

Managing Talent Assessment and Making Companies Attractive for the New Generation of Workers

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Abstract

Companies are quickly realizing that is through greater delegation and trust in key people who can tackle any type of problem with enthusiasm and motivation. This need arises to know the potential of people - employees and candidates - in order to allow the career development of the most promising people, able to collaborate in improving companies' eco-systems.

Organizations around the world are coming under increasing pressure to do their business in a more sustainable and equitable way. More than ever, companies know that the expression "Human Capital is the most important asset" is not a set phrase anymore.

According to research carried out by Willis,Tower,and Whatson in 2021, more than 9 in 10 people make enhancing their employee experience a top priority for post-pandemic success. But few companies are prepared to deliver this change. Here is when talent and organization should sit down and talk without ties.

The first part describes methods and techniques used to map the talents of employees and candidates and the results obtained during 5 years of projects in an Italian manufacturing company operating in the textile district of Biella (Italy).

In the second part the needs of companies and candidates are examined, providing a set of solutions that can be put in place to make companies more attractive for the new generations of workers.

Keywords

Talent assessment, employee experience, self-learning, employer branding, organization strategy, change management, companies' attractiveness.

Part 1 - When Employer meets Employee – a case study

1.1 What talent is and how we can measure it

We all have a series of attitudes, behaviors, knowledge, and experiences which - if shared - can be amplified and bring enormous benefits to ourselves and to the working group we are part of. The set of these elements is what we have defined as "talent".

Are we all gifted with some talent? Yes, all we are: the question is if and how much we have been put in a position to understand, train and develop our talent.

At first, this responsibility was assigned to our parents (if we had them), to the school (if we were in the lucky conditions to attend it). Then, from a certain point of our life, we ourselves must take care of our talents. And this point is when we start working.

There are people whose talent always emerges, others who need certain conditions to use it and others (typically the youngest and the poorest people) who have not yet had the opportunity to experiment their knowledge, to test themselves in various disciplines, to use in practice what they have only learned in theory or seen passively.

There are many ways to approach talent mapping and many tools to support the related measurement. The methods used in the companies for assessing talent can be divided into two broad categories:

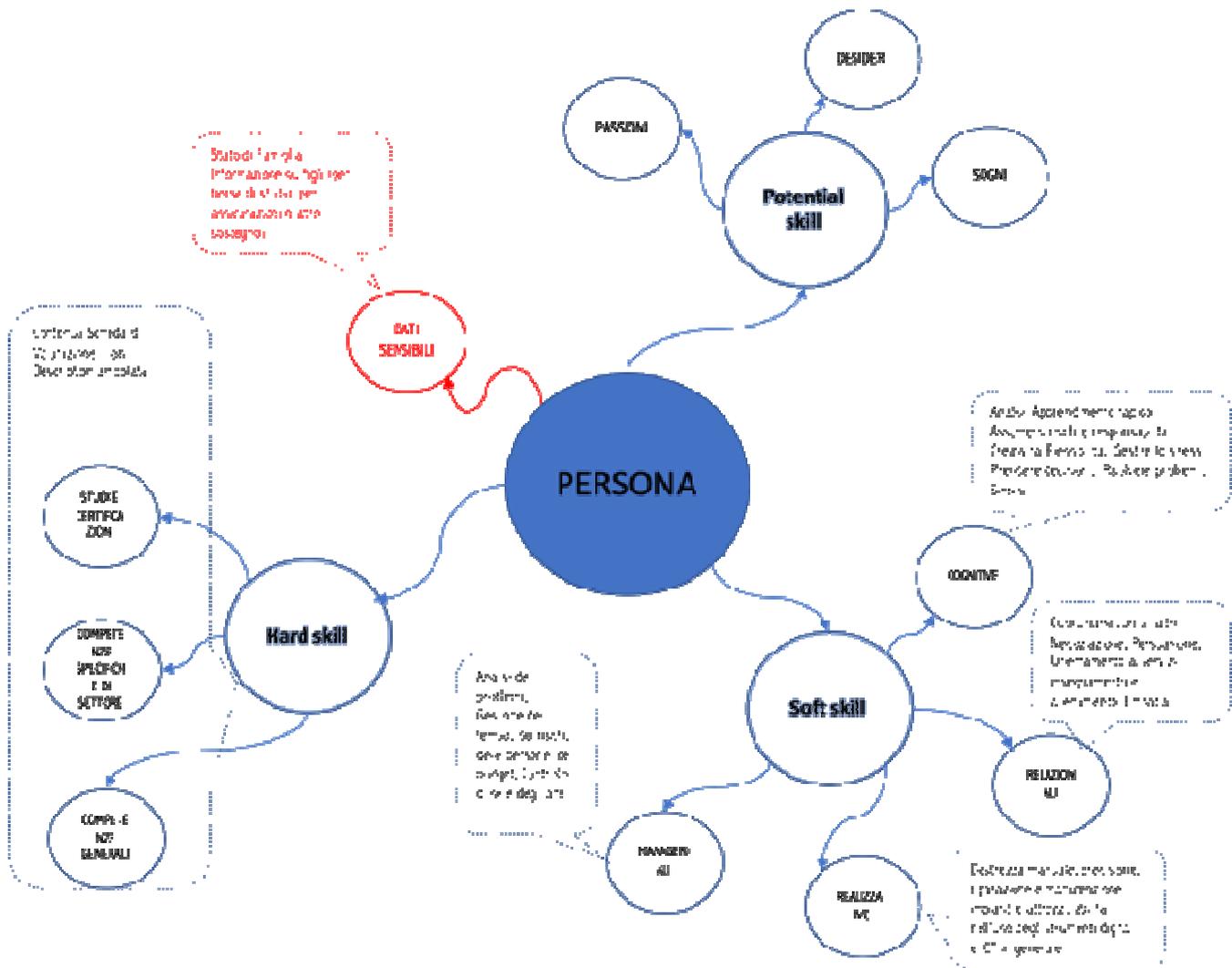
- using a psychological approach (focused on soft skills),
- based on technical-economic KPI (focused on hard skills),

We have added them a new category, collecting experiences and exercises that apply an anthropological-cultural model (focused on a person's potential skills).

How to measure talent? Which criteria, which metrics, which reference systems? Precisely because we reject the numerical model of the intellectual quotient, it was difficult for us to make it unique and univocal and at the same time complex and complete.

To analyze these subjective elements, relating to the observer as well as to the observed, it is important to have multiple points of view to describe an event, to give form and measure to actions, languages, experiences, and knowledge. We have shared the criteria, the aim, and the model with all the attendees, collecting their feedback and suggestions.

Then, we had the opportunity to collect two kinds of evaluations for each soft and potential skill: the evaluation of participants (self-evaluation) and the evaluation of an external person (the coach). All the measures are an average of self-evaluation and the coach evaluation.



How I can imagine my set of skills

To collect this information, we have designed and improved 3 different self-learning experiences:

1. a questionnaire of 40 multiple choice questions in which people have evaluated themselves in terms of soft skills and 10 open questions in which they had the opportunity to show their knowledge of organizational and managing disciplines -lean manufacturing, project management, innovation and change management.
2. a face-to-face conversation with an executive coach discussing about the technical and organizational problems in their office/company, sharing points of view about gender equality, diversity, conflicts and collaboration and finally sharing stories about their past and their future.
3. a Lego Serious Play® experience named “3DSelf-Portrait”: each person has been invited to build the model of his/her role in the company, using imagination, creativity, storytelling, and ability to synthesize.

1.2 An Italian company and its talent assessment

In 2019, a textile company close to Biella decided to start a talent assessment, in order to develop its employer branding, starting from the interest of exploring the talents of its employees and candidates. Attention was paid both to young talents, who can bring new approaches and innovative ideas, and to senior people, who have demonstrated the desire and the ability to pass on their knowledge and know-how to new generations.

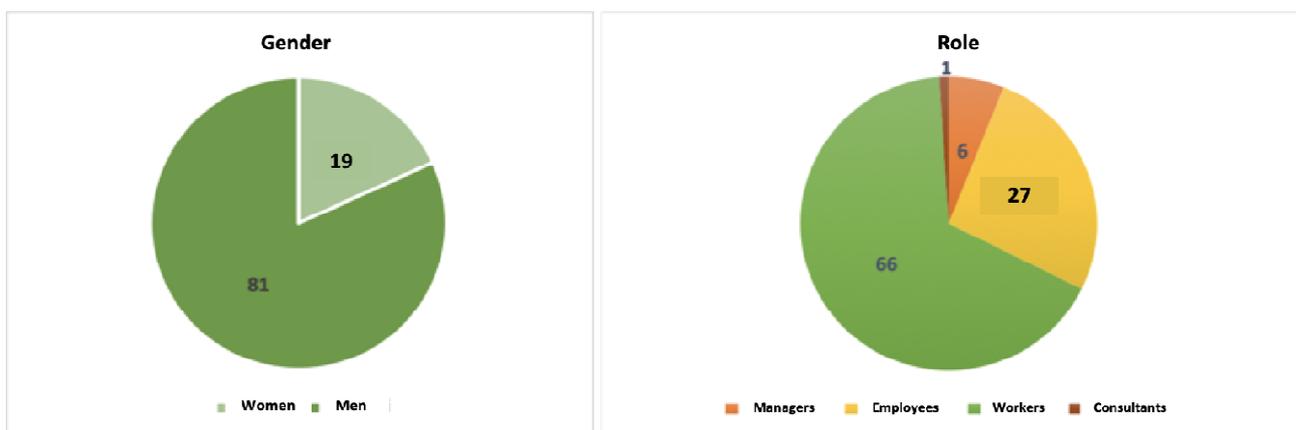
An enormous quantity of data has been collected, allowing us to carry out analyses relating to social aspects (corporate welfare) and cultural (knowledge, experience, potential). The process is repeated every year and involves both candidates and new hires, allowing us to keep the talent map updated every year.

TINTORIA FINISSAGGIO 2000 (TF2000) was founded in 1973 close to Biella, Italy. They started processing knit fabrics for the sportswear industry before turning to noble fibers such as silk, cashmere, and wool. Then they have developed a range of techniques for cellulose fibers such as linen, cotton and viscose and produce technical products for use in the car manufacturing, furnishing and outdoor industries.

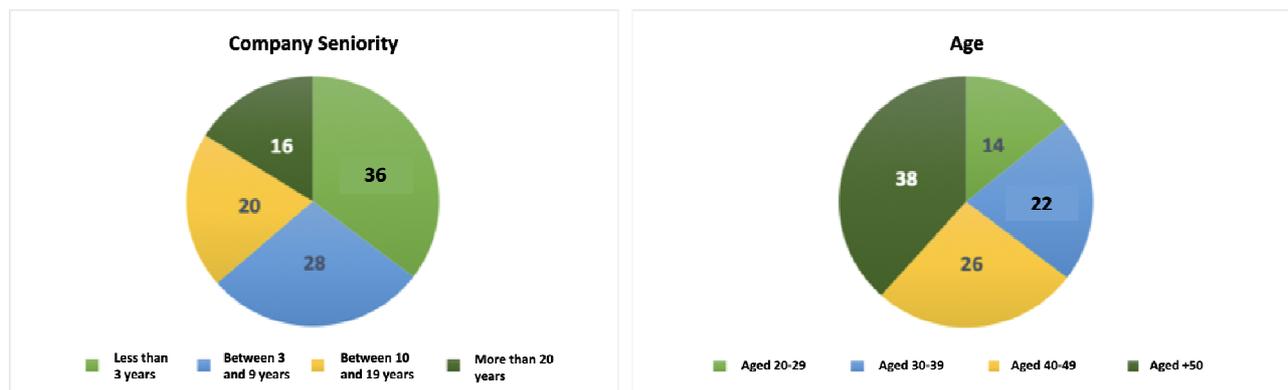
The processes they manage for their customers are:

- Dyeing: we dye all manner of fibers from luxury natural fibers such as silk, wool, cashmere, and mercerized cotton to synthetic and technical fabrics such as polyester and aramid fibers.
- Finishing: we offer a full range of services for all fibers: raising, shearing, fulling, open width mercerizing, continuous and discontinuous, vaporization, rope and continuous tumbling, and dry-cleaning machines. Common treatments include waterproofing, softening, flame-proofing, easy care, stain proofing, ink proofing, and antistatic.
- Bonding: thanks to PUR Hotmelt adhesive technology they assemble innovative multilayer and bonded textiles, either breathable or waterproof.
- Printing: they manage the full textile printing process on each kind of natural or synthetic fabric.

Right now, the company' employees are 100:



The graphs contain the numbers of people who meet a given requirement.



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Much information about people's talents have been collected and classified, including:

- education degree
- knowledge of other languages
- technical-managerial methods' knowledge (i.e., project management, lean manufacturing, total quality, etc.)
- knowledge of working tools (machinery, equipment, processing) and company information systems (ERP, office automation, specific software for plant control, etc.)
- approach to problems and solution
- ability to communicate and collaborate.
- ability to self-evaluate and self-learn.

1.3 Self-assessment and comparison

During the individual meetings, everyone was able to think about their own attitudes, reactions and behaviors, providing a self-assessment of their own soft and potential skills.

We talked about communication, conflict, and collaboration management. We discussed leadership, participation, and engagement.

This way it was possible to obtain a series of information that identifies strengths and opportunities for improvement, for individuals and for the groups they work with (teams, departments, offices).

Young people demonstrate a strong attention to these processes. they consider the work environment and climate more important than economics.

Finally, we discussed leadership, participation, and involvement: also, in this case the young generation pointed out the desire to be a part of a project, feel themselves useful.

This way it was possible to obtain a series of reports that identify strengths and opportunities for improvement as individuals as per groups.

Being able to compare themselves with others without prejudice, feeling listened to, being the creators of their own evaluation, are actions that make people more responsible, more engaged to improve themselves and their job.

Self-assessment faces us with the difficulty of "normalizing" the results.

We assume itself does not represent a problem, but it brings out those with above-average levels of self-esteem. This allows their bosses to focus on strategic skills and to identify objectives that everyone will have to achieve to bring out all the teams.

All the people involved, especially the workers, greatly appreciated this initiative: it made them feel listened, understood, appreciated.

This talent assessment has made it possible to retain some people who intend to leave the company, because thought this experience they have seen and shared a possible career path, experiencing the management attention to their personal needs.

1.4 The talent assessment results and the next steps for future

1.4.1. The «New Generations» and their potential

We consider "new generations" all the people who are working for TF2000 less than 3 years

- 25 people are aged between 30 and 59.
- 11 people are aged between 20 and 29.

This allows to identify two types of potential that these people can express for themselves and for the company.

- People over 30 have been able to consolidate important experiences in other companies in the sector (which can help us identify different – perhaps more efficient – ways of doing the same things) or in different sectors (from which we can draw proposals for managing some non-core processes for TF2000, such as maintenance or warehouse).
- People under 30 bring a wealth of organizational skills (many of them are graduated in management schools) and above all an approach to work that is more oriented to personal well-being and collaboration, so important for helping to improve the internal climate.

The potential that we consider fundamental for all people, whether they are junior or senior, concerns "Collaborativeness", that helps us define the "Ability to Collaborate", obtained through the evaluation of the following attitudes: Motivation, Collaboration, Communication, Relational Effectiveness, Empathy.

To bring out the potential of the most juniors and for making them engaged, we have considered their self-assessments in the following aptitude areas:

- «Solidity», indicates the emotional and relational robustness needed to become part of a production structure. Solidity is measured through the following skills: Theoretical Approach, Vision, Patience, Initiative, Flexibility, Stress Management.
- «Speed», characterized by the following skills: Quick Learning, Experimental Approach, Creativity, Manual Dexterity, Proactivity and Reaction Speed.

To bring out the potential of the more seniors, we stay focused on their self-assessments in attitudes and behaviors concerning:

- «Reliability», composed of attention to Quality, Punctuality and Accuracy, Result Orientation, a Synthetic Approach and Time Management: talents that are expected from more mature people who have acquired years of work experience.
- «Leadership», measured through: Authority, Customer Orientation, Conflict and Group Management, making decisions and taking responsibility for them.

1.4.2 The «Senators» and their potential

We considered all the people who have been working at the company for over 5 years. Of these people:

- 3 people are aged between 25 and 26.
- 61 people are between the ages of 30 and 65.

This uneven distribution prompted us to recalculate the "over 30s" group, classifying them as follows:

- 12 people are aged between 30 and 39,
- 17 between 40 and 49,
- 32 between 50 and 65.

Referring this last category of people (50-65), we have considered those who are in the company for more than 10 years: of these 23 people, some know very well the machinery, others the working processes, other controls, tricks, and secrets of the textile industry.

The company lexicon identifies some of these key people with the title of «Senators»: they are entrusted with the training of the youngest and with the endorsement of organizational choices within their department or their team.

We are working to put these people in the most favorable condition to transfer their skills to younger people through a training plan that does not cause inefficiencies in the production departments. To allow an effective transfer of knowledge, we have grouped these aptitudes under the heading "Tutoring": skills that include Experimental Approach, Synthetic Approach, Creativity, Patience, Authority. These qualities are necessary for the seniors to be able to pass on the most important aspects of the trade to junior workers.

1.4.3 The potential of teams

Alongside the specific skills of “Senators” - mainly related to fabrics, processes, and machinery - we have new skills: digital competences, peer to peer approach, collaboration and sharing brought by the “New Generations”.

The challenge is closing the gaps between two generations and working together to build a single company culture and guarantee to new generations a new way of interpreting their role.

After mapping the talents for everyone, we focused on the balance in the working groups, in order to obtain cohesion, participation and improvement of effectiveness.

To carry out an evaluation by departments, we used 4 classes of soft skills previously identified: Reliability, Solidity, Speed and Collaborativeness.

In addition, we have considered the Cognitive Potential obtained as the sum of the school curriculum, the professional curriculum, and specific hard skills (information systems, project management, lean production, etc.).

The result showed us how to balance the talents and the roles existing in every team.

1.4.4 How talent assessment is helping TF2000 to be more attractive

All the people involved, especially the workers, greatly appreciated this initiative: it made them feel listened, understood, appreciated.

This talent assessment has made it possible to retain people who were about to leave the company, because thought this assessment they have seen:

- attention to people and their needs.
- care for communication and corporate climate
- support employees in verifying their potential.
- execution of training and carrier paths for younger employees

This is what the new generation of workers want: respect, transparency, opportunity to growth.

Part 2 - The Future of the Companies attractiveness

2.1 The new expectations of employees

Which are the new expectations current and future workers are setting? Companies are discovering a great EX (Employee Experience) awakening surprisingly. And why is that? Most of all, because people have their expectations set by the market.

In this sense, we can find very logical reasons when we try to understand what employees want to bring from their personal life to their work life (if there are still boundaries between them). The

market has been setting these liquid experiences for many years before Covid. People are already trained.

Why would they go to the movies if they could enjoy Netflix at home? This personalized experience on the couch cannot compete with the fact that it is necessary to drive to the cinema, spending precious time that will be taken from leisure.

With the same reasoning: why would they go shopping if they can use their Amazon account?

This kind of ambivalence is what organizations are facing. What can they do to keep themselves attractive? What do they have to give up capturing talents?

They have to deep dive into all the moments that matter between an employee and an employer: tasks, conversations, true moments, total rewards, and emotions have direct links to workforce engagement, productivity and sustainable business performance.

2.2 Ask your people!

We can affirm after many years of work experience that the handiest tool that we have and that is also the cheaper one, is the keyword.

Before starting any plan to approach employees' wishes, companies should design different surveys and hold conversations that will help you get closer to their true needs. Just like the Marketing department does with customers.

2.3 The three new essentials

First, we can affirm that the Hybrid Model has come to stay. No matter how long it will take companies to realize this new standard: the later it is assumed, the more talent will be lost.

Second, adapt to flexible work: redesign strategies, programs, and policies to address the emerging needs of flexible work. If you are not thinking of this, we advise start doing it immediately. And don't try to fight against this phenomenon.

Third, well-being needs to be prioritized to enhance the daily engagement of every single employee. We can state that the Total Rewards Programs must be reviewed to adapt their content to different talent groups, that, of course, have different needs. Spend your money wisely!

2.4 Rebalance the employee experience offerings

In this changing environment companies must redesign the employees' experience considering the following constraints:

- Focus on the importance of designing and delivering Total Rewards, embedding inclusion and diversity programs, and creating a culture of wellbeing.
- Lead through change

- Equip leaders and managers to lead through change.
- Reconnect with employees.
- Adopt the hallmarks of Transformative EX organizations to understand, listen to, communicate with and engage employees Equip leaders and managers to lead through change
- Build an integrated EX strategy.
- Build an EXstrategy that is integrated with your business strategy and fueled by technology.

2.5 Adapt to flexible work

Almost three-quarters of organizations (73%) have identified flexible work as a priority to improve the EX over the next three years. But many employers are not ready for this shift as only 56% say they're flexible regarding where and how work gets done,

Unlike in the past, people's lives and identities are no longer defined by work. Before, people worked and from that they organized their lives. Today, a life project defines the choice of work.

Times of great uncertainty, accelerated digitalization and the demands of a new modality of work generated a greater awareness in favor of living in the present and a reconsideration of the space that is given to the work occupation.

The world of work continues to transform and requires a redefinition of agreements existing. Then new questions arise:

- How to resolve the current tension between work routine and time for personal enjoyment?
- Dissatisfaction, massive resignations. How to deal with Millennials? And Z gen?
- Remote, Hybrid or In-person? Who prevails in the crack of the new work format?
- Is the current form of leadership in crisis? What leader profile does the new work context demand?

In 2023, VMLY&R and Trendsity carried outresearchas a contribution to all those who today face the challenge of redefining companies' culture. They have found many essential clues that will be extremely helpful to delineate the future of organizations.

Some statements arrived to stay:

- A new, more holistic look: work integrated into life, focused on objectives and quality.
- Pragmatic purpose: more than half work to be able to meet daily expenses. And for 31% it is a means to carry out personal projects (travel, undertake, access new experiences, housing, etc.), being the main motivation in young people (49%).

When companies design the Total Rewards Programs should have all this in mind.

What is "professional development" today? Which are the new values for this?

Another consequence of the pandemic is that we realized that it's important to live in the present more than prepare for the future. Projecting our life is not a practice anymore.

- Prioritization of experimentation
- Continuous learning

are the most valued attributes by all generations.

The look of commitment as a value is thought of in another way: it is not outward, but internal. It has to do with what I want for myself.

2.5 The New Keys for making employees engaged and productive.

The new generation of workers ask to be part of a “big picture”, in harmony and with urgent issues: environmental impact, reuse, recycling, waste reduction. It is therefore important:

- Offer true participation in decision-making.
- Give rise to important processes.
- Learning and mentoring possibilities.
- Significant experiences.

2.6 Organizations in checkmate facing the need for change

How likely would you resign or look for another job offers if you were asked to work in person?

- Overcoming the discussion between face-to-face and remote work.
- It is essentially about the value of flexibility, both in time and place of work.
- The time and place of work is distributed according to the availability of each person, as long as the delivery deadlines are met.
- The focus is on meeting objectives.

As we maintain, organizations suffer from a lack of talent and turnover: two sides of the same coin. Especially in the youngest, rotation emerges as the natural dynamic in the path of professional development.

The urgent move for companies is to redesign a value proposition according to the new coordinates. This must be built at the intersection between organizational culture, diversity and purpose.

- work-life balance is as relevant as security.
- employer branding is more relevant than the activity itself.
- Flexibility is the new emotional salary and the new normal. That includes schedules and workplace.

Remote workers value the possibility to choose what hours of the day they will work, and their own timetables. Besides, hybrid workers prefer to choose from where and when they work.

So, as a huge reflection: Autonomy as the center of balance, Asynchrony as a labor trend.

2.7 The new leadership is “People Centric.”

How will work be in the future? Which challenges are we facing right now? How will companies survive?

We have already said it: jobs will be 100% more flexible and will require a great capacity for reinvention.

Further, upskilling and reskilling will be the strategy both for employers and employees. There will be greater pressure for continuous learning processes.

Being a “leader” lost magic, because of the lack of balance young people saw in their parents, managers or superiors.

Role models who did not have the ability to disconnect and enjoy life, are not inspiring for the new generations. These are willing to give up part of their success in order to achieve the mentioned well-being.

The new demands on leaders are based on “kindness”, on social perceptions rather than hard skills.

This is because many collaborators quit a bad boss and not an employment.

People's patience to live with a bad boss is running out.

A kind leader is inclusive, open-minded, is authentically interested to know and understand:

- the person above the collaborator
- life experience more than work experience
- needs and feelings more than hard skills.

If the boss is interested in the well-being of employees, it's important to design and maintain a friendly environment at work.

2.7 Conclusions

Organizations are in check and faced with the need for change.

Turnover and talent shortage: two sides of the same organizational problem.

"I don't 'marry' any job, I prioritize my well-being and the most convenient".

Especially in the youngest: rotation emerges as the natural dynamic in the path of professional development.

Redesigning the value proposition according to the new coordinates.

The value proposition must be built at the intersection between organizational culture, diversity and purpose.

Flexibility is the new “emotional salary” (of hours and workplace).

Overcoming the “remote vs. office”: flexibility is the new normal.

On the other hand, virtual workers value the flexibility to choose what hours to work, while hybrids prefer to be able to choose where to work from.

Autonomy as the axis of balance, Asynchrony as a labor trend.

The trial companies are facing is basically related to the shapes of freedom that they are going to give to their talents in exchange to keep running and growing... The good news is that there is a lot of work to be done!

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