

Gemma Dale; Tim Scott

HR2025: The Future of Work – Managing People

Gemma Reucroft and Tim Scott

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The Future of Work – Managing People



HR 2025: The Future of Work – Managing People

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A promotional graphic for SAP Learning Hub. The background is a blurred cityscape with a tall building. In the foreground, a man with glasses and a dark sweater is looking at a tablet. The text is overlaid on the image.

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The times, they are a changing...

This book is about the future. We are attempting to predict, with reference to those trends that we can see developing right now, what work will be like in 2025, and more specifically, what managing people will be like in 2025. What skills will line managers need, what challenges will they face, what sort of employees will they be managing? What will they be doing, every day?

But before we go forward, we want to take you back a just a little way, to the year 2000, and take a moment to reflect on the sheer extent of the changes that have taken place over the last 15 years or so.

In the year 2000, we had only just stopped worrying about the Y2K bug. Remember that? We weren't at all sure whether all the computers would just stop working at midnight on New Year's Eve, and we would be sent hurtling back to pre-technology dark ages. We spent a lot of time and effort worrying about that.

As for the office technology of the day, the fax machine is still a big deal as a method for communication. Computer monitors are chunky, and it's definitely desktops over laptops for the average office worker. Email accounts weren't for everyone, yet. Neither was internet access in the office.

When it came to phones, they certainly weren't as smart (or android) as they today. If you had one at all chances are you were toting around a Nokia phone that made, well, telephone calls. You could text, and you could play a basic game of Snake, but that was kind of it. If you needed to email a colleague then you would have to log onto the big old PC on your desk, if you had one. Share a document with a colleague in another office? You had to fax it! Or you could just ring them from your landline or course, finding their number in your Rolodex (younger readers may want to Google what this is for future conversations with Gen Ancient).

If you had a meeting with a customer and you hadn't been to their offices before, you would need to dig out your paperback A-Z, as there won't be any Google Maps for a good while yet.

Working from home depended on being able to plug a cable into your telephone socket. It made a funny noise. And took about a week to do anything. None of this pitch up in your virtual Starbucks Coffice with your iPad stuff back in the year 2000.

In employment law terms, the Working Time Directive was just a baby. We hadn't yet got round to making age, sexual orientation or religion and belief protected characteristics, and we still worked on the old school TUPE Regulations.

There is no Twitter, Facebook, You Tube or indeed any of those other networks that fill our daily hours, and allow us to easily network, keep up to date or get new ideas. And watch cat videos. Wikipedia doesn't exist as a handy reference guide. You had to look stuff up. In actual books! None of those handy apps or gadgets that make our work life easy today. And who would have thought back in the year 2000 that you would be happy to put your entire CV on line for the world to see?

The pace of change over the last fifteen years has been phenomenal, unprecedented.

Now email is starting to be seen as a legacy system. Technology is getting ever smaller and ever faster. Everything is social now.

We remind you of the past to show you just how fast this recent pace of change has been. It will continue to be thus.

The world of work has changed, is changing, will change a whole lot more.

Before we move on, one final thought. If you are a people manager in 2025, you could have someone in your team who was born in 2009. Is it just us, or does that sound a little bit scary?

Theories and Stuff

This predicting the future stuff is tricky. There are technologies just on the horizon, emerging trends we can already foresee, and we can make educated guesses on how this might influence how we work and how we manage people. 3D printing, wearable technology, cognitive assistants; all these things and more will start to become the mainstream rather than just residing in the hands of the wealthy few. Five billion people will be connected by mobile devices by the year 2020. The increasing pace of change in general, but technology change in particular, means that there will be impacts upon work over the next few years that we simply cannot envisage as we write this book today. Hey, if it was easy then the producers of Back to the Future wouldn't have suggested we'd all be hanging out on Hover boards by early 2015.

In this book we are going to consider those trends we already know about, and take a look at the potential implications for the people manager of 2025.

So what are these trends?

Firstly, we are ever increasingly more plugged in to work. More and more managers are getting used to working with and leading remote teams. Text, email and messenger services allow people to work on the hoof and stay in contact, everywhere, every when. We are constantly connected to work and to our devices. The line between home and work is becoming increasingly blurred. We've been working this way for a while now, and as new technology comes on line it is only going to build and build. Technology is becoming cheaper, faster and more accessible. Only a few years ago videoconferencing required lots of expensive kit and might therefore have been found only in the hands of the larger corporate who could afford it. Now, it is in the hands of everyone with a smart phone or connection to the internet through Skype or Google+.

The obvious, and rather huge, impactful trend is technology and the hyper connected state we find ourselves in. There are technologies available right now that have the power to completely change how we work; they just haven't yet made it to the mainstream. By 2025 they will seem routine. Whilst we don't see the demise of the traditional office just yet, work location will become less and less relevant. We can be effective anywhere there is a WiFi connection. Less need to be tied to an actual desk, or certainly the same desk, day after day. We just don't know yet where technology has the potential to take us, to shape us as people managers.

And all this technology stuff leads us to another key trend: globalisation.

Technology, added to emerging economies increasingly getting online and having the same educational opportunities as those in the developed west, has the potential to disrupt work as we know it. Boundaries will begin to disappear; talent can be acquired anywhere and in any time zone. Collaboration tools override previously unsurmountable constraints like geography.

Demographic change is another significant biggy. We have an ageing population. People are living longer, but they are also increasingly suffering from conditions such as diabetes, obesity, pulmonary heart disease. People will be working longer, less likely to want to retire at 65, even if the pension numbers permit. In the not too distant future it will become the norm for people to live into their 100s. For the same reasons, the number of your employees that will have caring responsibilities is set to rocket in the next decade. By 2025 line managers may well have people in their teams that were born in 2009. At the same time they might have people working for them into their late 70s.

We also have a serious problem with youth unemployment. Now considered to be structural rather than an economic, cyclical issue, we have more and more young people across the world that are outside of the labour market, and don't seem to be either able or equipped to break in. When they do, it is often to low paid work that is then hard to move out, or up, from.

The very type of work that people will do may also fundamentally change. Professor Lynda Gratton talks about the 'hollowing out' of work. Work is increasingly outsourced to other parts of the world. Consider the off-shoring of contact centres to India that has been prolific in recent years. It is cheaper and gets the job done, so the trend to outsource to emerging economies such as China and India may well continue. Technology has already replaced many, many jobs in the UK. As both of these trends collide, and overlaid with the general decline in manufacturing and the old industries of such as steelwork and mining, and the switch to online for many activities when they exclude people altogether, we may end up with a great big hole in the middle of the workforce. There will be the specialists, the technical professionals, subject matter experts. And then there will be people doing that work that cannot be done by a machine or done from a distance; domestic work, caring, retail, driving. So even who is being managed in 2025 is hard to predict.

What we do know is that work is changing. The old transaction (pay in exchange for work done) is rapidly become outdated. Employers want more (think engagement, discretionary effort, energy) and so do employees in return. Employees don't just want a wage anymore; they expect, perhaps even demand, corporate social responsibility, work life balance, flexibility. The bargain, the balance, is shifting somewhere new.

Work has changed, is changing, will change a whole lot more.

It's a fairly obvious conclusion that managing people will also be different by the time we reach 2025. And yet, we believe that in some ways, it will remain just the same.

Throughout this book we are going to explore what some of these trends might mean for the line manager of 2025; who they will manage, how, and what challenges they may face. What will be new and what will stay.

Are you sitting comfortably?

A woman with long dark hair, wearing a grey sleeveless top, is standing in front of a large window, looking down at a smartphone in her hands. The background shows a bright, modern office interior with large glass panels and some greenery visible outside.

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The changing role of management

We are taking you back in time again, just for a moment.

In the old days, management was all about the command and the control. Pick that up and put it there. Dig that, produce this, knock that nail in here. Making stuff. Complex hierarchies. Top down decision making. Scientific Management. Taylorism. Fordism. The big UK industries were mining, steel work, railways, car manufacturing....

In this structure managers of people had a role as the cascade of information from the top to the troops, unless of course they had handed that particular task over to their trade union shop stewards.

Traditionally, the nature of work had employees firmly in the role of factor of production. Clock in, clock out, get paid. The day to day management role of the past was all about supervision and checking; getting the job done, routine tasks, hitting those production targets. Monitoring, measuring, managing the minute and the hour. Approaches to and theories about motivating the workforce were very much focused towards the lower end of Maslow's hierarchy – pay for work done. We have been running experiments on the links between the two since the turn of the twentieth century, and we've held fast to some of the old assumptions about what motivates people for quite some time. And plenty of organisations still work to them still. But more on that when we get round to talking about reward.

Wind back a decade or five, and most employers weren't thinking about talent frameworks or the employee value proposition. If you go right back to the development of the UK employment law framework, you will find the main piece of legislation was called the Master and Servant Act; a title that pretty much sums up the nature of the relationship at the time. The historical management role was one of parent to child. Command and control. Tell the buggers what to do and how to do it, and talk to the union if we have to.

But work has changed. And is still changing still. Problems with the 'tell them what to do and how to do' it school of management are widely acknowledged, and we are now much more accustomed to open and collaborative models. We know that there will always be a need for targets, routine tasks, supervising the day to day. Managing people still means these things today and tomorrow, but it encompasses so many other things too. Most organisations now understand the case for employee engagement and effective leadership, even if their managers don't always live it every day.

There has been a debate for a few years now about whether the middle management role is in terminal decline. We aren't too sure about this, yet. If it is indeed terminal, then it is certainly a long drawn out death.

The trends we have already mentioned – increasing technology, automation, generational changes among others, may well mean there is a changing role for the people manager. A change in what they do every day, for some, but not necessarily all.

Whatever the future does holds, we don't believe the task of managing people is going to disappear any time soon. As long as there are employees there will need to be management of them. However, we do believe that people management **as we know it** is going into a decline, or at least a change of focus. There will still be the need to undertake those duties of everyday people management like providing feedback, coaching, developing and managing performance problems, dealing with all the stuff that employment law requires of us. The extent to which management will change will be industry, sector, and role specific. There will always be the need for routine task supervision in many places; whatever we think of scientific management in the call centre, the manufacturing plant, some of this approach is likely to still hold fast.

If Gratton is right, the routine management, day to day Fordism stuff will sit in the lower half of the labour market. For the knowledge worker, there might be something different.

But one thing we believe we will need much more of in the future, that we need much more of now, is good leadership. Leaders, people managers, who understand what people now want from work, how to get the best from people, how to engage, motivate, retain. And at the same time, get out of their way. We believe that tomorrow will be much more about leading people than routine task supervision.

Or maybe that is just what we hope.

Who will these 2025 managers be managing anyway?

Well firstly, if the trends stay at they are, it probably won't be someone with 30 years' service. The job for life has been disappearing for years, on both sides of the employment relationship. The trend towards shorter tenure is likely to continue.

Micro professionals are also on the rise. Social media makes it easier than ever for people to network their way to new contacts, new jobs, collaboration with other similar professionals. Link that to online labour markets and this may just become game changing. You have a piece of work to do? Forget hiring a permanent employee who will come and sit in your office. Put it out to tender and let someone bid for the work. You may just find the person who wants to complete it is sat in a developing economy. Back office tasks, routine admin, anything that can be done sat at a PC with an internet connection can theoretically be done anywhere.

Mix all this in with the fact that people are typically spending less time with their employers than in the past, and managers might be managing different people on a regular basis, for very short periods. Managing an established team over the long term might be in decline.

Going back to Lynda Grattan's theory about the 'hollowing out' of work. (Highly skilled specialists at the top of the labour market and low paid work at the bottom). If these predictions hold true it has profound implications for people management; managers may find that they are managing across this huge gulf, or they at one end or other of the spectrum.

The line manager of 2025 may be managing people looking after others, driving, cleaning, hairdressing, or picking up and moving. Or, they may be managing people with some serious high end technical skill, that the manager doesn't even understand either (and arguably don't need to). There is a good chance that they won't be managing lots of other managers in a layered hierarchy – so those rumours of the death of the middle manager may not be overstated after all.

Let's also not forget to consider the impact of migration. People are more and more willing to move for work, sometimes long distances. And even if they don't physically pack up their bag and move across a border, technology means that they might be working for you, from some place else. Just like the WordPress example shows, a team can work anywhere in the world, across various time zones, and still be effective. We recommend 'A Year Without Pants' for more stuff about working at WordPress. Noting that the 'no pants' metaphor works better in the US. In the UK it is slightly more disturbing.

The manager of 2025 will be managing everybody, anybody. Five generations in the workplace. Everything from a young person straight from school, brought up entirely in the digital age, through to the so-called Baby Boomer already past traditional retirement age. Whatever the industry, the organisation, the sector, the people manager of 2025 will have a diverse team to lead.



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The day to day

We've shared our thoughts about who the 2025 people manager will actually be managing. So here are a few predictions from us about exactly that that 2025 manager will be doing, in the day to day:

- Talent acquisition. Or recruiting if you will. If hostilities do commence in the often fabled war for talent, then people managers will naturally need to play a serious role in this. If you build it, they will not come. Not unless you have a kick ass employer brand anyway. Google might have them queuing around the block but we reckon that line managers will need to take a more active role in acquiring the right talent than passing the vacancy to the recruitment manager – internal or external. Candidates will increasingly be checking them out in the social space, checking if they are the kind of person that they want to work for.
- They might get some of the basics done via a cognitive assistant. Think Siri on acid. Your virtual PA will schedule your meetings, update your diary, manage your in-box. It will be able to handle much of your current routine activity. However, although it might be able to remind you that your partner's birthday is approaching, it won't be able to run to the shops to get a card – yet. Although it might be able to contact FunkyPigeon.com on your behalf....
- Using technology everywhere, every when. By the time we get to 2025, your average computer will have the power of the human brain. Technology will be faster and smaller, able to run more and more of our daily lives, and it probably won't be in some old shoe box in an office, tying you to a physical location.
- Managing collaboration across boundaries and distributed employees. The team might be anywhere, from another continent to their front room. Employees doing what we've heard called the one minute commute. From bed to laptop. With or without pants.
- Tailoring their style to the individual. Gender, age, location, culture, personal circumstances. One style will not fit all. But then again, did it ever?
- Engagement and retention activity for the in-demand technical specialists. They won't be easy to replace in the hollowed out future. You might just have to fight hard to find your talent and keep your talent.
- Managing cognitive overload. Data and information coming from multiple sources. Email might be considered by some to be a legacy system, but we reckon it will still be around, just about, although it will be just one of the ways that the people manager of 2025 communicates. After all, we said that email will kill of the letter, but there are still plenty of them being posted every day.

Above all, we believe that the manager of the future needs to be a real leader of people. Before the HR practitioners amongst you dig out your old textbooks to refresh yourself on that old debate, what we mean is that once you exclude those roles that require an actual physical presence and lots of routine task supervision (as that isn't going to go away just yet) then what you are left with is the need to develop qualities and competencies of genuine leadership. Think inspiration, authenticity, honesty, direction, guidance. We think the future demands new leadership stuff.

Don't worry; there is a whole chapter on that coming up soon.




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Employee voice

We asked you earlier in this book to remember what work was like just over ten years ago. This time we will ask you to go back a little further, for those of you that were around then anyway....

Think back to the late 1970s. You want to make a change in your workforce, introduce something new, restructure or reorganise. People who work for you aren't happy about something, anything. They want to raise a grievance, talk about their pay, ask you for something extra. Who did you talk to? For many organisations here in the UK, it was a trade union representative. Discussions would be scheduled, formal, minuted, subject to challenge, negotiation and compromise. The employer didn't hold all the cards, or even most of the cards, in some workplaces

A big chunk of employee voice in the UK was collective, and collective usually meant a trade union. If the term is new to you, by employee voice we simply mean the two way communication between an employer and its employees. It takes many forms, but in its widest sense it includes any way in which employees express how they feel about the organisation. Employee voice means engagement survey results, staff forums, pay bargaining, consultation committees, trade unions, suggestion boxes. It's what is said about you on social media, Glassdoor, in the canteen and around the water cooler. It is also absence from work, grievances, tribunal claims and the graffiti on the toilet wall. Employee voice may also mean silence. Some people categorise employee voice into indirect and direct. For us, employee voice is just simply any way an employee chooses to express their feelings, opinions and desires.

Employee voice has changed, is changing. And just like the rest of the stuff we are talking about in this little book, the pace of that change is accelerating too. Those days when employee voice meant a shop steward speaking on behalf of everyone else and filtering back down the management message are long gone, even in those organisations that still have a strong trade union presence. It seems almost an anathema that many organisations did not communicate directly with the people that worked for them.

Today, employee voice is an interesting point. The importance of internal communications on employee engagement is now much more generally understood, and so is the case for employee engagement in its own right. Social media is making its way into employer lead communications, even in much more traditional organisations like the NHS. Technology is changing the way that we all communicate, at home and at work. Companies have started to realise communication doesn't mean talking at people – it doesn't mean the MD turning up at a road show once a year with a PowerPoint deck telling everyone what the strategy is and taking a couple of questions at the end, or a quarterly newsletter full of positive stories.

Some organisations get it. And some don't. There are plenty of workplaces still trying to constrain social. We've heard talk of social media supervisors, who will monitor the social media activities of employees. For us, this is trying to fit old solutions to new problems. Social media is described as the conversation that never sleeps. On that basis, neither could any social media supervisor. You wouldn't follow your employees down the pub and eavesdrop on their conversations, so why would you do it on social media?

Employees want the same today at work as they want in their personal life; speed, honesty, two way communication and an easy way to put forward their point of view. But then again, didn't they always?

Our number one prediction? The future of employee voice is social.



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New Style Conversation

There is still a place for a collective voice, but we don't believe that this necessarily means a traditional trade union, industrial relations style voice.

Trade union membership has been on a steady and seemingly irreversible decline since around 1980. There have been years where it has picked up a little, but it hasn't been sustained. The reasons for the decline are numerous, interconnected and complicated. Factors such as decline in manufacturing and traditional industries like coal and steel, legislative change and technology change are all in the mix. The future of trade unions is hard to predict; there is no guarantee that the unions will not manage to turnaround the decline, but what we do know is that trade unions have to date failed to engage with younger workers. According to the latest data, only around 10% of current trade union members are between the ages of 16–24. Current members are getting older, and a good chunk of them are now only a decade or so away from retirement. We are going to stick our neck out and say we can see no return to form on the horizon. For the line manager of 2025 therefore, the chances that your employee voice is going to come via a trade union is pretty low.

It goes without saying that social media is already a big part of employee voice. Whilst there are still plenty of companies out there taking the lock it down, lock it out approach, they no longer have control, whether they like it or not. Today, people ask you if you are on LinkedIn, if you tweet, or have a Google+ account. By 2025, whilst particular platforms might come and go, asking someone if they are social will sound as dumb as asking them today if they currently use the internet.

There are plenty of companies out there whose idea of employee voice is still just the annual engagement survey. In many places, a once a year tick box exercise. Questions constrained by the employer, with a nod to letting people have their say with a couple of open ended options at the end. What do you most like about working here? What is the one thing that you would change if you could? This doesn't really cut it in today's world, and it certainly won't work in 2025. It's just too slow. Who wants to wait a year to share their opinion when they can send a tweet in seconds?

The speed of technology development makes more specific predictions difficult. But the need for employee voice will not diminish. If anything, the changes to our culture mean it will become more and more prevalent. More and more immediate.

And the people manager? They are the centre. Forgot waiting for the Internal Comms machine to crank out some content. The people manager needs to listen, understand and respond to the employee voice, from wherever it presents itself. Internal Communication needs to stop being the job of a department or an individual. It belongs to everyone, and is the responsibility of everyone – now and in the future.

More stuff we think about employee voice

Employee voice will evolve further, and will include technologies we just can't envisage as we write this in 2013. But here are a few predictions for you just the same.

- Employers and people managers will have no choice about being social. Trying to lock it down and pretend the conversation isn't happening won't be an option. If you try, it will just leave you unable to hear anything that is being said.
- Internal communication and collaboration tools like Yammer and Chatter will become ever more prevalent. If employers don't launch them, their employees will do it anyway. Employers will just have to get over all that stuff around risk and embrace it.
- Trade unions will become increasingly more marginalised, unless they seriously get their act together and start doing something radical around engaging younger workers, like yesterday. Pay bargaining is probably terminal as a method of voice around pay outside the public sector, but this will leave a void that needs to be filled.
- The one-off, annual employee engagement survey will quietly fade away, and by 2025 will look about as relevant as the fax machine does today. Employers will need to take feedback in real time – their ears must be permanently open. Feedback to managers might be comments and likes on their Yammer updates (or whatever technology comes next).
- Finding out what your employees want will mean a constant conversation. Note the reference to conversation. Yes, we mean two way dialogue. Not telling.
- We are now used to receiving information in real time. Information is available on twitter within seconds. Employees want the same speed of information about their company. And the only thing faster than twitter is the rumour mill.
- Multi-channel employer communication will be more important than ever. Broadcast it and they will listen won't work. You will have to go and find your employees and engage with them, where they want to be, in the manner they want to digest it. Similarly, you need to hear the voice from wherever it originates.
- Parent to child communication methods are out.

And as we said before, the future of employee voice is absolutely social.

Generations and Generalisations

We are undergoing a period of demographic change. People are living longer and working longer. There is no longer a UK national retirement age, and pensions aren't what they used to be. People are also getting sicker; conditions such as diabetes, heart disease, dementia and obesity are all on the rise big style (no pun intended). The amount of people who will be providing care to family members will reach a critical point in less than a decade.

For the first time, we will soon have five generations in the workplace. How will people managers need to respond to managing teams across different generations?

Over the last few years there has been a tidal wave of articles and research about the so-called Gen Y cohort (those born between around 1980 to around 2000 depending on which particular article you are reading) and Gen Z who will enter the workforce some time around 2018. Surveys abound. Apparently, these generations are different to those that came before them. A quick Google search will provide you with a plethora of information about what this generation want at work. You will find advice and guidance on how to recruit them, engage them, retain them, reward and manage them.



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Here are just a few examples of the thought leadership this particular genre has produced:

- Gen Y want meaningful work.
- Gen Y wants to be able to use social media and technology at work. They get frustrated when the technology they have to use at work is outdated.
- They want a more flexible workplace, not necessarily the traditional deal of Monday to Friday 9–5.
- Work life balance is important to them.
- They are interested in the environment, and they want an employer that gives back, that takes their Corporate Social Responsibility seriously.
- Opportunities for learning and development are highly important to this generation, and is often rated by them as more important than the benefits package and job stability.
- Generation Y want regular feedback and they want to be empowered.

Our response to this list is simple; doesn't everybody? The need for meaningful work, effective feedback, positive work-life balance and opportunities for development would be high up on most employees wish list, whatever their age and stage of life. To suggest that these are the needs of just one cohort entirely misses the point. Generalising and stereotyping based up the time you were born gets us nowhere. More importantly, it is dangerously misleading, if not verging on discrimination. Take anything from the above list and replace it with reference to gender, race or sexual orientation. Does it sound a little dumb now?

To the generalisations on generations we say #generationblah.

The evidence on generations is far from conclusive. Much of the so called evidence from research is taken from tiny survey samples. The whole debate is high on rhetoric and low on fact and substance.

Whilst generalised generations don't matter that much, ages do. It's just a stage of life thing. If you have an employee straight out of university with a mountain of student debt, they will have different needs and want different things from their manager or their work than the employee nearing retirement or the employee just starting their family.

What we see increasing right now is the desire from employees for choice and freedom. One size recruitment method, induction plan, contractual working hours, benefits package, development opportunity just does not fit all. HR teams and managers simply cannot design an approach, put a coat of paint on it and call it done. And this trend towards a more individual approach is one that we can see building and building.

Our view is simple; it is time to stop stereotyping and generalising. What we need is flexibility; treat your employees like the individual people they are, with their own needs in the workplace. Meet them where they are at. What the line manager of 2025 needs above all, is flexibility of approach.

But on reflection, why wait until 2025?

Managing Performance

Ah, the annual performance review. Don't you just love it?

Or maybe not.

The problems with the traditional approach to performance review are well documented, and we won't repeat all of them here. The biggest problem with performance reviews (and there are many) is that lots of managers are really quite bad at it. Difficult conversations just don't come easily to many of us. For many managers the immediate day to day operational requirement is their main focus, and all that people stuff just gets pushed aside and left to the last minute, if it reaches the top of the stack at all. Often, reviews are rescheduled, squashed in, given a cursory glance. Managers fill in a form and allocate a score, all in order to get the policy police off their back. It is an organisational ritual that serves neither party very well. The annual review is a static thing that unless regularly reviewed by employee and manager becomes rapidly out of date as the year progresses.

The review is a process that everyone has to adhere too, often because HR says so, but few actually get any real benefit from. Our view is that you just can't summarise an entire year's worth of performance into one meeting, one score, one form. During the course of a review period, your team will do some awesome stuff and some rubbish stuff, be both on time and overdue, be good, bad and everything in between.

Despite the fact that we know what is wrong with the traditional model of performance appraisal, many, many organisations still fall into the same traps all the time. They still have complicated review structures, have the HR team in the role of process guardian, fiddle around regularly with the approach. The temptation is to just keep changing the form, the scores, the process, rather than tackling the elephant in the room. The traditional performance management process isn't fit for purpose today, and it certainly won't be fit for purpose in the working world of tomorrow.

Those highly talented employees just won't put up with crap line management. They will simply take their sought after skills elsewhere, unhindered by geographical constraints. And in today's online world, if employees don't get their feedback and esteem needs met by their line manager they will simply get it from somewhere else instead.

As bloggers and tweeters, we are equally as happy with a re-tweet or a supportive blog comment from someone we admire as we are a positive comment from our line manager, if not more so. And actually, it is usually a heck of a lot quicker. Employees want from their line managers what they get in the real world. Immediate access, immediate feedback. Who wants to wait a year for a pat on the back, or even a kick up the proverbial posterior? Why would employees care about the feedback they get annually, in an hour long meeting, when they have been getting it in the real world on a continuous basis?

Our hope for 2025 is that organisations have woken up to the inadequacies of traditional performance review mechanisms, and have started to do something less formal instead. Like a good, honest conversation.



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Thoughts on new style performance management

We have a few predictions about performance management in the year 2025.

- Managers will have to recognise what employees do outside of work as well as in. Think social, think networking. What do they bring to the table from their external activities?
- Managers will have to stop assessing people on how long they are sat at their desk, as they might not have one in the same location, or they might not have one at all. They will need to find a better way to judge the performance of their team.
- Managers will need to open up to other views on their team members, and not just focus on their own (another key failing of many performance reviews right now). And we don't mean 360 degree feedback. We mean social recognition, and to use a buzzword, crowdsourcing for feedback.
- The stuff of the review will be more visible. No longer will it exist only in a form filed away in someone's office. Think Trip Advisor, Amazon star ratings, restaurant reviews. Think this can't translate across to the employment world? It's just an extension of the LinkedIn recommendation.
- In. The. Moment.
That is all.

Thanks very much

We all need feedback and recognition, no matter who we are or what we do. It should be part of every manager's role right now. Unfortunately, lots of organisations are rubbish at it. Too often, recognition means an off the shelf programme, where you can get yourself some shopping vouchers or your photo in the monthly company newsletter for doing something slightly out of the ordinary. This only works if firstly, you like this sort of stuff rather than finding it hugely cringe-worthy, or secondly, have the sort of manager or colleagues that can be bothered to fill some sort of nomination form in. Recognition schemes are just another one of those things that many organisations do, without really giving any thought to why they do them or what they are trying to achieve. And often, these schemes have seriously crap names.

We hope for far more from employee recognition today, tomorrow, in 2025.

Technology and social media make this so much easier. As organisations become more transparent...

- Recognition will become everyone's role, not just the line managers. Peer to peer, up, down and sideways. It won't take place just in the annual review; it will be open, visible, regular. The manager who fails to give it will fail to retain their best people...
- Social recognition will play a part – it won't just be organisational. People's skills are already out in the social world through blogs, tweets, freely shared work. Not just those SMART objectives ticked off on a form.
- And while we are talking about social recognition, recognition is on the internal social network too. Follows, comments, likes, influence.
- Gameification. Using the principles of gaming in other ways, other places. It certainly has a place in recognition too. Think how addicted people get to Candy Crush. Games are designed to give you small rewards, to keep you interested, keep you playing, keep you spending. Think badges, points, completing a level. We all get a sense of achievement. Think of systems of reward that allow employees to build up small rewards, or give rewards to others.
- Recognition of the whole person; everything that they bring. Their personal brand, their personality, their network.
- Using technology to recognise people. Thank you cards and a nice box of chocolates will still have their place, but we need to go beyond the 'employee of the month' board in the canteen for 2025. Actually, scrap that thought. We needed to do that in 2005.
- External recognition too. Not just the noticeboard, the back page of the magazine or even the internal social enterprise network. Out in the real world. Sharing how great your people are.

Like we have said elsewhere in this book, it's about individualisation, meeting people where they are. Not applying the standard corporate off the shelf approach.

Developing Development

The future of work begs the question; whose responsibility is development anyway? Many employees still sit back and wait for someone to come along and develop them. It isn't their own responsibility; it is management, HR, somebody, anybody. We are rapidly becoming a knowledge economy. Pretty much everything you need to know about anything is available via a few quick Google search. All the learning you need is in your pocket. It's in a tweet, a blog, a video on You Tube, Wikipedia, an app. Technology. No longer will someone in HR organise a course, or check the training needs section in the performance review documentation, in the future of work.

We believe that the line manager of the future will play the role of facilitator, coach, mentor, guide. They won't produce the content, everyone will. We believe that the manager's role in development will be providing the feedback to allow the needs to be identified, and then signposting the way, clearing the way.



HR teams and managers both will act as guides and signposts towards development activities. The organised training course, with delegates sitting around a table in the same location, will go into a slow decline. We already know today that that particular sort of learning environment doesn't deliver, and most of what is taught is quickly forgotten. Learning and development in the future will mean mobile, gameification, augmented reality, social, bite size. Everybody sharing with everybody else. The line manager will need to be able to understand and use all of this technology too of course....

More thoughts from us on the future of learning and development....

- Do you remember those days where you a dozen or so of you all travelled to a venue, and you spent all day sat in a room listening to a facilitator. Who probably had a projector and some serious PowerPoint slides as the focus of the room? It was 9–5, there were biscuits, sandwiches at lunch and a happy sheet at the end? Yeah, we're all still doing it. But we hope we won't be in 2025. Why would you, when you can learn in a virtual classroom? Geography and time will stop being a barrier to learning. We are all MOOCing now.
- Free stuff. Both of the authors of this book are also bloggers and tweeters. Much of what we both learn today is free. We learn from the ideas of others in our profession. We are learning in the moment. In the working day, or in the evening sat on the sofa. With just the mobile in your pocket, individuals have access to more information at the touch of a button than generations before us could have ever dreamt of. Plenty of people are just putting stuff out there for free for others to use in any way they see fit. And cat pictures.
- Technology. We have already mentioned the speed of new technology one or ten times. The technology is the enabler to great routes to great learning and development. It allows e-learning, social learning, anywhere and anywhen learning. Consume content any time.

That's all we are going to say about this. Some of our very good friends are learning and development specialists, and their book in this series (which we can confirm will be jolly good) will tell you all you need to know.

Show me the money (and some other things too please)

Until fairly recently, reward in organisations was fairly standardised. Everyone got pretty much the same benefits, irrespective. A salary with a few extras on top for most, until you start to climb the corporate ladder, when those extras on top tend to get progressively nicer. Reward was focused near the bottom end of the Maslow triangle and the Herzberg list of hygiene factors.

A few years ago, flexible benefits started to emerge, and then went into the mainstream. Employers began to understand that different people wanted, well, different things. Simple really.

We believe that most employees, once all of that Maslow and Herzberg basics stuff has been taken care of, want more from work than a pay cheque. It's not just about the money, money, money. And there is no counting on what makes people tick, what drives them. If you don't believe us, ask Daniel Pink. If you were asking us what we want, we'd say access to Twitter, freedom to develop ourselves through doing work type stuff outside of our usual work, like conferences and networking. We are partial to a bit of CSR too – the chance to give something back. The generational articles would have you believe that it is just the younger generation that want something different from work. We don't agree. It's not just those pesky millennial kids that want a new reward deal.

Because here's the thing. It's about meeting people where they are. Flexibility. And this isn't just about the corporate offering. The line manager has a huge role to play in reward too. The day to day, everyday kind.

Giving people a choice, the ability to tailor what is right for them. This is a trend we like, and believe we will see more of; the individualisation of reward. It's all about the context – what fits at your place, and not rolling out what the folks down the road, or the latest so-called best practice case study, are offering.

Options, choice, variety.

So where does the people manager fit in to all of this? Well if there is a link between performance and pay then that is fairly obvious. They are going to be involved in the process of the annual review, the annual rise.

Even if this isn't the case, once you have gone past all the standard corporate stuff such as the set pension percentage and the fixed basic salary, if you take a broader view of reward then the people manager has plenty of influence and scope for impact. Little stuff from small, in the moment, rewards and recognition, through to offering some flexibility when it comes to working hours and working place. That is where the impact of reward really takes place.

The key is HR teams empowering their people managers to do this stuff, make these decisions. Have a formal scheme if you want one, but make sure every manager can do what works for them and their teams, at their place. Individualisation. This is what 2025 requires.

Or today even. We seem to be saying that a lot. There might be a pattern developing here....

An advertisement for SAP Learning Hub. The background is a blurred image of a person holding a tablet. The text is overlaid on the image. The main headline is in large, bold, yellow and black letters. Below it is a sub-headline in bold black letters. At the bottom left is the 'SAP Learning Hub' logo, and at the bottom right is the 'SAP' logo.

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Skills and Stuff

We've talked about the changes that are coming. But that's only part of the story. What are the competencies, skills and knowledge that managers are going to need to deal with all this new stuff, these new ways of working?

Here are our suggestions of the line management competencies that are going to underpin the workplace of 2025. A list of things that people managers will need to do, learn and embrace in order to be fit for the future.

Social intelligence

The world is becoming social. Right now, as we write this book in 2014, you still (sort of) have a choice about engaging with it. Right now, for leaders it is an opportunity; an opportunity to talk directly to your teams wherever, whenever. The opportunity to become a real person, not just a photo on the internet. An opportunity to demonstrate some of the other competencies in this list. In the future, there won't be a choice. Everything will be social. And if you are a people manager and you aren't involved, you are going to be about as relevant as a VHS player (if you are old enough to remember what one is, of course).

Trust and Authenticity

Trust in organisations is declining. Too many scandals, too many dodgy deals. Too much marketing spin. People trust people that they know. Who are real. Trust in leadership is fundamental, right now and in the future. So our advice for the people managers of 2025 is to take your real self to work. Actually, forget that. Do it now, in 2014.

Collaboration and Communication

The old methods of communication barely cut it today, and they certainly won't work tomorrow. Organisations refer to the 'dialogue' they have with their employees as 'internal communications' but we actually know most of the time it is more like internal telling. A member of the senior team pitches up once or twice a year with a boring PowerPoint presentation and orates the strategy at a group of bored employees who have been mandated to attend. Newsletters sent through the post, all-users email updates, noticeboards. None of this is going to cut it in the future workplace. Your employees will want the information that they need to find them in the place that they usually hang out. They want to collaborate on the tools that they use outside of work. The barrier between work and home is going to get increasingly blurred, for the right reasons. So if you want to get future fit, then embrace *real* communication.

Adaptability to change

Because everything is going to carry on changing, faster and faster. People managers, everyone, will need to be able to adapt to change, be agile, flexible. Otherwise...well, you know what happened to the dinosaurs don't you?

Tech savvy

There is quite simply no choice on this front, for anyone. In the workplace of 2014 there are still plenty of Execs who have their PA's print out their emails (seriously, there are, we know some). There are plenty of people around who think that they can get away without using technology. The answer is simple. Hang back, or get ahead. Because you will be left behind, for ever.

Coaching

People don't want to be told what to do. They want to be led by someone who knows that they are talking about, and who has personal credibility. And then they want to make their own mind up how they do their tasks. They want autonomy. So tell people what to do and then get the hell out of their way. Then have great conversations with them about how they continue to develop. (Note, a conversation, and the notion of coaching, implies a two way dialogue. Just in case that wasn't clear).



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The E Word

That thing that much is written about, surveyed about, consulted about, but still less is really well understood. Employee engagement.

What does engagement really mean, anyway? The concept is so talked about that it is in danger of disappearing up inside its own rhetoric. Oh, and by the way, despite what you may have read, there is no actual hard evidence that good employee engagement drives financial business performance. Just so we are clear on that.

But putting the debate and the labels to one side, we take a very simplistic view of engagement. Engagement is an outcome. It is what you get when you do good people stuff and you have good people management – at all levels of the organisation. Despite what the consultants would have you believe, it is a fairly simple concept, it is just that many organisations don't do it well. Doing good people stuff means the whole kit and caboodle. From recruitment to exit, all the way through the life employment life cycle. Great induction, effective learning, strong employee voice, cracking comms, pragmatic policies. The right reward, the right physical environment, the right employee relations. And good people management stuff means everything from the right sort of leadership right from the top, through to effective team management all the way down, around and across the organisation. People managers who understand that doing the people stuff **is** the day job, not an add on to their operational job. These are the things that engage. But they are hard to do well.

So what does the future mean for the people manager of 2025, who wants to ensure an engaged team, wants to find and harness that elusive discretionary effort?

As we have already said, people want a little something different from work these days. The old style pay / work bargain of Monday–Friday 9–5, giving your all to the company in question, staying for life until you get your carriage clock just isn't what people want, any more. They don't want it now, they won't want it in 2025.

It all comes back to this individualisation thing. Meeting people where they are with their individual needs, circumstances and contexts. No more one size fits all.

We've talked quite a bit in this book about the power of social media. For us, this fits right into the engagement space too. The employee voice thing is part of it, but not all of it. Social can be a powerful enabler and driver of engagement. It is people talking to people after all. Social allows you to connect your employees wherever they are. Social is learning, social is communicating, social is stories. It has the power to smash right through those things that we often complain about in organisations, things that can lead to disengagement. We talk about silo working. About communication problems. About hierarchy and bureaucracy. Things that get in the way. Social changes that. We predict that social media will be central to employee engagement in 2025, and probably much sooner for the switched on few. So it isn't just HR folks that need to get on board. People managers do **too** if they want to engage with their people, where they are going to be.

Between now and 2025, the labour market might change. The context might change. The skills requirement might change. The technology will definitely change. But sometimes, the old sayings are true. You know the one I mean. That people don't leave companies, they leave managers. Of course this is not an absolute; there are plenty of factors that influence a decision to leave an organisation. But the day to day relationship between the line manager and the person who works directly for them is hugely impactful on the should I stay or should I go internal debate.

The line manager is key to employee engagement. Always has been and always will be.

In 2025 and beyond.

PS. The future of employee engagement isn't the annual survey. We may have made this point a time or too. But it's kind of important.

On the payroll?

There is an assumption running through this little book. The assumption that the people we are talking about managing in this imagined future are exactly employed by you. As in actually on the payroll, employer / employee relationship, mutuality of obligation and all that.

Self-employment is on the rise and rise. Opinions vary as to why. To some, it is the sign of a weak economy. Others see it as a work life balance, flexibility, life style choice sort of thing. Whatever the underlying cause, it is happening and if the trend continues as it is, then it has the potential to have a significant impact on the workplace and the people management practices of 2025.

Some of those people that are in the self-employed figures own big businesses. They have premises, employ others, are fully corporate. But of course many of the others are working for themselves, by themselves. The independent practitioner. Portfolio careers. They go into organisations, sometimes for months at a time, sometimes to deliver just a few days training. They might be working at your place but other places too. They may be close to your organisation, using your meetings rooms, using your technology, eating in your canteen, but they are not employed by you. They are strictly purchase order, not payroll.

If a chunk of those people are sitting in your office in 2025 are self-employed, contractors, independent practitioners, then the dynamic shifts somewhat. There is still a pay / work bargain, a psychological contract, and some of that stuff that the employment lawyers call mutuality of obligation, but of a slightly different, slightly reduced, more short term sort. It is a different type of relationship.

On a purely practical level, then the normal employment law rules just don't apply. If it's not working out, you can just say goodbye without any of that complicated performance management, disciplinary procedure, attendance process type stuff. On the flip side, the other party has that choice too. They are not tied into your company car scheme, private medical health insurance, long service award, long term incentive, extra holiday when you've reached the ten year's term culture. Which means that the old ways of reward and motivation that we are so keen on won't wash in 2025, if they ever did. The theory might have been telling us for years that these type of rewards don't motivate behaviour but we've held fast to them all the same.

So the rise of self-employment might mean some changes for the manager of 2025. They might find themselves managing people who have short tenure, completing only discreet pieces of work, are paid on the day rate. Managers may find themselves engaging with interims, specialists in their field, working together, coming together, for just a few months, weeks or even days at a time.

Some of those everyday practicalities of people management change. There won't be an annual performance review because the person in question might not be around that long. There won't be a set of long term SMART objectives for the same reason. Induction might not be about helping someone form long term bonds with the organisation through explaining mission, vision and values because the contractor just needs to know what they need to know to get the specific job done. No lengthy recruitment processes for a short term engagement. No long term rewards plans.

Instead, it will be about building relationships quickly, setting the scope and setting the specialist free to do it. Opening the doors for them in the organisation, paving the way for them to get up to speed and get the task completed. Engaging them, but in new ways, different ways, not here until retirement ways.

Permanent employment isn't dead by any means. But there is another way, today. There is no need for employees to commit themselves to the Monday to Friday 9–5, if they don't want too. People are increasingly choosing to work for themselves. So the people manager of 2025 will have to factor this into his or her management approach, whether they like it or not.



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The Hollowing Out of Management?

Right at the beginning of this little book, we talked about the theory of the hollowing out of the labour market, also known as the hourglass. This notion that we might end up with a big fat gap in the middle, with the well paid, Office based knowledge worker at the top, and the low paid, low skilled worker at the bottom and not a great deal left in between.

This has huge implications for the economy, the labour market...and for people management.

If work does hollow out as predicted, then what does it mean for the people manager, day to day?

We might well find ourselves with a strange tension. The manager of the knowledge worker versus the manager of the traditional worker, living in different worlds, at different extremes of the labour market. A completely new management gap.

With the rush to predict the future, there has been a tendency in much of the literature to embrace all the fun, shiny stuff, and forget about those workers for whom place is everything, physical presence is everything. Who won't be remote working in a Starbucks, rejecting hierarchy, making best value out of their cognitive assistant, operating in a democratised holocracy. The manufacturing employee standing on a line. The retail worker serving in a store. The bus driver, the cleaner, the hairdresser, the widget maker.

Here in the UK, we have a low pay economy. More than five million people are currently in low paid jobs. High youth unemployment is a major issue now considered structural rather than cyclical. Once you are in low paid work, it is hard to get out of it. When it comes to today's labour market, both getting in and moving up are challenges. And it is only likely to get worse. Recent research suggested that half of current occupations won't exist by 2025 as they are increasingly automated and outsourced. In the hollowed out labour market the question arises; how does an employee bridge the gap and move from the bottom to the top?

If the predictions hold true, the possibility leaves us with more unanswered questions. Can all people managers and all employees embrace the potential of the future of work, or just some? Will others be left behind, repeating the management models and methods of the past? Will it ever be possible to switch from managing and leading at the bottom of the gap to the top? And will we see increasingly different skills needs? We can make some predictions, but we really just don't know.

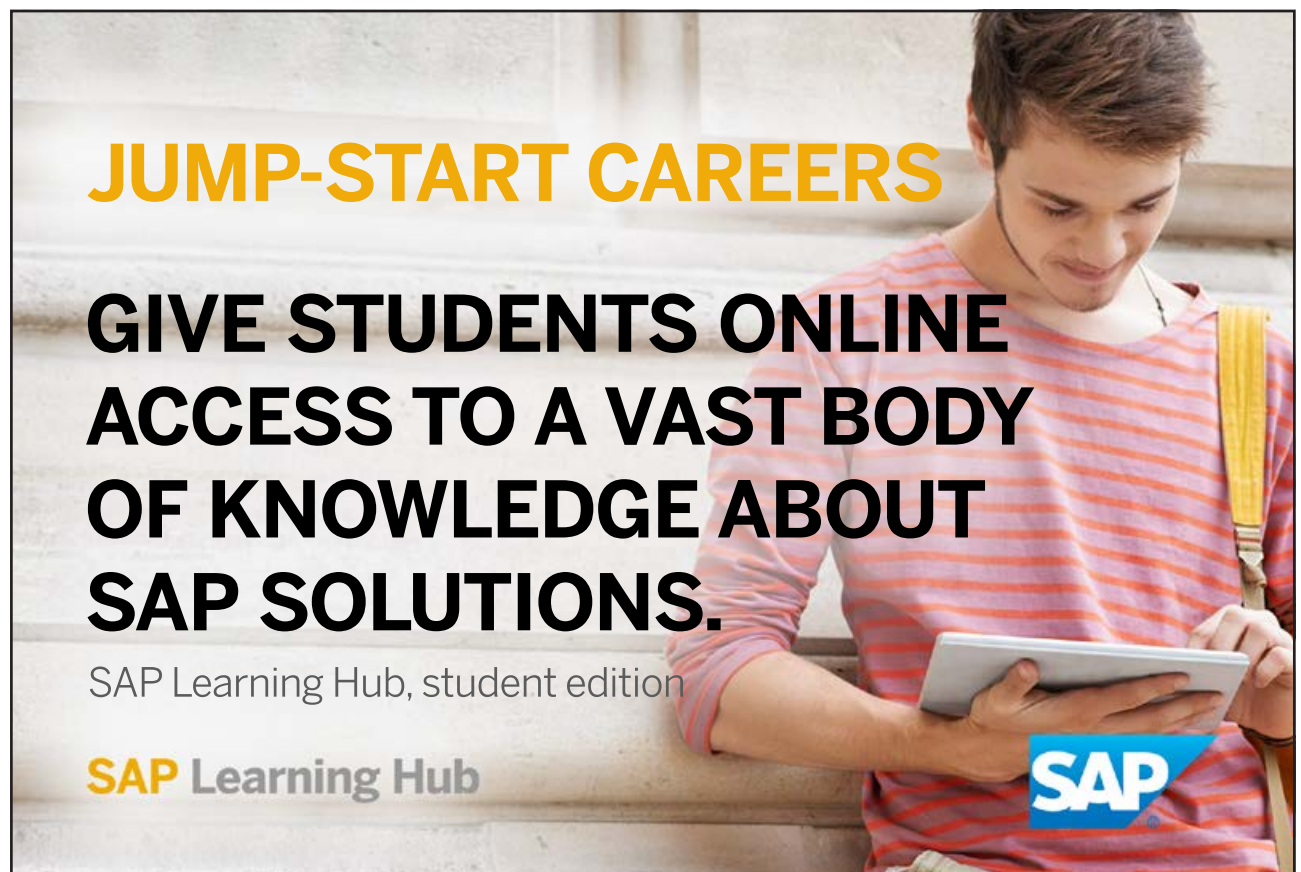
This book is about people management, and what it might be like ten years or so hence. One possibility that could arise is that we find ourselves with two polarised types of people management. One for the top and one for the bottom. With a whole host of implications not just for those managers, but the methods, processes and HR practices that support them.

The Human Resources Manager in 2025

This book is about the future of people management. But we know that many of its readers will be Human Resources professionals, so we thought we'd give share our ideas as to what does this possible potential future mean for the HR professional too. How do they partner with the line manager of 2025, what skills will they need to acquire?

Well first of all, if you're a HR type and have skipped straight to this chapter, you need to go back and read the one before about leadership skills for 2025. Go on, we'll wait a moment while you skip back.

So, first things first. You need all of those skills too. Who is going to lead the organisation towards the future of people management, to new ways of working, but the HR team? Who can help shape the right culture that is fit for the future? You can.



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On a practical level, you need to be aware of the changes that are already happening and those that are still to come, so that you can ensure you are still able to operate effectively. Your continued personal development is key. You simply must keep up to date; keep one eye on what is happening externally to your organisation. Constantly scan the horizon. Read, network, learn.

Talent acquisition, retention, learning and development, reward, internal communications, performance management, employee voice, employee relations. None of these things are going to stay the same, so you are going to need to be able to adapt. We can't predict every trend that is going to arise in the workplace over the next decade or so, but we do know that change is coming, and HR teams need to be agile and be able to respond. Otherwise by 2025, you will look then, how the 1970s style personnel department looks to us now.

The challenge for HR is simple. You have to help your organisation move forward. Because for every organisation that is thinking about this stuff, many more are looking over their shoulders to the past, thinking about what they have always done and how things used to be around here. The challenge for HR is not to build a slide in the office, but build the capability to adapt to what is coming, whatever that may be. To cut through the clichés, move the focus from yesterday to tomorrow, without jumping on any bandwagons. Remembering all the time that the future of work still includes the warehouse assistant, the cleaner, the security guard, the lorry driver. Sometimes, when it comes to the future of work, the inane infographics are taking over the genuine insights.

Our one piece of advice? Get social. If you are not already out there, in this new social HR world, then join us, join in. A world of learning, sharing, connections awaits you. That will help you do exactly what we have just said you must do – lead your organisation and your people managers into the future of work.

The changing world of work is presenting you with an opportunity. An opportunity to do something different, and take your organisation with you. To demonstrate your thought leadership and help make your business and its leaders future ready. So our advice to HR professionals is embrace the new stuff. Embrace the future of work. And the future of work, is social.

We will leave you with one final thought. Not one of ours this time, but one from Malcolm X. *'The future belongs to those who prepare for it today'.*

Let HR lead the way.

Everything changes, but everything stays the same...

We began this book by reflecting on the magnitude of changes that the world of work has experienced during the last couple of decades. We've made a few educated guesses, borrowed some of the ideas of others, and talked about what changes there are to come on the run up to 2025.

Business writers have been making a business of predicting the future of work for decades. Some stuff we got right, and some of those predictions we are still waiting for. Like the one from the 1970s that said the paperless office was just around the corner. So we need to cut through the hyperbole. Something else we are still waiting for.

Judged by what you deliver and not the hours that you work? Work is a thing that you do and not a place that you go? Try telling that to the call centre worker who has their toilet break monitored.



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For every change, innovation, evolution or shiny new thing, there are some things that we believe won't change very much at all. When it comes to management, the what is more stable than the how. Let us turn for a moment to that font of all knowledge that is Wikipedia. It describes management as existing *'to coordinate the efforts of people to accomplish goals and objectives using available resources efficiently and effectively. Management comprises of planning, organising, staffing, leading or directing and controlling an organisation or initiative to accomplish a goal. Resourcing encompasses the deployment and manipulation of human resources, financial resources, technological resources and natural resources'*. It's a little long and a little formal, but that pretty much sums it up. And it sums it up whether you are in the middle of the industrial revolution, in Taylor's days, or somewhere much more exciting instead in 2014, or 2025.

If you are a people manager today, yesterday, tomorrow, some core aspects of the role have always been there and will continue to be. Recruitment, induction, development, reward, managing performance. Dealing with the sticky stuff like discipline and grievance, or people just doing what they shouldn't. Motivation, engagement, feedback, listening to your employee voice. The 'what' of people management remains. The 'how' has changed, is changing, will change some more. The how, the context, the technology, the environment.

Some organisations will be more impacted by the change we discuss in this book than others. For every corporate giant, there is an SME fighting hard to survive, a traditional manufacturing plant operating scientific management principles, an organisation doing the bare minimum that they can when it comes to the people agenda. For them, change comes much slower, and sometimes only when they simply no longer have a choice. As time goes by, these organisations that are slow to change will find they have increasing challenges. In some cases their environment is disappearing to the developing world. In others they will find it increasingly difficult to attract and retain the right sort of people, the right sort of skills. As we have said elsewhere in this book, routine task supervision as a form of management will decline – but it will still exist, for some.

The line manager relationship with those people that work directly for them is critical today, tomorrow, in 2025. Other stuff may come into play, but it's right up there near the top of the list of reasons why people choose to move on.

Whatever else is going to change between now and 2025, we don't believe this will. More of us might be working at a table in the local Starbucks, we might have ditched the suit and swapped it for a t-shirt and sneakers, we might have a funky working environment complete with football table and slide; pick your cliché. But that line manager / direct report thing is now, and will remain, absolutely crucial, in 2025 and beyond.

The technology, the demographic change, the social revolution; these things present people management with new hows. New contexts. New challenges, but new opportunities too.

There's no such thing as best practice

As we are thinking through the possibilities of the future of work, we thought it was important to make one point that still somehow seems to be regarded as controversial by some:

There is no such thing as best practice

Management thinking comes and goes; society shifts its priorities and beliefs; academics research and publish new thinking. However, particularly as HR people, we are often urged to implement this or that approach because it's considered to be "best practice". We strongly believe that there is no single "best" for your company. There are many ways to deal with most management situations and only you will know all of the variables that need to be taken into consideration in your circumstances.

The only company that should try to be Google is Google. The same applies to managing people.

It's right that you should pay attention to what others are doing – there may be things you can learn and tweak to suit you. Be curious and read as widely as you can to understand new ideas that are developing. Listen to advice from consultants, management gurus and wise people. But please, never believe there is only one "best practice" way to run your business or manage your people. Now, or in 2025.

What If...?

The rest of this book reflects our view and experience that management practice develops slowly (some would argue glacially) and generally in a linear manner. UK management practice in particular is widely considered to be a step behind that in other global economies. But what if there was a sudden leap forward? What if our predictions of steady development based on what is regarded as good practice now prove to be overly pessimistic and there's a sudden appetite for the adoption of futuristic people management theories? Where could we end up?

There is, of course, a risk that in looking at the cutting edge, this chapter could be the literary equivalent of the silver jumpsuits our 1970s counterparts imagined we'd be wearing in 2014. But we'll take that risk.

Often the thinking behind the “next practice” organisations is inextricably linked to the organisation that is implementing it – their thinking, their values, their sector and stage of life. The organisation that many have looked to in the past 15 years has been Google – famed for their funky office space, incorporating what is considered cutting edge office design and most notoriously space for employees to “play”. But the focus is moving beyond simply having funky offices. Funky approaches to management are the new thing.



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The current HR media obsession is a company called Zappos which at the time of writing is most of the way through implementing a management approach known as “Holacracy”. The fundamental premise of holacracy is that it is a more democratic form of structuring an organisation. There are “roles” – not jobs or job descriptions – which are structured into a system of “circles” connected by people in roles known as “links” who sit on multiple circles. Still with me? It gets more complicated: there are defined governance processes within the model that circles must use to create their own roles and policies. The theory specifies a decision making process that is not strictly consensus-based but is intended to integrate input from everyone.

There seem to be lots of myths surrounding this concept – as with any leading edge theory it is oversimplified and selectively reported (see “Ulrich model” in the HR dictionary!). Reading the HR press, you would be forgiven for thinking that there is no hierarchy, no managers, no control and it’s some form of anarchy which just magically results in a really successful company – and you too should bin your job descriptions immediately. In fact, holacracy is rigidly (and openly) hierarchical. Fundamentally, holacracy is a hierarchy of circles in which each circle tells its lower circle what its purpose is and what it is required to do. The higher circle has control over the lower circle and can change, reconstitute or abolish it as it sees fit. Suddenly it doesn’t sound that all different to management, does it? We can’t see many organisations going the whole hog and implementing holacracy in its pure form...

Alongside “holacracy”, another word that crops up repeatedly in any discussion of future working styles is “agile”. Unlike holacracy, there isn’t really one unified definition of what agile working means, but arguably the key tenet is that “work is an activity, not a location”. It encompasses some familiar concepts like home working, remote working, hot desking and flexible working. Obviously we are mainly dealing again here with the knowledge worker whose work can genuinely be done anywhere at any time in our modern, ultra-connected world. This means a shift away from the 9–5 office pattern and towards a far more flexible approach to timekeeping and performance management. With agile working, getting the job done takes precedence over spending 37 hours a week working. Depending on your point of view, this can either be an extremely liberating and adult way to work, or an expectation of an “always on” 24/7 approach. Properly done, it won’t surprise you if you’ve read this far that we believe it has the potential to be the former.

From an organisational point of view, it offers a number of benefits – not least a potential cost saving on facilities. From an employee point of view, it means you can build work into your life, not blank out 9–5 every week day. It does need a complete shift in mindset on both sides – especially if the organisational culture has historically been one of presenteeism. It’ll play havoc with your time and attendance system.

Other thinking at the moment looks towards employee ownership as a future model. Interestingly the leading light in this area is the 150 year old John Lewis Partnership! Every employee is a partner who receives the same percentage bonus across the board, which depends on the organisation's financial performance. Not only are the terms and conditions generally favourable with numerous "perks" but every partner has their views represented through a structure of councils and other communication methods. Champions of this form of structure point out that it is in the partners best interests to work hard as they are the direct beneficiaries, rather than faceless shareholders. It is also in their best interests to participate in the planning and development of the organisation as the bottom line is that more successful it is, the bigger their bonus.

So there are three very different concepts that might apply to future work. Will any of them take hold over the classical approaches to organisational structure and management that we're used to? Our hunch is no – but don't say we didn't warn you if in 2025 you find yourself being a link in a circle discussing governance processes..



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And so...

There are some things about people management that we believe will stand the test of time, whatever the technology, whatever the location or time zone, whatever the method. In 2025 there will be some elements of leadership and management that are just the same as they are today.

Relevant, timely feedback. Supporting the development of others. Authenticity and credibility. Behaving as a role model. Treating people as individuals and not as resources. Using good judgement. Being interested in your team. Dealing with the hygiene factors. Providing inspiration and a clear vision. Good communication. Good people management today and good people management tomorrow. The method might however, change just a little bit.

Unfortunately, there are some organisations and managers that still don't operate good leadership and management practice. The list above might seem aspirational to many, even today. Unfortunately, we seem to know what good leadership looks like, but we just don't see it all that often. And we need to still remember we have to get the present right, before we start on the future.

Some management skills will become increasingly important in the future. There are plenty of managers right now who don't get social, digital, technology. It's not a generation thing; it's a keeping up to date thing. Some of those managers may well be out of the workplace by 2025, but not all. As work, life and technology move ever faster, a key line management skill is going to be keeping up to date with all the new 'stuff', being agile and adaptable to change.

A few people management skills may disappear altogether. If you are a micro manager, or are wedded to the command and control, you are going to have a problem. You can't micro manage someone in another time zone. If most of your team work from home, then you will simply have to find another way. Striving for perfection, taking your time to make a decision won't be an option for many, unless you want to get left behind.

To sum it all up, we believe that the next decade will see some of the following.

- The increasing personalisation, individualisation, of management and Human Resources. The days of one size fits all will disappear. This applies to benefits packages, talent acquisition strategies, learning and development, but is also relevant to the line manager. Generational generalisation aside, you will need to adapt your management style in order to manage the employee who is 18 as opposed to someone who is 65. Flexibility and versatility will be important managerial competencies.
- More and more flexibility at work. Increasingly, companies will realise that you can't hold onto the 9–5. The working patterns that we still follow today were invented during the industrial revolution. In the future there will be more acceptance it is about what you deliver, not where you are sitting, what hours you clock up.
- Agility, adaptability, flexibility. The future is fluid, unpredictable, subject to change. So managers, employees and companies alike will have to be up for changing, fast. If you do what you have always done, you won't get what you have always got. You will become extinct.
- As technology and flexible working make the world smaller and talent potentially outside of the office if not the time zone, managers will have to find smarter ways to do the day to day management tasks like catching up with their team members through to the performance reviews. More virtual teams, shorter tenure at companies, anywhere working – relationship building skills will be key, not to mention crowdsourcing for feedback on performance, creative ways of communicating and recognising contribution.

People have been predicting the demise of the middle manager for years, just like they have been predicting the war for talent. We don't know if either of these myths will become truths before 2025. We don't know if we will have flying cars, space travel or a robot in every home, but we do believe there will still be a need for people managers and good leadership, whatever the organisation, whatever economic and technical changes are to come. It might just look and feel a little different to the way it does now. The truth is, the speed of technological change makes predicting anything but the very immediate future very difficult. And if our predictions are wrong, hey, we are just two HR type folk. If Hollywood aren't embarrassed to look back and realise they got it wrong, then neither shall we be.

Many of the suggestions we have made in this book could be considered good practice right now. Many organisations have already recognised this and are embracing new technology and working practices. They are future fit already.

But for every organisation that is embracing new ways of working, adopting new technologies, moving with the times, there are others who are trapped in the past. Stuck with old behaviours, old school processes and systems. And we all know what happens to the organisations that cannot, will not move forward. We have all seen the corporate corpses littering the high street. Our simply message is this: don't be one of them.

When it comes to the future, we are on the side of science fiction writer William Gibson who said this.

The future is already here. It is just unevenly distributed.

P.S. in 2025 the two of us are going to go out to dinner, and re-read this book. And see whether any of this stuff has come true, or whether we were just idly pontificating.

See you in the future. It starts tomorrow.

A wish list

So as we bring this little book of ponderings to a close, here are the things that we hope for, the things we would like to see, in the world of work by 2025. We believe these things are possible, but it will take an open mind, a willingness to change and embrace the new, a willingness to understand the employee of the future.

1. Performance reviews are different. Not annual, not line manager lead, by real time and with contributions from everywhere.
2. We have fully embraced everything that social media can give us in the world of work, and we have finally got over the desire to ban all this stuff.
3. We have given up insisting on the 9–5. Genuine flexible working is embedded. Meetings in the Coffice, and boo sucks to presenteeism. Working anywhere.
4. CVs are ancient history.
5. So are employee engagement surveys.
6. We are not talking about yet another generation. (We are wondering what will come after Gen Z? Maybe it will be like the old car number plate system and start from the beginning again).
7. We are having fewer meetings. Pretty please.
8. HR departments are more about the value add and the partnering stuff, and less about the policies and the process documents.
9. We have got much better at saying thank you and showing appreciation.
10. We have stopped inventing new variants of and fancy names for leadership and just focused on doing it well, wherever you are, in your context.