg, 2019).

Millennials

Totaling about 70 million, 24% of Generation Y/Millennials workers, plan to leave their employers within two years according to a study by Deloitte (Agovino, 2022, July). and 45% of Millennials feel burned out due to their work environment (Fox, 2022, May). Additionally, even though most prefer at least a hybrid format, 61% of Generation Y employees say they miss interacting with their coworkers in person (Janin, 2022).

Generation Z

By 2030, Generation Z, who are now between the ages of 20 and 25, will make up 8.3% of the workforce (US Bureau of Labor Statistics). 40% of them plan to leave their employers within two years according to a study by Deloitte (Agovino, 2022, July). They are motivated by security (Patel, 2017). At work, they want fun, flexible schedules, and paid time off (Morris, 2018). 46% of Generation Zers care about climate change, along with millennials (Fox, 2022, May).

Generation Z went to school online even before the pandemic. They do want some face-to-face networking (Cruszvergara, 2022, para 3,5). 66% of Generation Z want in-person feedback from their managers (Sahadi, J. 2022, February 16). Furthermore, 71% of Generation Z employees miss interacting with their coworkers in person. This compares to 61% of Millennials. 69% of Generation Z, in a survey during Fall of 2020, said they would like to work remotely at least half of the time (Janin, 2022). The top reasons Gen Z, and Millennial workers cited for quitting included pay, burnout, and mental health concerns according to a Deloitte 2022 survey. They stay at work if they believe they are engaged, which means the company provides opportunities for personal and professional growth and advancement. Also, they are looking for good work life balance. They are looking for companies that align with their values and their personal ethics.

Almost 50% of Gen Z and Millennial workers in senior positions say they've rejected jobs because the role didn't match their personal values. Diversity equity and inclusion are ways to retain younger generations of workers and to keep them satisfied long term; it is a significant driver of retention. The Deloitte study found that they want a hybrid or remote work setting (Leonhardt, 2022, May 18). Generation Z has been described as stressed, indebted and idealistic. Their focus on wages, and to some degree unions, therefore, is no surprise (Agovino, 2022).

Quiet Quitting

Quiet quitting is the concept that describes employees not committing to a 24/7 life-work imbalance. It describes employees completing their job requirements yet doing no more "above and beyond" that is not compensated accordingly. Some state that this describes employees "getting by"; working well but not doing actions/projects that are beyond their job description. Quiet quitting is understandable in a time when employees are reevaluating how they will conduct their job responsibilities (Kilpatrick, 2022). Men and women with college degrees were the most likely to demonstrate this concept. Specifically, men aged 25-39 worked 16 fewer hours each year between 2019 and 2022. Furthermore, men with at least a bachelor's degree worked 14 less hours during that time period than before the pandemic. Interestingly, men with higher earnings and working the most hours reduced their hours the most during the 2019-2022 time frame (Bloomberg, 2023).

Although the term has been associated with Generation Z, their parents in Generation X also stated that they would not be workaholics. Millennials blurred the lines of work and life due to technology, yet they, too state that there needs to be more balance than demonstrated by Baby Boomers. USA employees worked 11 fewer hours on the job during the pandemic than prior years going back to 2007. Despite the occurrence, Americans continued to work more hours than other advanced economies. Specifically, the average USA employee worked 1791 hours in 2021, more than Canada, Japan, and the United Kingdom (Bloomberg, 2023, January 10). For younger workers, the desire for more flexible hours or jobs was a key contributor.

Chris Argyris (1957) posited that if employees are not treated as mature adults they will react. He stated that healthy development involves being active as an adult, relatively independent, and being able to express many and deeper abilities. He noted that if employees work in a dependent situation at work and are expected to be passive to the leader, it can create frustration, conflict and failure for the employee. He stated that the employee may regress and decrease his or her efficiency, and create informal systems against management. Employees can become argumentative or difficult at work and, hence, a "fight" reaction. In this mode, they may be the ones who care and bring up challenges to their superiors. The flight approach would be shown by those who just quit the company. The United States has seen a high level of quitting occurring during the pandemic and is part of the symptomatic situation that Chris Argyris had warned about decades ago. Finally, what can be the most frustrating reaction in a company is the "adapt" option. In this approach, an employee may have a sense of failure to show their full ability and capability at work, and they decrease their efficiency.

Most companies have had productive employees during the pandemic's remote work. If companies require them to return full time to the workplace, will organizations see negative reactions by mature employees who feel as though the company is backsliding and treating them as immature, dependent, and unreliable workers?

GENERATION Z AND MILLENNIALS: GENDER DIVERSITY: COMPANY PRIORITY

When employees say their company is highly committed to gender diversity, that leads to employees who state they are happier and plan to stay at their company longer. This is true for women and men. Younger generations are more likely to see bias in the workplace. Managers under 30 are more likely to say they see bias (McKinsey and Co, Women in the Workplace 2020).

Labor Market Conditions

An unprecedented labor imbalance exists. 10 million jobs were open with 3.5 % unemployment rate in August 2022. Previously, the unemployment rate of 3.5 % equaled 6 million jobs open. Although job openings fell by approximately 50,000 to 10.45 million in November 2022 (JOLTS, US Bureau of Labor Statistics) with 4.4 million more job openings than unemployed workers. This is a "high level of activity" in the labor market. It may be at a "Peak leverage" for employees and job candidates. Employers have shifted in their recruiting approaches by reaching out to actively recruit candidates rather than placing ads. For example, 37% of those hired, more than 1,000,000 in the second quarter of 2022, were reached out to by an employer <u>before</u> they applied to the company. In contrast that percentage was 18% in 2019, pre-pandemic (Siegel, 2022, August 16).

During the pandemic, as noted above, there have been significant changing workplace relationships. That appears to have influenced employees' union membership as well as their views on that membership. Union membership was 14 million workers in 2021. That represented approximately 10 % of American workers. Although that is gaining attention, it is a decline from 20% in 1983 (Rosenbaum, 2022, June). In perspective, in the mid-1950s, approximately 25% of all workers were in unions. In 1960, experienced service industries growth [jobs in manufacturing peaked in the 1970s; declined more than a third since then], globalization, and workplace protection laws (Brown, Foreman, Scheiding, 2019). Actual union membership remains low. Starting in the late 1970s, 1/3 of workers nationally said they would vote “yes” for a union. In 2017, though, 48% of workers nationally said they would vote “yes” for a union (Rosenbaum, 2022, June).

To put the situation in perspective, though, approval of labor unions is at its highest point since 1965. 77% of adults ages 18 through 34 state that they support them. This group includes Millennials and Generation Z. This mindset is an historically progressive cause according to Pew Research. Correspondingly, Generation Z has been described as more progressive on social and economic issues than any other generation (Thier, 2021, December). Thousands of twenty-somethings and thirty-somethings in newsrooms, museums, non-profit organizations are unionizing (Greenhouse, 2022, April). However, there is some ambiguity in the minds of workers about turning to unions. “They are wary of having another boss.” The worker-calls for more representation are playing out at levels below formal union elections. The current tension is not limited to core employee demands related to wages, hours and working conditions. Employees want a say on issues, including use of AI systems, company mission, structural changes within the workplace, worker councils: dispute resolution, and worker representative on the board of directors (Rosenbaum, 2022).

Some companies use crowd sourcing ratings, “connection scores”: to evaluate customer service at stores. Some employees have shared that this process makes them feel powerless and at the mercy of customers’ whims. For many workers, it is thought that the scoring system helped to drive the National Labor organizing campaign underway. This may influence employees considering collective bargaining related to working conditions. The majority of workers told NBC News that they would not be financially punished if their cafe’s “connection” score was low. There have been reports of managers threatening to cut staff hours if their stores fail to improve the rating. Legal experts state concerns that companies that use these customer surveys for feedback may be unwittingly allowing the gender and racial biases of their customers to influence how they manage their workers, which could amount to discrimination.

Starbucks has repeatedly denied the connection scores influence how many staffing hours the store receives. This is only one way that they used to assess the performance of its stores. It is intended to encourage store managers to focus on improvement overtime rather than comparisons of scores to other locations. Their diversity and inclusion team works closely with the teams responsible for creating materials like customer surveys (Matsakis, Rosenberg, 2022, May). However, customer feedback is notoriously unreliable and discriminatory, particularly against women and people of color states Professor Flake, a law professor at Ohio Northern University. Research has found that people rate the performance of minorities and women lower than other groups (Matsakis, Rosenberg, 2022, May).

Furthermore, recently, Starbucks has closed a number of stores. In stores that are permanently closed, workers in good standing can switch to neighboring locations, the company said in an email. Starbucks said it will communicate with the union to discuss opportunities for transfers to other stores. The company has pledged to offer more safety training. It stated that it is making changes to store formats and layouts. The measures include “closing a restroom, or even closing a store permanently” where safety is no longer possible (Smith, 2022).

Most U.S. workers (60%) *don’t* have jobs that can be done from home. For a large majority of these workers, their jobs continue to involve at least some in-person interaction with others at their workplace. Approximately 50% of those who ever interact with other people at their workplace say they’re very (19%) or somewhat (32%) concerned about being exposed to the coronavirus (Parker, Horowitz, Minkin,2022).

Unemployment Rates

The highest rate of U.S. unemployment was 24.9% in 1933, during the Great Depression. Unemployment remained above 14% from 1931 to 1940. It remained in the single digits until September 1982 when it reached 10.1%. During the Great Recession, unemployment reached 10% in October 2009.

In 2020, it reached double digits again at 14.7% in April when the U.S. was dealing with a pandemic and a potential recession (Amadeo, 2022). This is in contrast to the 3.7% rate in November 2022 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, US Dept. of Labor, November, 2022).

Pay Equity

There is a notable pay gap in the United States compared to other countries. In looking at jobs that do not require a college degree, when looking at median wages in dollars, the following differences exist (Anna, 2022):

- Belgium= $15.6
- Germany = $13.4
- Netherlands = $13.1
- Argentine = $12
- United Kingdom = $10.4
- USA = $9

This discrepancy may have contributed to the current U.S. employee focus on wages.

Recently, a large corporation raised retail salaries to be comparable to other positions in the industry. Some employees asked, though, if the profits were being shared? The pandemic disproportionately affected the poorest communities and minority communities in the view of some of the company's employees. "The historical evidence suggests that unions help reduce income inequality," said Henry Farber, an Economics professor at Princeton (Rosenberg, 2022). In one large company, employees have created spreadsheets to anonymously share salaries with coworkers. Estimates that the company's revenue/retail employee ranges from between $545,100 and $610,000 based on a review of financial statements. Many employees are looking at that statistic (Rosenberg, 2022).

Regarding paid time off, Germany and Spain mandate 34 days of paid vacation and holidays for every worker each year. Italy and France require 31 days of paid time off. Belgium and New Zealand require 30 days. Australia mandates 28 days. Canada requires 19 paid days off. Japan requires 10 paid holidays for every worker (McDowell).

TECHNOLOGY

How does automation fit into the overall employer-employee situation now? Let's consider Artificial Intelligence (AI). For example, at Amazon machines are increasingly working alongside humans in Amazon warehouses. During June 2022, the company debuted two new devices, Proteus and Cardinal, that will join the roughly 520,000 robots already in fulfillment and sorting centers. Amazon has kept its industrial robots in restricted areas of its warehouses where they don't interact with employees. The company believes Proteus can safely incorporate robots in the same physical space as people . These robots are aimed at reducing some of the warehouse's most strenuous tasks. Amazon has faced criticism over its labor record and employee injury rates and these technological advances may help to alleviate some of the issues. The company has said that jobs cannot be done without people. "It is a Symphony of people and machines working together" (Palmer, 2022, June 29).

Starbucks has moved to automating behind-the-scenes work of tracking a store's inventory. More stores have moved to self-checkout (O'Brien, Wiseman, 2021).

Millennials and Generation Z will be directly impacted by AI and robots in the workplace. There have been pandemic shifts in regard to workplace automation. A survey in 2021 by the World Economic Forum found that 43% of companies planned to reduce their workforce as a result of new technology. Companies are starting to automate service sector jobs. Examples include making pizza dough, transporting hospital linens, inspecting gauges, sorting goods, cleaning floors of supermarkets, delivery service in hotels, cooking. The jobs impacted include salesclerks, administrative assistant, cashiers, and aids in hospitals; those who take care of the sick and elderly. This will disproportionately impact less educated women and it will disproportionately affect those employees who occupy the low and mid-wage jobs. Furthermore, it will disproportionately influence those exposed to viral infections.

Talent's Desire for Career and Skill Development

The way training, learning and development were delivered shifted during the pandemic. There was a decrease in the expenditure on learning due to the increased use of technology in 2020, and there was an increase in that number to $1280 in 2021. This was compared to $1308/worker in 2019. Virtual classrooms and eLearning substantially grew. Therefore, although learning spending dropped, hours saw a slight increase in 2021 to 35 hours of formal learning in 2020 compared with 34.7 hours in 2019. On-the-job learning grew with 61% of organizations emphasizing that format in 2021 compared with 56% in 2019, pre-pandemic. Managerial and supervisory training ranked as the number one topic or content area in 2021 after a dip in 2020.

This was due to more leaders managing remote teams and needing to refine or attain new skills (Homer, 2022; Ho, 2021). Gallup reports that when organizations make a "strategic investment' in employee development they have 11% great profitability and are twice as likely to retain their employees." Commitment to training and development retains employees. An Amazon study found that 74% of Millennial and Gen Z employees are likely to quit within the next year due to a lack of skills development opportunities (Hurst, 2022). It is crucial that companies continue to make a commitment and investment in their employees' growth.

Furthermore, 52% of employees believe that they are easily replaceable at their jobs and part of that is because of increased automation. 57% of employers said the same thing. 40% of employees said that they worry that their job skills will become outdated because of advancements in technology such as automation, artificial intelligence, and robots. In a survey, 47% of Gen Z, 45% of Millennials, 41% of Gen X and 35% of Baby Boomers stated this concern. Additionally, this concern was voiced by 49% of black Americans, 49% of Asian American, 48% of Latino Americans, and 38% of white Americans. Yet, 81% of Americans are hopeful about their careers. 95% of employers are optimistic about the future of their employees' careers (Bergeron, 2022).

Importance of Leadership Development: Succession Preparation

A Gallup survey found that 70 percent of the variance in employee engagement is tied to the manager. Engagement is tied to higher levels of discretionary effort—which leads to higher levels of performance—as well as higher levels of retention. CEOs list leadership development as their top concern, right after attracting and retaining talent, according to the Conference Board's C-Suite Challenge report (Kruse, 2019). Recent forecast reports show the biggest causes of insufficient leadership are inadequate succession management and ineffective identification of high potentials. Approximately 60% of organizations believe their talent pipelines are not large or deep enough. Less than 50% of organizations believe the pipeline reflects the diversity of their organizations, their markets, and their customers. Retaining the best people starts with strong leadership and developing the next generation of leaders (Werder, 2020). This will continue to be a significant managerial and leadership concern moving past the pandemic.

Employee Engagement

Employee engagement is strongly connected to business outcomes; it is essential to an organization's financial success, such as productivity, profitability, and customer engagement. Engaged employees support innovation, growth, and revenue (Adkins). How can a company increase employee engagement? Employee retention is an ever-increasing concern for employers. Employers should meet employee needs in certain areas: Clarity of work assignment and good work tools and supplies. Challenge in one's area of expertise. Furthermore, recognition for one's accomplishments; opportunity to grow; and respect for one's opinions are significant drivers of engagement. Other contributors are an organizational mission that motivates the employees, feedback on performance, and positive social interactions and pride in one's group (Manning and Curtis, 2021). Additionally, strategy and tactical development, performance solutions, and transforming the organizational culture can engage workers. A company needs to intentionally implement these approaches and invest in them. If a business conducts an employee satisfaction survey, be sure it measures workplace dimensions aligned with business objectives (Mann, Harter). Gender equality is another driver. In fact, 45% of women female employees in the USA want to become a senior manager or leader. Generations Z employees look for diversity, including gender diversity, and equity at the workplace.

HR Matters: Pandemic Impact

Research has shown that 70% of employees say they value the HR Department more than ever after experiencing the impact during the pandemic, HR developed plans to keep remote employees engaged and informed. These managers and professionals advocated for the employees as needed, including relief for them -- whether it be medical for COVID-19 or mental health needs. Often due to HR efforts, companies shifted resources to Wellness initiatives. They reimagined tools and strategies to recruit talent. Organizations realized that developing employees remained essential to retaining them, and implemented flexibility plans for the workplace (Taylor, 2021, p. xiii)

Employee/Employer Power Imbalance

Employees want flexibility in their schedules. They want more freedom in how they structure their lives. They prefer flexibility in *how* they do their work. Their preference is to better balance their personal and professional lives. Aware of income inequality, and they want higher pay.

Employers and companies have made adjustments in pay and benefits, and they are addressing employee wellness including mental and financial health. In a world of accelerating and radical changes there will continue to be significant opportunities and challenges for leaders, organizations and individuals that approach change with an open mind, an informed point of view and a readiness to take action today to prepare for the future (GT Briefing).

Post-Pandemic Workforce

Among Americans with jobs that can be done remotely, 59% of those who are still working from home much or all of the time according to research by the Pew Research Center.

This is well above the 23% who did frequently before the pandemic. Among those who have a workplace outside of their homes, 61% said they are choosing to work from home. Research shows that 60% of workers with jobs that can be done from home say they like to work from home all or most of the time when the pandemic is over. That is up from 54% in 2020. The biggest reason --76%--state that working from home is their preference (Sahadi, 2022, February 16). For those who do have access to their workplaces but are opting to work mainly from home, their reasons for doing so have changed since fall 2020. Fewer cite concerns about being exposed to the coronavirus – 42% now vs. 57% in 2020. 76% state a preference for working from home is a major reason they’re doing so (vs. 60% in 2020) Parker, Horowitz, Minkin,2022).

The economy impacts the workplace in many ways. A factor to consider is inflation. As the United States Federal Reserve continues to take measures to fight inflation, it appears that there may be a greater impact on “white collar” jobs. Some brand name companies have announced job cuts or hiring freezes in the latter part of 2022, and these include Amazon, Citicorp, Intel, HP, Microsoft, Phillips 66, and Walt Disney Company. The service sector is about 1/4 of the 2022 job cuts, yet that is understandable given the fact that during the pandemic they had to over expand and possibly over hire. Other firms are looking to their businesses to determine if they are properly structured for the current business situations. As mentioned earlier, firms are incorporating technology rather than humans to handle changes (Wile, 2022). That situation will be monitored by experts in the future. Is the recent reporting of the slowing rise in the inflation rate, US employers added 263,000 jobs in November of 2022. That means that there are still nearly two job openings for every unemployed worker and the unemployment rate is at 3.7% (US Jobless Claims Fall Again, 2022).

USA Talent and the Changing Workplace

United States talent shortages are at a 10 year high. In August 2021, a record 4.3 million workers quit their jobs (White, 2021). Older workers are retiring. There is not enough talent to fill the void. This is complicated by changing needs and expectations by employees (Castillon, 2021).

More than 4.27 million Americans quit their jobs in May of 2022 slightly down from the 4.4 million who quit in April of 2022 and the record 4.5 million who did so in November of 2021. As of July 2022, although lower than the month before, 4.18 million people in America left their jobs and at a historically high rate. Job openings were also very high, over 11 million. As of July 2022, the number of quits exceeded the pre pandemic high for 17 straight months and more than four million Americans left their jobs in 15 of the last 17 months at that time. Employers in the low-wage sectors continue to have difficulty filling vacancies. There are numerous reasons for this, including employees not being willing to work for local difficult working conditions that they would have accepted before the pandemic (Richter, 2022). At the core of these changes is increased flexibility, said Anthony Klotz who coined the term great resignation. The changes may not have occurred for another 30 years if not for the crisis, Klotz said. "The pandemic brought the future of work into the present of work" (Fox, 2022, May 10). Even as the strong labor market may wane, he notes that employers shouldn't alienate their workers by returning to pre-pandemic-era inflexibility. He warns of employee deviant behavior or even retaliation against the company. Managers and leaders may feel like they need their followers to be physically present, like before the pandemic, in order for them to hold their power. Yet instead managers need to ask their employees what they want from work and to adapt accordingly (Vanderford, 2022).

The Future of American Work

Research shows that 50% of employees want to make a variety of career moves because of the pandemic. Among those who plan to make a change, requesting location flexibility (41%) is the main reason. Other changes they cite are asking their employer for a raise and/or promotion (39%); looking for a job in a new industry (33%); seeking another job in the same industry (32%); planning to quit their current job and start their own business (22%). Roughly two in five employees are considering quitting their job because their company (41%) or manager (37%) has not cared about their concerns during the pandemic. Employed men are far more likely than employed women to say they are considering quitting their job because their company (50% vs. 30%) or their manager (44% vs. 29%) has not cared about their concerns during the pandemic (Catalyst, 2021).

CONCLUSION

The pandemic's impact is unmistakable. Workplace power is shifting. There are shifting employee wants and demands at the workplace. Labor market conditions are showing unique actions and reactions by companies and employees. Generations and the evolution of workplace power balance is demonstrated by changing workplace relationships, expectations, and policies. These are shifting at historic levels. Technology's role in these shifts is unmistakable. This leads to significant HR's challenges and opportunities. It also may show that this rethinking of the workplace leads to more engaged and productive firms.

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