THE
UNIVERSAL WORKFORCE MODEL

An Outcome-First Guide to Getting Work Done

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INTRODUCTION

Is there anything more important to your organization than its workforce? A 2021 Fortune/Deloitte survey of 3,000 CEOs discovered that, among the challenges they face today, one ranks above all others: "talent, in nearly every form."[1] More recently, The Economist referenced a survey by research organization The Conference Board, stating, "Chief executives cite worker shortages as the greatest threat to their business in 2022."[2]

But there is an elephant in the room, and we need to talk about it: Our current models for accessing talent are flawed. We must do better.

Old Assumptions Create New Pitfalls

Consider how companies secure workers. First, an organization decides to hire an employee, engage a contractor or seek a consultant. It then turns to HR and its recruiting partners to acquire talent, or to procurement and extended workforce partners to set up contractors or services.

But, stop. Have we gone wrong already?

We assume we know who we seek, where to look and what to pay. HR, procurement and solutions partners may offer insight, but often the decisions about the needed resources have already been made.

The flaws of this process come to light as the hiring organization skips the fundamental question of, "What do we need to achieve?" before asking, "Who do we need to hire?"

As a result, requirements and costs are based mainly on what worked in the past or is the easiest process to navigate.

Companies compete for scarce talent they never fully use, and they often overspend on contractors based on limited data and, therefore, little understanding of the market or the deliverables they need. As a result, budgets, timing and quality have always suffered, but somehow, the work got done.

Today, companies face a new pitfall from the traditional approach to workforce strategy: The work is not always getting done.

The cost of talent is rising. Organizations experience supply chain disruptions due to labor shortages. Workforce scarcity threatens nearly every industry, from building new technologies to delivering fuel for service stations. It is time for a new model.

Prescription for a Future-Ready Workforce: Put the Outcome First

The good news is that a new approach to workforce strategy is not only possible; in some cases, it is already in play. Companies have begun to realize that they need to refocus on the work itself before they talk about workers, roles and vacancies. To begin, they must ask their business managers, "What do we need to achieve?" They then should look to answer the question, "How do we get there?"

When you start with the outcome, everything changes. The goal can be deconstructed into the tasks that bring it to life. The tasks can be split along new lines of work by current employees, new hires, contractors, outsourced services or automation.

Locations for the resources can be tailored to optimal costs and delivery of outcomes. Skills requirements can reflect the tasks needed to achieve a result, rather than the unwieldy lists of responsibilities associated with traditional roles. And costs can be determined based on all available options – not just a limited set of known suppliers of talent and resources.

In short, companies can approach the workforce with their eyes open, secure the right resource every time and even avoid unnecessary battles in the war for talent altogether.

Now Is the Time to Shift

Of course, changing the fundamentals of workforce engagement is not an easy move. It is a journey that will take time. But a journey should not be a sacrifice to the business. Instead, it should add value to processes already in place today as it sets the stage for near-term change and long-term transformation.

That journey is now possible for several reasons. First, thanks to innovations in work design, the process of breaking down an outcome into its component tasks can be built into the workforce strategy. Likewise, due to evolving strategic relationships between companies and solutions partners, the expertise to reconfigure work to best apply resources is now developing. And finally, advances in artificial intelligence (AI) and services-enabled architecture have given rise to technologies that bring all workforce options into view.

These are the drivers of what we call the Universal Workforce Model™. The Model provides a practical means of achieving outcomes that can help companies skip the proverbial war for talent and create a more agile organization fit to thrive in a new world of work. This book aims to articulate the issues concerning workforce access, shed light on the new Model and illuminate the path that brings it to life.

Transforming workforce strategy is more than a good idea. It is an inevitable journey as companies adapt to a fluid business environment. We hope the insight here will act as a call to action and help you get started on the path to a Universal Workforce Model.

PART I

What is the Universal Workforce Model and Why Does it Matter Now?

The following chapters introduce the Universal Workforce Model concept, including its definition, some of the issues organizations face today and the current workforce practices driving its emergence.

After reading Part I, you should have a better understanding of:

- **What the Universal Workforce Model is and what its three core elements are**

- **Which stakeholders benefit from the Model**

- **Why now is the time to start the journey based on converging business trends**

THE UNIVERSAL WORKFORCE MODEL DEFINED

What is the most efficient and effective way to get work done?

The answer to that question is changing rapidly. Emerging from the pandemic, companies face more pressure than ever to adjust to a changing workforce. Remote work, in-demand skills, rebuilding teams, evolving the organization – every aspect of the business is subject to a complete rethink and redesign.

Successful companies will be the ones that can answer the question, "Is it best for us to utilize a current employee, hire someone, outsource the work, use a contractor or consultant, use an on-demand talent platform, automate part or all of the task or combine several of these options?"

Departing From "Status Quo Innovation"

To arrive at an answer, organizations must transform how they view work and make workforce decisions. One vision that has attempted that transformation is the "total talent" or "integrated talent" strategy.

That approach focuses on bringing together previously siloed functions of HR (associated with hiring employees) and procurement (related to the engagement of contingent workforce suppliers and services providers). As a result, companies would no longer make employee-versus-contractor decisions in a vacuum because every worker type is in the conversation.

Unfortunately, the total talent approach is full of challenges. First, what is total talent? If an organization has coordinated permanent and contingent worker strategies, does that count? What if consultant engagements are considered separately? Second, the means to pool data from disparate systems was not widely available until recently. Finally, total talent provides little direction on what happens once companies achieve the data visibility they seek. While the concept expands an organization's options for targeting workers, it does not directly address who should do the work or how work gets done.

Introducing a Practical Model for Workforce Transformation

Enter a fundamentally different approach to workforce strategy. The new Model approaches work and the workforce from an entirely new first step: Start with the results.

That outcome-first, business strategy approach, called the Universal Workforce Model, accounts for the complete workforce view afforded by technology today. The Model puts employees and prospective employees, contractors and services providers into a common framework for deciding how work gets done. It provides a single business partner function dedicated to identifying paths for using the best available resource for the work and aligning workforce strategy to business outcomes.

And most importantly, the Universal Workforce Model starts by deconstructing the work needed to achieve an outcome into its component tasks. Then it is possible to rethink who does those tasks and how they are accomplished. By rebuilding the path to the outcome, planners can disconnect

workforce expectations from legacy definitions of who does what work.

As a result, the Model empowers organizations to apply resources and achieve outcomes with the flexibility, creativity and efficiency essential to a world of rapid change.

Achieving a Universal Workforce Model capability will require transformational changes in certain aspects of the business. It is a journey that will involve time and commitment, but getting started is easy and will also yield near-term benefits along the way. To best understand how we get there, let's start with the Universal Workforce Model's definition and then look at its impact on the business.

The Universal Workforce Model Defined

Current models, such as in-house or outsourced talent acquisition, contingent workforce management or managed service provider (MSP), are resource-defined, meaning that the first step in the process is to ask, "Who do you want to hire?"

Unlike the current and legacy models, the Universal Workforce Model is a practical, outcome-first approach to business strategy that asks, "What are we trying to achieve?" It then provides a mechanism to focus on identifying the optimal path and resource for the outcome being sought.

The Model harmonizes currently siloed resource channels (including employees, contingent workers, services providers and automation), advocates tasks above roles and uses technology to ensure data-led decision-making.

The Universal Workforce Model has three defining features, based on classic areas of business transformation: process, people and technology:

1. Task-Based Versus Role-Based Planning (Process): An operating system built on deconstructed jobs promotes organizational agility. The business is asked, "What do you need to achieve?" and not, "Who do you want to hire?" As a result, it is easier to assess workforce options objectively, identify automation opportunities and deliver a resourcing process aligned to diversity, equity and inclusion goals.

2. Workforce Business Partner (People): As a single point of contact for accessing all workforce channels for a business unit, the Workforce Business Partner applies a task-based approach to planning resources and activity to achieve an outcome. The Partner uses comprehensive, external market and internal data to advise the business on the best way to get work done and deliver the best approach to accessing the entire workforce.

3. An Intelligent Workforce Platform (Technology): The Workforce Business Partner is empowered by an AI-driven technology platform. As a source of data-driven intelligence, the Intelligent Workforce Platform gives visibility into an organization's entire employed and extended workforce. It also provides a gateway to complementary technologies, enabling objective, evidence-based decisions.

This high-level definition provides a basis for understanding the Universal Workforce Model. Still, it may raise more questions than it answers. And it should! Naturally, one should question what task-based planning looks like, how an organization finds or develops a Workforce Business Partner and how the Intelligent Workforce Platform differs from past technology innovations.

We will explore these elements in more detail, but first, we will look at a more basic question: "Why does it matter?" Specifically, how does the Model address the strategic and tactical demands businesses struggle with today?

MEETING STRATEGIC AND TACTICAL NEEDS

Managing work and the workforce is a core business issue. Every person in the organization experiences challenges related to workforce strategy, whether controlling costs, achieving outcomes or simply determining who is needed for the work to be done and how to find them.

The Universal Workforce Model addresses two types of workforce problems shared by nearly every company today:

- **Strategic challenges** in determining how to secure resources at the right time and cost through permanent and extended workforce options

- **Tactical challenges** associated with skills shortages, demand for better use of data, evolving worker priorities and achieving higher standards for diversity, equity and inclusion

These challenges influence the success of the organization and of the individuals who struggle with everyday work demands. What follows is a closer look at the problems and how the Universal Workforce Model addresses them.

Strategic Challenges

Organizations work in competitive marketplaces, and they must leverage people to get work done in an environment of increasingly urgent and variable demands. Unfortunately, the traditional recruitment and extended workforce (nonemployees) management models do not provide the agility to stay ahead of demand. Four strategic problems stand in the way:

- Fragmented sourcing
- The impossible ask of talent acquisition

- The recruitment process outsourcing (RPO) paradox and the conflict of expectations and delivery
- The extended workforce paradox and the flight of spend to unmanaged areas of work
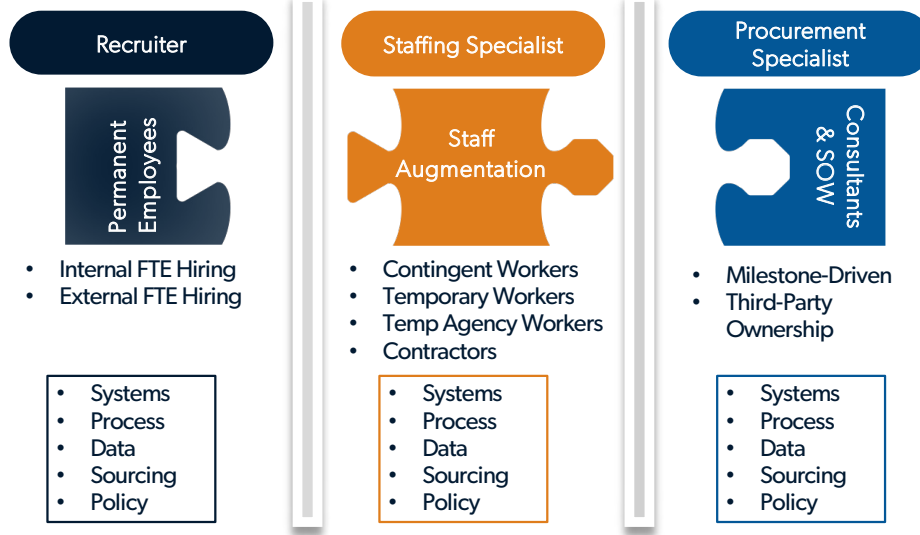
Problem 1: Fragmented Sourcing

When organizations consider how they will secure the workers or resources they need, they almost always start with a predetermined notion of the type of worker they seek. A business leader, for example, will usually begin the sourcing effort by saying, "I want a contractor" to work on a specific job, "I need a consultant" to support our new initiative, or "We need to hire an employee" to fill a recent vacancy. In effect, they have predetermined the resource need.

This predetermined need triggers a process that only considers one workforce option, which then leads to a sourcing effort to secure a contractor, a consultant or an employee. In effect, the organization restricts the recruiting strategy to a fraction of the workforce, operating through the siloed functions of talent acquisition (for permanent employee hires) or procurement (for engaging contractors or services). At the same time, it excludes hybrid or blended options and misses the opportunity to consider options for automation.

The Universal Workforce Model bridges the employee versus extended workforce siloes by removing hiring questions from the initial work discussion entirely. Instead, the process starts with the question, "What are we trying to achieve?" naturally followed by, "What are the various ways in which the work can get done?" This approach lends itself to an open choice of permanent or extended workforce options, as it focuses on needed skills and capabilities rather than predetermined job roles.

Figure 1: Harmonization of Workforce Channels

Before: Traditional, Siloed Decision-Making

Recruiter

Permanent Employees

- Internal FTE Hiring
- External FTE Hiring

  - Systems
  - Process
  - Data
  - Sourcing
  - Policy

Staffing Specialist

Staff Augmentation

- Contingent Workers
- Temporary Workers
- Temp Agency Workers
- Contractors

  - Systems
  - Process
  - Data
  - Sourcing
  - Policy

Procurement Specialist

Consultants & SOW

- Milestone-Driven
- Third-Party Ownership

  - Systems
  - Process
  - Data
  - Sourcing
  - Policy

After: The Universal Workforce Difference

Workforce Business Partner

Permanent Employees

Staff Augmentation

Consultants & SOW

Automation

Intelligent Workforce Platform

Systems — Process — Data — Sourcing — Policy
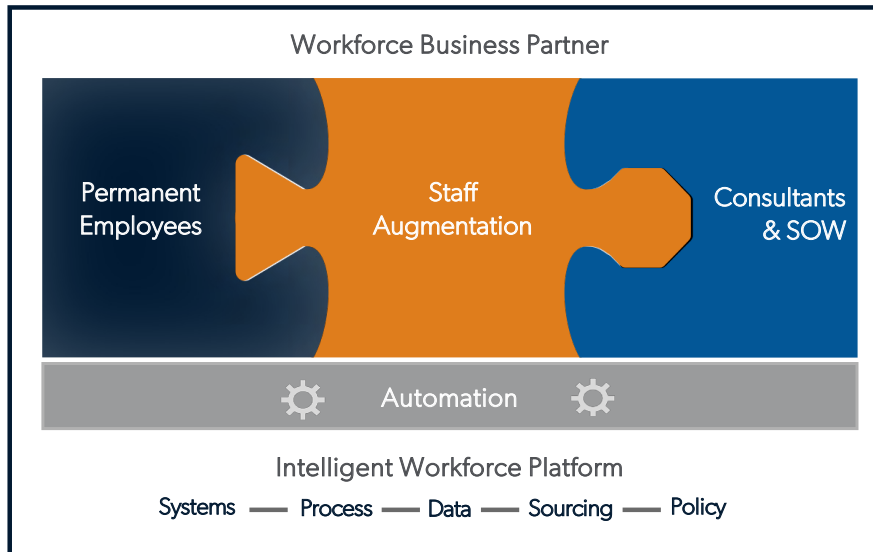
The Universal Workforce Model offers a practical opportunity to harmonize silos of workforce engagement into a unified approach, with the Intelligent Workforce Platform bringing together all data and the Workforce Business Partner driving the decisions.

Likewise, the Intelligent Workforce Platform – the third feature in the Universal Workforce Model – enables visibility across employee and extended workforce channels. As a result, sourcing decisions are no longer based on fragmented views of the workforce. This level of visibility was the original promise of total talent strategies.

Problem 2: The Impossible Ask of Talent Acquisition

Talent acquisition models have long struggled to give organizations the fluidity and agility they crave. In particular, in-house teams are crippled by factors outside of their control, such as fluctuations in resources and demand over time, resulting in slow delivery of talent and an impact on quality. Technology innovation offers promise in addressing these issues, but the practical challenges of implementing available technologies create potential barriers to progress.

What's standing in the way of a more agile talent acquisition model? Consider the differences in hiring needs and recruiting channels for each skill, role and location covered by an organization. Talent acquisition may have to cover dozens or even hundreds of skills across multiple fields, each requiring specialized knowledge and networks to find and engage the right talent.

At the same time, the organization must have the technology infrastructure to make the

engagement experience easy and transparent for prospective candidates. That same technology infrastructure must also support the recruiters and talent decision-makers. Challenges include the use of data and visibility into the workforce, recruitment marketing, interviewing, selection and assessment, and candidate care, to name a few.

Even if an organization has the budget and resources to field a talent technology ecosystem to support a fully competitive talent acquisition function, doing so takes time to develop. In many cases, recruiting staff and supporting technology infrastructure reflect years of evolution. And yet, new talent demands can arise overnight, with an expectation that they will be addressed rapidly.

Traditionally, companies had two choices: make do with overstretched internal teams and technology or leverage an external talent partner with the resources to keep up.

Unfortunately, future conditions may leave internal teams unable to compete for desired talent in the face of an extreme and lasting worker shortage. Likewise, external partnerships provide great value but also have their own challenges that can emerge over time. (See the following sections on the RPO paradox and extended workforce paradox.)

The Universal Workforce Model reduces the burden on internal talent acquisition in several ways. First, it finds the easiest path to the right skills and capabilities before talent acquisition even needs to act – no searching for non-existent or costly resources due to a lack of foresight. Second, the Model introduces a new role in the form of a Workforce Business Partner. This recognizes the investment needed by an organization to allow the function to match its strategic importance, considering that talent is the number one issue for CEOs worldwide.[3] Third, the Model draws from the entire talent supply, regardless of work style or channel, as well as the right technology to support the effort through the Intelligent Workforce Platform.

Problem 3: The Recruitment Process Outsourcing (RPO) Paradox

Most organizations have become familiar with in-house talent acquisition teams becoming isolated, starved of technology investment and under-resourced. To solve the issue, RPO partners bring in the expertise, resources and flexibility to balance the equation. RPO providers also carry the promise of innovation and continuous improvement in processes and technology.

Unfortunately, RPO relationships are often set up in a way that limits the value a provider delivers. While companies seek an RPO provider's expertise, technical innovation and flexibility, companies often impede a provider's success by insisting on owning the data and process end to end. As a result, the tech stack is positioned inside their firewall. This means every proposed piece of technology must be vetted and compete for internal resources to implement in the ecosystem, which restricts the success of the RPO model.

Similarly, the hundreds of resources employed in RPO service centers are notoriously difficult to switch accounts to meet demand fluctuations, as they are often committed to the service of one client. As a result, the model successfully provides resources but fails to set up the organization for future performance.

The technology and resource limitations of the RPO arrangement are the biggest cause of the shortfall. So, when an organization sets out to engage an RPO to solve its long-standing challenges, it experiences some improvement in results at the outset, but it often misses out on the long-term innovation and agility it seeks due to those long-standing challenges. These challenges arise precisely because of the way the RPO was set up in the first place – expecting long-term improvement while remaining under the limitations of the client's systems and processes. This is the RPO paradox.

The Universal Workforce Model breaks through this paradox by bringing a technology ecosystem and related processes to bear through one point of integration with the client. The talent acquisition relationship leverages the specialized partner's full technological capabilities and best practices. As a result, the company maximizes its recruiting power and changes at the speed of innovation without the barriers of internal processes and integrations.

Problem 4: The Extended Workforce Paradox

Fluctuations in workforce supply and demand are not limited to employee recruitment. Those variabilities make it difficult for the procurement function to maintain visibility into the extended workforce. As a result, while procurement typically manages the nonemployee workforce to ensure cost discipline, many organizations see an increase in overall costs. Why? The non-permanent workforce sits broadly in two categories:

- **Contingent/Temporary Workers:** These workers are engaged under time-and-materials charging arrangements, and their work is managed on a day-to-day basis by the client organization. This population is often under an MSP arrangement that offers highly visible, structured data with a clear line of sight to pay rates, time worked and supplier margins.

- **Consultant/SOW Workforce:** These resources could be engaged under milestone or time-and-materials charging arrangements, with the workforce managed to some extent by a third-party (e.g., a consultancy) that takes an element of responsibility and risk for the service delivery. This population is typically engaged under statements of work (SOWs) negotiated by procurement. However, due to the nature of SOWs, the data is opaque, unstructured and characterized by higher margins.

The extended workforce paradox is defined by the reality that it is easier to reduce costs by focusing on the contingent worker category. This is accomplished by bringing the many disconnected paths of engagement – whether different managers each driving their own staffing firm relationships or different departments defining and paying for work through distinct channels – under one common, consistent management process.

That process is often owned and executed by an external MSP partner. The resulting structure improves data visibility, governance and cost control. This approach helps identify and rationalize cost inconsistencies by bringing discipline to pricing and the use of suppliers across the extended work-force supply chain.

The Universal Workforce Model stops this flight of spend to undisciplined channels by covering all resource types under one framework. Employee recruitment, contingent workers and services are engaged through a common approach that boosts access to resources, cost control and compliance across the business.

Tactical Challenges of Current Models

For managers, directors and line-level practitioners, the broader "big picture" challenges of talent acquisition and extended workforce engagement are less important than the prevailing tactical challenges they face daily. These tactical problems include four significant issues that will continue to evolve, including:

- **Skills shortages and the need for agility** in leverag-ing workers and resources

- **Evolving workforce technologies** and the inability to implement new innovations easily

- **The advancement of data and analytics** and the demand for better workforce intelligence

- **Changing worker expectations and corpo-rate goals,** from diversity, equity and inclusion and sustainability to flexibility and the growing contingent workforce

Skills Shortages and Workforce Agility

In a world where job vacancies routinely exceed the total number of active job seekers, it's no surprise that companies have trouble finding people to get the work done – at least

using traditional processes and methods. Moreover, the dynamics of a supply shortage are not likely to change. After all, many who left their current positions in the workforce during the COVID-19 pandemic did so permanently, either retiring or taking on new careers or life choices.

Given the shortage of workers, companies are refocusing traditional talent processes to create a more agile work-force capability. They are doing so by rethinking the bar-riers that limit talent acquisition and extended workforce engagement today.

Those divisions begin with the predetermined direction of using a permanent employee versus a contractor. As men-tioned, the Universal Workforce Model draws from both sides of the employee/flexible worker universe to arrive at the ideal direction.

Likewise, the approach breaks the limitations of traditional job roles by opening work through a task-driven model. Overall, the work can be divided, allocated and resourced through the best means possible, a fluid approach that creates the agility to achieve optimal results in the face of continued workforce scarcity.

Implementing Workforce Technologies

The world of workforce technology is fast-moving, crowded and complex. As an example, two consecutive surveys by research and advisory firm Talent Tech Labs offer a snapshot of the pace of change. The more recent December 2021 "Ecosystem" report[4] reveals 39 separate categories of talent technology serviced by hundreds of providers. Compared to their report a year earlier, 97 providers were removed, and 84 were added.

What chance do you have of staying on top of this rapidly moving landscape? How do you gain consensus on the right ecosystem for your organization, securing budget, navigating internal IT resources and prioritizing against competing projects? How do you execute this before your planned ecosystem is obsolete?

In our experience, there is often a chasm between the promise of workforce technologies and the operational reality. The Universal Workforce Model addresses this challenge with a gateway approach that results in a simplified technology ecosystem centered around an Intelligent Workforce Platform.

Data and Analytics

Organizations are awash in a sea of workforce data, which raises the stakes for improving workforce intelligence. Workforce stakeholders must make informed decisions about everything from pay rates to worker types, locations and performance measurements. **The challenge for any manager or director is that data alone does not translate to good decisions. For accurate intelligence, context and analysis are vital** – and that requires a holistic view of all data across the numerous disparate channels and systems where it resides.

The Universal Workforce Model has one point of integration that brings all data into a virtual environment, empowered by a machine learning function that adapts that information for analysis in a common framework. As a result, the technology Platform delivers intelligence based on both internal and external data, draws analysis based on that information, and enables the informed decisions that business leaders seek.

Changing Workforce Expectations and Policy Goals

In addition to a changing marketplace and technology landscape, workforce decision-makers must contend with evolving priorities every day. These priorities come from consumers, customers and workers themselves, changing expectations based on business and the markets, as well as new regulatory issues and a focus on new workforce demands coming out of the pandemic, ranging from privacy and vaccinations to health and safety, to name a few.

Most notable are priorities around boosting diversity, equity and inclusion; supporting sustainability; improving workforce flexibility; and leveraging a growing contingent workforce. Companies are embracing new levels of commitment to these goals, and HR, procurement and business leaders must make substantial efforts to meet them.

These goals are best supported by a workforce infrastructure that: 1) makes workforce decisions that are flexible and transparent, and 2) captures any information that tracks and highlights progress or challenges in meeting those goals. The Universal Workforce Model provides a decision-making ecosystem that addresses both needs.

For example, the Workforce Business Partner can track diversity in hires, retention or success of diverse candidates, or the performance of both contingent workers and employees through one source. Likewise, a task-based, barrier-free approach lets organizations better engage workers regardless of location or work arrangement (permanent employee or flexible worker).

Strategic Versus Tactical Is No Longer an Either/Or Question

The application of an approach to both strategic and tactical issues is often a stumbling block to legacy workforce strategy or transformation efforts. In the past, the shortcomings of focusing on near-term issues were not felt for a meaningful amount of time. In other words, a tactical approach that did not change easily still delivered value for one, two or even up to three years. Today, change often comes too quickly to rely on a near-term solution.

Likewise, the business does not have the patience to wait for a long-term vision to solve pressing problems. That means a solution must deliver wins today. The Universal Workforce Model provides the flexibility to address both, offering near-term solutions and long-term value in a practical approach for everyone involved. It's a journey that will be required for any successful organization to navigate the rapidly evolving future of work and the workforce.

REAL-WORLD TRENDS LEAD
TO A NEW WORKFORCE PERSPECTIVE

By John Boudreau

What's behind the need for a Universal Workforce Model? As I wrote in my October 2020 blog,[5] it is the irreversible evolution toward fluid work and workers.

You can see this fluidity in the emerging imperatives of work automation, inclusion, the skills-based labor market and more. The phrase "fluid work" captures how work has melted, released from the confines of a regular full-time job, just like water released from melted ice. Workers and work are more "fluid" and won't refreeze into the old shape.

The COVID-19 crisis provided great examples of how remarkably workers apply "hidden" capabilities their organizations never used before, shifting quickly to their most pivotal contributions. The most prominent examples involve knowledge workers adjusting to remote work, but an even more interesting pattern can be seen among workers in manufacturing, retail and other on-site venues.

Deere & Company, the Iowa farm and construction equipment maker, pivoted to making at least 225,000 face shields.[6] Maine-based company Flowfold, which ordinarily makes outdoor gear, also pivoted to producing face shields.[7] These moves required new workflows, materials and training, as well as getting product design ideas directly from frontline healthcare workers.

Some organizations gained agility by tapping new sources of workers. Stan Jewell, president and CEO of Renfro Corporation, a sock-making company, pivoted to making one million face masks per week.[8] The "hard part" was finding 550 temporary workers to assemble and package the masks in seven locations. He solved it by attracting 16- to 20-year-olds, those not yet even in the labor market.

This newfound work agility also "melts" traditional corporate boundaries as work and workers flow between organizations. For example, the Kroger supermarket company temporarily borrowed furloughed employees for 30 days from Sysco Corporation,[9] a wholesale food distributor. Manufacturer of outdoor lifestyle products Winnebago joined a coalition of manufacturers coordinated by a 3-D printer company to print visor parts for clear acrylic face masks.[10]

These examples show how work that was previously held in stable jobs is now "melting" into something more fluid.

Workers, previously conceived as jobholders, are melting into more fluid talent, who are ready to shift skills, apply non-job skills or move across boundaries between organizations.

Some describe this as work becoming "gigs." Yet, something new is afoot. National Public Radio noted that the pandemic has "suddenly transformed millions into virtual workers,"[11] and the Upwork freelance platform reports that two million Americans started freelancing between August 2019 and August 2020.[12] In addition, a McKinsey Global Institute survey of 800 executives found that 70% expect to use more temporary and freelance workers for on-site work post-crisis.[13]

The term "gig work" is misleading, typically conjuring up images of Uber, Lyft and DoorDash. That perception obscures the fundamental reality of pervasive fluid work, supported by a growing array of alternative work options both inside and beyond a single employer.

These alternative work options are increasingly supported by new work systems, like the arrangements that enable organizations to borrow talent, the calls to action that find and deploy workers who volunteer for new tasks, or the systems that allow managers to retrain manufacturing workers.

Yet, these new systems and initiatives are currently ad hoc, haphazard and not integrated into systems that leaders, workers, managers and policymakers can use to make better decisions that truly optimize fluid work.

These benefits will not be forgotten post-crisis, now that workers, managers and leaders have experienced fluid work. What lessons can these stakeholders use to prepare for more fluid work?

Lesson 1: Fluid Work Rests on Platforms

The traditional gig economy rests on "platforms" that find and match those who want to work with compatible work assignments. G2, a software marketing website, provides a searchable listing and rating of freelance platforms, including Upwork, offering a wide variety of capabilities, including engineers, software developers, marketing designers, consultants, project managers, writers and college student interns.[14] A 2015 McKinsey Global Institute report estimated that online talent platforms could increase global employment by 2.4% by 2025. They could help more than 230 million workers globally reduce their job search time, decreasing unemployment and introducing new opportunities.[15]

Many organizations are experimenting with "internal talent marketplaces,"[16] for work projects sometimes called "inside gigs."[17] These platforms are available only to an organization's regular employees, matching melted jobs (tasks or projects) with melted jobholders (skills and capabilities). The internal talent marketplace, underpinned by an "inside gig"

approach, is key to the operationalization of the Universal Workforce Model.

Unilever calls their platform "FLEX Experiences." "By accessing the platform, Unilever employees can work on projects for a small or large proportion of time, increase the depth of their expertise in a current skill or build new skills and experiences. Through the power of AI, people are suggested opportunities that match their profile and aspirations, and at the same time, given full visibility to all opportunities available globally across all areas of the business, ultimately democratizing and giving transparency to the way the company develops talent."[18]

A Universal Workforce Model that integrates an increasing array of internal and external platforms is key to optimally tapping them.

Lesson 2: Uncertainty Is a Constant and Can be a Good Thing

In a September 2021 Institute for Corporate Productivity (i4cp) survey of over 1,000 HR leaders, only 30% of those in organizations with more than 1,000 employees believe they currently have the skills necessary to advance their strategy over the next one to three years.[19] Only 15% indicated they were "very highly effective" or "highly effective" at analyzing the gap between the organization's future workforce requirements, and current workforce skills and capabilities. Some find these results "sobering," suggesting an HR profession that is woefully unprepared for the future.

I think this is realistic, exhilarating and a good thing.

For too long, HR has operated as if HR planning must make a prediction and then "stick to it," developing HR programs to support that prediction and updating it only in the next formal planning cycle.

Uncertainty does NOT prevent strategic planning nor good decisions, but the frameworks to support good decisions under uncertainty are very different from those for decisions when you know the future.

HR leaders might diversify, building several unique talent and organization capabilities, each suited to a particular possible future, and then "divest" those that turn out not to be needed. HR leaders might hedge by preparing to "day trade" talent, acquiring it as soon as the need arises and then divesting it as soon as the need subsides, perhaps by using freelancers or contractors in areas that are particularly uncertain.

Such strategies require a Universal Workforce Model that can tap into a broader ecosystem of talent sources and engagements, many of which can be more short-term, renewable and make such strategies work.

Lesson 3: Fluid Work Requires Work Deconstruction

Optimizing alternative work arrangements requires freeing leaders from the traditional work operating system focused exclusively on jobs and jobholders. Seldom does an alternative work arrangement simply substitute a new type of work arrangement for the regular employee in an intact job. Rather, the optimal solutions require deconstructing the jobs into their component tasks/activities and deconstructing the workers into their component skills/capabilities. Then, each deconstructed element can be examined for its compatibility with alternative work arrangements, and the work can be reinvented and reconstructed to reflect the most optimal combinations.

PART II

How Does the Universal Workforce Model Work?

The following chapters provide a closer look at the reasoning behind the three components of the Universal Workforce Model: the task-based approach to work, the Workforce Business Partner and the Intelligent Workforce Platform.

After reading this section, you should have a better understanding of:

- **How the core elements of the Universal Workforce Model connect to, and evolve from, present-day practices**

- **Why each element is essential to the transformation effort**

- **What is needed to make a case for change**

A TASK- VERSUS ROLE-BASED APPROACH

By John Boudreau

The Universal Work Model considers that work can be done by regular employees, but it also embraces the increasingly diverse array of alternative workers and resources. Engaging such workers requires work arrangements that look beyond typical definitions of jobs and the assumption that the worker will be a full-time employee who holds a series of jobs in the organization.

Along with co-authors in several past books ("Beyond HR," "Lead the Work" and "Reinventing Jobs"),[20] I have argued that solving the future of work requires "deconstructing" jobs and then the capabilities of the jobholders. In essence, reexamine the job by its component tasks and the workers as owners of capabilities to achieve those tasks.

The task-first approach is naturally empowering for the worker, as it breaks down the limiting bundling of activities that traditionally comprise what we refer to as jobs.

Often, only a portion of those bundled tasks directly uses the worker's best skill or strengths. Also, if workers are freed to take on projects beyond their formal job, the organization can tap additional worker capabilities. With a task-driven approach to work, the activities are separated from the packaging known as the "job." This reveals many more options than the traditional concept of work as a "job" and the worker as a "jobholder."

The move to empower companies and workers through a new approach is recognized as a priority today. As a June 2020 Harvard Business Review article reinforces, "all knowledge-based work can be unpacked into a set of different tasks. … To figure out the future of the gig economy for knowledge workers, therefore, we need to analyze things at the task rather than at the work level."[21]

Workers can now be seen not simply as jobholders but as repositories of a complete array of existing and potential capabilities. One example is a skills-based work system.[22] COVID-19 revealed this when workers making auto parts or vodka can be provided with just the right few additional skills and become makers of personal protective equipment and hand sanitizer. The new "jobs" did not exist previously.

One way to see the growing imperative for work deconstruction is in the increasing array of alternative work arrangements, often called a "talent ecosystem." The list below is adapted from the Institute for Corporate Productivity (i4cp)[23] and

illustrates the most common work arrangements within such an ecosystem.

- **Talent exchanges:** Build capability, perspective and relationships by swapping/rotating talent with entities outside your enterprise.

- **Gig workers or freelancers:** Access on-demand skills and capabilities when/where needed using external talent platforms.

- **Crowdsourcing:** Obtain input, information and ideas from a curated audience internally and externally to the organization.

- **Innovation partnerships:** Engage start-up organizations and/or academic units for new ideas, commercialization or launching new ventures.

- **Co-ops/internships/apprenticeships:** Use students and others who are early in their careers or are making a career transition to take on specific tasks and build a future talent pipeline.

- **Nontraditional talent:** Source talent from traditionally under-tapped sources, such as underserved populations, socioeconomic groups and differently abled people.

- **Internal talent marketplace:** Offer employees flexible opportunities to take on projects or tasks beyond their jobs to fill unmet needs.

Regular, full-time employment in traditional jobs should be on this list, but it should not be the only option. Instead, it should be one of several options that are optimized to best engage human workers. However, for most organizations, the list includes only employees in jobs.

In the book "Lead the Work," my colleagues Ravin Jesuthasan and David Creelman and I proposed three work engagement dimensions that can help leaders consider how to redesign work to better tap alternatives to regular full-time employment:

- **The assignment (or the work to be done)**
  - How small can it be deconstructed?
  - How widely can it be dispersed?
  - How far from employment can it be detached?

- **The organization (the boundary containing the work)**
  - How easily can the organization boundary be permeated?
  - How strongly should the organization link with others?
  - How deeply should the task involve collaboration?
  - How extensively should the boundary be flexed to include others?

- **The rewards (the elements of exchange for the work)**
  - How small or immediate is the time frame?
  - How specifically should rewards be individualized?
  - How creatively should rewards be imagined beyond traditional pay and benefits?

For example, organizations contain the job of product designer, which includes many tasks. One of those tasks is generating ideas for new products or features, combined with other tasks, such as evaluating those ideas to fit with existing production or marketing strategies and selling the ideas to key organization constituents.

If we deconstruct the job, then the task of generating new product ideas emerges as one "assignment" that can be deconstructed from the rest of the job. That task can be undertaken by volunteer focus groups, perhaps comprised of regular customers, dispersed to a wide array of volunteers and detached from an employment contract. The "organization" boundary must be permeated but only enough to allow the volunteers to interact with product design teams.

Notice, however, that if the question is framed as, "Can volunteer focus groups do the job of product designers?" then the answer is simply "no," and this alternative does not present itself. Similarly, if the question is framed as, "How can we design a job that consists only of suggesting new products and features?" then the answer is, "impossible" because the organization does not have enough of such work to fill a regular job. The COVID-19 crisis accelerated this melting or "deconstruction" of work and workers, requiring a concept of work that moves beyond the traditional job. Workers, managers and leaders will want to keep the agility that comes with deconstruction and reinvention, but they will need new systems that go beyond traditional jobs.

The Universal Workforce Model frames these questions in terms of deconstructed tasks. Rather than asking, "Can we substitute alternative work arrangements for the employees in our current jobs?" consider asking if the work can be arranged by tasks to better suit the capabilities of current workers. Framing these questions through task-based work provides a far clearer picture of the opportunities and challenges of alternative work arrangements. Task-based work offers the same clarification regarding equally significant imperatives, such as work automation and skills-based work systems.

Work deconstruction is essential. Organizational leaders, managers, workers and policymakers must evolve toward liberating work from jobs, liberating worker capabilities from job requirements and liberating worker qualifications from college degrees. Only then will we see the true patterns and optimal solutions promised by a Universal Workforce Model.

THE WORKFORCE BUSINESS PARTNER

Introducing the Workforce Business Partner: a resource that is central to delivering work outcomes, one of the most strategically important functions for the organization. Aligned to a specific business unit or function (likely mirroring the existing HR Business Partner structure), the Partner carries a high level of expertise and experience to drive agreement on decisions across all functional and leadership stakeholders.

The Workforce Business Partner understands what is trying to be achieved and, in collaboration with business leaders, advises, designs and gives strategic advice on the best way to get work done. The Partner draws upon a broad range of external market data, combined with the organization's internal data, to define and gain agreement on every strategy.

Two Paths of Innovation Give Life to a New Strategic Function

In the past, the daunting scope of knowledge required of the Workforce Business Partner made the work nearly impossible for one role to perform. However, today, the Partner is also informed by an Intelligent Workforce Platform. This source of knowledge is empowered by multiple data sources that contribute to the tasks involved in executing the strategy for the Universal Workforce Model.

In particular, advancements in two significant areas bring the Workforce Business Partner role to life: data and processes.

Innovations in Data and Technology

First, there is the data. Within the broad universe of available workforce data is the business intelligence needed to arrive at the best-resource, best-cost option for achieving the tasks

associated with a given outcome. Unfortunately, such data was not available in one usable source until recently. Instead, distributed information across disparate systems and structures made achieving a meaningful view of available options impossible. As a result, useful business intelligence remained hidden in that sea of data.

To understand all resource options, the Workforce Business Partner draws from the Universal Workforce Model's Intelligent Workforce Platform, which brings data into one source and applies AI-driven analytics to that data. As a result, the Platform delivers intelligence to inform meaningful decisions quickly and effectively.

Advances in Process and Execution

The second empowering development for the Workforce Business Partner is the process that drives the Universal Workforce Model. In the past, a single role would be unlikely to have access to the various job descriptions, business objectives or information about pay, performance or other workforce data across the organization. Likewise, no single person would be charged with advising how best to achieve an outcome or how to draw from the best resources available. That's because nearly every department or location worked in its own silo.

The Universal Workforce Model puts the Workforce Business Partner in the center of a resource and business strategy function that spans the entire business. The resulting decision process gives stakeholders across the enterprise a single reference point for driving their strategies to get work done. That single source is the Workforce Business Partner.

How the Workforce Business Partner Works

The core job of the Workforce Business Partner is to understand what the organization is trying to achieve, how long work should take and how much it should cost. Based on that understanding, the Partner advises where to get the work done and what type of workers should do the work, as well as where the opportunities are for automation.

In the future, AI will predict many of these decisions and choices. Over the next several years, organizations will be "teaching the machine" by capturing tasks and results. These "learnings" will enable the increasingly accurate and detailed prediction of outcomes on various delivery strategies, and the Workforce Business Partner will draw upon them to align resources to the work and its outcomes.

The role requires deep comprehension of an organization's business objectives and the ability to turn those goals into

a structured workforce architecture and framework. The Workforce Business Partner:

- Works with stakeholders across their business unit or function to deconstruct "old-fashioned" job descriptions and help leaders rethink tasks and outputs

- Defines the context of all roles in the company's success and designs processes that give workers a consumer-like experience based on simple, fast and transparent communications and interactions with the employer

- Understands what the business unit they represent is trying to achieve, identifying the optimal workforce solution and opportunities for automation

- Analyzes performance metrics to design new ways of working

- Uses a hearts-and-minds approach to change traditional mindsets

Figure 2: Introducing the Workforce Business Partner

Analyze
Workforce Platform
Market Insights
Internal Insights

Advise
Hiring Manager Engagement
Advisory Conversations

Act
Channel Strategy
Sourcing Strategy
Hybrid Solutions

Evolve
Compliance
Continuous Improvement

The Workforce Business Partner represents a business unit or function that analyzes data, advises stakeholders, creates a plan of action and drives the evolution of the process to get work done.

There are obvious synergies between this role and that of a design architect in the construction industry. For physical structures, design architects analyze sites and create plans for construction, remodeling, additions or repairs. Then, the quantity surveyor takes the blueprint drawing of a house, calculates the resources and materials needed to build the structure, and lays out how everything should be built.

They create a critical path analysis and time frame for each project stage, plus a cost/time/quality-versus-risk profile. A Workforce Business Partner does exactly that by taking the business objectives as a blueprint and designing the best way to get the work done.

Key Areas of Focus

Several specific areas of activity create a sustainable framework to empower the Workforce Business Partner. These areas will evolve as circumstances change according to the organization's unique needs.

Deconstruction of the Work: A Priority for Workforce Business Partners and Team Leaders Alike

Organizations have no trouble building job descriptions and workflows to meet project objectives. Deconstructing them is only a matter of reverse engineering. Yet, it is painstaking, and it should be. Why wouldn't we want to understand every nuance of the work our people do?

Still, breaking down the work and learning about the nuances is not impossible. The challenge is to figure out our response to what we learn. Is the process redundant? Wasteful? Already optimal? Are we missing key steps? Are they logically arranged? With the mature Universal Workforce Model, project team leaders analyze and distill the work their staff does – or new processes in the making – to its essence. With an understanding of the work and its processes, leaders then proceed by asking:

- Do we have access to the talent (and the right type of talent)?

- Are they being motivated and rewarded in an optimal way?

- Are we putting them in place to achieve the specific outcomes we need?

In the breakdown of the work, close collaboration with the Workforce Business Partner is necessary. Team leaders must share what they know about the work hierarchy with those who have the means to match it to the right people. Like never before, hiring professionals are charged with understanding what must be accomplished and how best to do it.

So, breaking down and evaluating work objectives does not end with the interested departments. Instead, they will then pass the baton to those who have that wide-angle vision into the company's total available and potential talent supply, including other departments and functions, and, of course, the Workforce Business Partner.

Notably, the structure of the work and workforce is no longer HR's responsibility alone. This arrangement also changes the balance of managers' and leaders' roles across the enterprise. Going forward, instead of "just" leading employees, managers of departments or teams will lead the activities and outcomes. They must stay focused on business objectives even as they guide and support the people (and machines) working toward them.

Process Innovation: Evaluation and Update of Past Models for Matching Workers to Work

Traditionally, worker turnover has not changed the status quo of how work got done. Employers fill open positions with the same type of worker who just walked out the door, automatically putting full-time employees or temporary contractors in the same slots. However, it takes a different approach to drill down and ask tough questions about what the business is trying to achieve, what the work should entail, and which types of workers or automation options are available to vie for the work.

For instance, it may make sense to bring in a long-time contractor who has become familiar with the company as a full-time employee. Knowledge of company values and business goals may put this individual far ahead of a new hire's learning curve. On the other hand, filling a full-time position that has become more complex over time with just one person could be extremely limiting. Instead, a team of two or more contractors might provide a broader skill set to tackle intricate projects.

The Workforce Business Partner should have the vision, expertise and data to take stakeholders through the question-and-answer process and develop the best talent model for the moment.

Predictive Strategy Development: Projection and Preparation for Future Skills Needs

But, what about tomorrow? Agility demands that organizations be ready for what's coming in the face of changing business needs and the shifting talent marketplace. A Workforce Business Partner can objectively assess pitfalls and opportunities, foresee contingencies, and plan to meet them. They can use analytics to make reasonable projections to prioritize departmental funding or seek talent exchange programs with leading companies in another field. This level of foresight and proactive strategy puts an organization in front of competitors who typically notice a void in their technology or talent pipeline when it is already too late to fill it.

The Evolution of the Workforce Business Partner Role

Today, the Workforce Business Partner is part of the broader journey toward a mature Universal Workforce Model. Just as organizations have the practices and resources to build a task-oriented, outcome-driven workforce strategy, the ingredients to bring together a fully functioning Workforce Business Partner role are established in different parts of business today.

Consider the current drivers that contribute to the role. First, the workforce expertise stems from the knowledge base of recruitment, HR and procurement functions for securing, engaging and managing workers of all types today. Second, the technology capability of the Intelligent Workforce Platform brings together the systems housing internal and external workforce data. And finally, the strategic view that brings together functional business knowledge and workforce expertise lies within the capabilities of solutions partners who connect strategies to business outcomes for their clients every day.

While the pieces to support the Workforce Business Partner are developed and working, the journey to realizing a Partner as a single source of unified knowledge and strategic direction will take time.

Evolution will consist of the continuous effort to bring these parts together. If that journey has yet to start for your organization, now is the time to begin.

THE INTELLIGENT WORKFORCE PLATFORM

The Intelligent Workforce Platform has arrived, which is good news because we need it.

An Intelligent Workforce Platform is a single integration point and gateway to all complementary technologies that captures data in relation to the entire workforce – internal, external, past, present and potential. The Platform's purpose is to apply AI and machine learning to provide insight on the best way to get work done.

The range of inputs that comprise a Universal Workforce Model strategy span all facets of a business. These inputs come from the many sources of workforce information that are commonly known by their acronyms. These include all human capital management (HCM) technologies, HR information systems (HRIS), applicant tracking systems (ATS), vendor management systems (VMS), peer-to-peer (P2P) networks and associated applications, and information in enterprise resource planning (ERP) systems, to name a few.

The work itself – and its component tasks, priorities, timelines, dependencies and costs – all play into the mix. Likewise, any workforce decisions that determine what resources will execute on the needed tasks must account for the capability, availability and costs of all resource options.

These options encompass current employees, prospective new employees, contingent workers, contractors or services providers. Add the potential for automation, and the resulting complexity demands a daunting amount of knowledge to inform resourcing decisions.

Today, the ability to make informed decisions is now available. This ability comes through a robust knowledge Platform that has the power to enable

data-driven strategies as the Workforce Business Partner guides how work gets done. A technology infrastructure informs sourcing strategy, right-sourcing, accurate classification, and supplier and rate advice. The technology does this by capturing and aggregating comparable data for the entire external and internal workforce, and all talent intelligence and analytics into a single system. This technology is the Intelligent Workforce Platform, the third major component of the Universal Workforce Model.

Stop Adding Complexity and Start Simplifying Integration

One primary differentiator for the Platform is that, rather than being designed to encompass all data needs on its own (an impossible task), it is focused on easily integrating the systems and channels where that data currently exists. The system easily integrates procurement and recruiting systems and their sources of information, including the previously mentioned HCM, ERP and VMS data.

The resulting universal view across all systems allows the Workforce Business Partner to search and analyze data from permanent employees and contingent workers in a single effort. This information is the foundation for developing strategies that align talent outcomes with business goals and bottom-line results. In essence, the system enhances and maximizes the value of existing systems. Once engaged, all workers are tracked in the relevant system of record for enterprise-wide visibility.

Key Priority: Minimizing Connection Points

When it comes to integration, a one-to-many approach is rec-ommended. The Intelligent Workforce Platform should be the conduit to all channels and sources of data. At the same time, it should achieve this connection to those sources through a minimum of integration points with the organization's internal systems.

As shown in the diagram below, the Platform minimizes the number of integrations inside the firewall and maximizes access to best-of-breed point solutions outside the firewall. This strategy enhances agility, flexibility and scalability – all vital success criteria in the new world of work.

The Platform Advantage: Comparing Apples with Pears

The real value of the Intelligent Workforce Platform comes to light when it enables the user (the Workforce Business Partner) to compare all forms of talent and all methods of getting work done in one place. Even as information is presented in differ-ent forms in different places, the AI functionality understands the information in the context of the work and the resource decisions to be made.

The Platform is the difference-maker for the Workforce Business Partner, as it provides the data and the analysis capability to compare apples with pears. For example, consider an organization facing an IT project. That project

Figure 3: The Technology Workflow
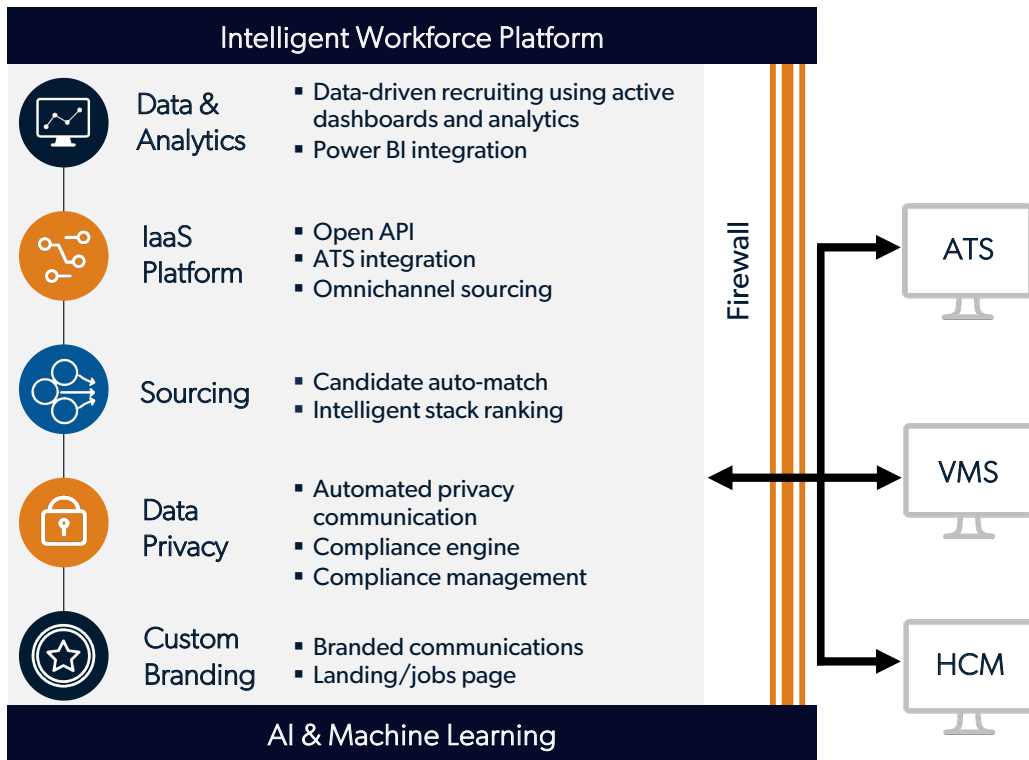
The Intelligent Workforce Platform replaces multiple points of integration across the firewall to bring together all resources and options for accomplishing business outcomes.

may be part of a digital transformation that seems to be on the agenda of nearly every company around the world today. The complex decision process grows simpler with a mature Intelligent Workforce Platform. First, the Workforce Business Partner describes the scope of work, and then the "machine" provides recommendations for getting that work done in the most efficient and effective way.

The output is a product of current machine learning technology. The machine recognizes the elements of the project. Based on successful outcomes of similar projects it has "seen" across a portfolio of organizations, the system arrives at recommendations about different parts of the work. The plan will flow around the detailed tasks involved. One element may be outsourced; another may be automated. Contractors might be recommended to do another part of the work, and employees may own yet another section of the work close to the organization's intellectual property.

Just 10 years ago, this concept may have seemed far-fetched. However, the barrier between today's systems and this fully intelligent functionality is no longer held back by the technology. The machine learning capability is here. The remaining gap is in the training of the machine (i.e., giving the Platform the results from work initiatives to inform how it responds to new requests).

Now's the Time: The Pace of Change Is Accelerating

The world is on a journey to fully automate the work and resourcing decision process. However, human expertise and guidance will remain an essential part of the Model even as automation capabilities grow. That means the Workforce Business Partner will be providing advice based on data that sits inside the Intelligent Workforce Platform.

Analysis and resulting intelligence can take on many forms. For example, it may include comparing the total cost of ownership of various worker types, the financial risk value of giving the work to a service provider or deciding whether to pay services providers based on outcomes versus bringing in contractors on a daily rate. Also, consider the impact of increasing or decreasing an hourly rate or sending work to a worker in a lower-cost location (i.e., nearshore versus offshore).

These options are in reach when the organization understands the internal and external data needed to make the right decisions and finds a way to bring that data into a single, structured environment. That is why having an Intelligent Workforce Platform is critical to achieving the Universal Workforce Model.

PART III

How Does the Journey Begin?

The journey to a full Universal Workforce Model capability begins with simple steps, delves into the practical details of workforce strategy and positively impacts the business from day one. The methodology for mapping that journey draws from a specific diagnostic structure to create a plan that aligns with an organization's unique strengths and challenges.

After reading this section, you should have a better understanding of:

- **What specific, initial activity is needed to start the Universal Workforce Model journey**

- **How the current-state diagnostic is uniquely structured to prioritize actions that most effectively build the Universal Workforce Model**

- **What near-term goals can be established to drive adoption and achieve wins**

FIRST STEPS TO PLANNING THE UNIVERSAL WORKFORCE MODEL

The Universal Workforce Model requires a fundamental change in how leaders view work across an organization, but the initial steps are simple. The first part of that change begins with the company, and it is a big question: What urgent issue does the business face that will bring everyone together?

Starting Point: A Burning Problem Unites All Stakeholders

Any fundamental transformation requires everyone in the C-suite to understand the urgency of their issues concerning work and the workforce. If the Universal Workforce Model is seen as an "HR consideration" or a good "procurement strategy," it will never take hold across the business. Fortunately (or unfortunately for the performance of many organizations), today's business climate brings more urgency than ever to rethink how work gets done.

Thanks to acute shortages of in-demand skills, evolving demand for goods, changing global competition, rapid shifts between remote and onsite work, and enormous economic pressures, getting work done is more complicated than ever. As a result, many organizations feel the effects of their inability to accomplish work where it hurts the most: on the bottom line.

With the profitability and survival of the organization at stake, the push to rethink workforce strategy brings procurement, HR, operations, leadership and every other part of the business into the conversation.

The challenge is that any transformation effort is impossible without a clear and detailed journey to achieve change.

To begin, understand that while the Universal Workforce Model journey leads to a shared vision, the activities and priorities along the way vary according to every organization's business and level of readiness. This variety of demands means there is a broad range of capabilities and perspectives to consider when creating a plan of attack.

A Practical and Detailed Strategy Makes the Difference

The good news is that the methodology behind the Universal Workforce Model tackles the challenges of managing transformation head-on. The process is built on a methodology that uniquely positions companies to take practical actions that lead to the fully realized Model. It is a journey that can span several years, yielding incremental value to the business that will prove essential in the constrained talent marketplace.

What makes the methodology effective for turning a vision into reality? The answer lies in the balance of structure and customization at the journey's outset. What follows are four highlights in the Universal Workforce Model planning process. These elements enable a detailed and actionable roadmap suited to the long-term vision of the organization and the immediate concerns of key stakeholders. Those highlights and unique requirements include:

- The Discovery and Planning Process
- The Diagnostic Framework
- Actionable Results and Prioritization
- The Delivery of Skills to Drive the Work

The Discovery and Planning Process

Planning begins once all stakeholders agree on the need for a new work model. The overall strategic development process covers seven stages, some of which overlap or run concurrently with others, as represented in Figure 4.

The owner of the Universal Workforce Model development process will be a dedicated expert in workforce and business strategy with an objective view. Usually, a third-party strategic partner will be ideal for this role. However, regardless of the positioning of that strategic-development owner, the keys to success will still be a depth of expertise and independence from the internal functional silos. The important thing to know is that the process is intentionally designed to collect input from leaders through a common framework, identify gaps, weigh priorities and create the business case for the strategy.

Through the endeavor, the organization will understand current-state processes, gain a clear view of needs and agree on the most critical priorities from all stakeholders.
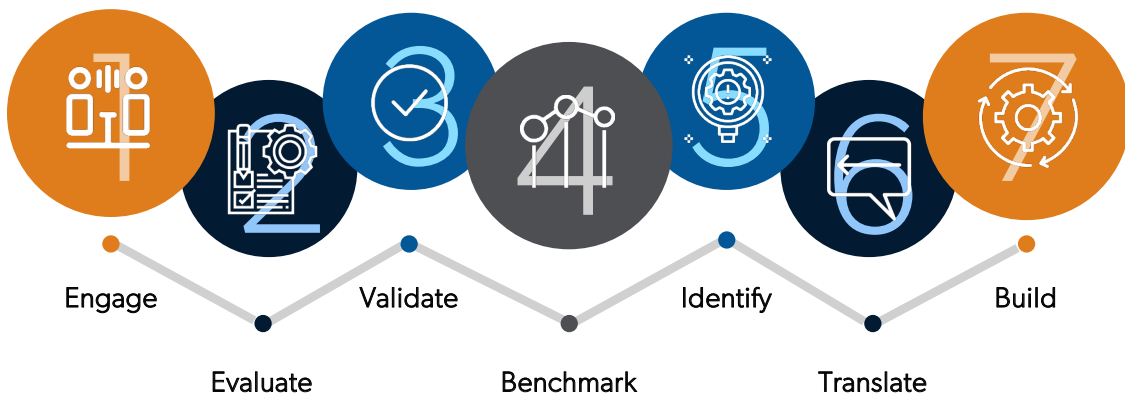
The Diagnostic Framework

The "engage" and "evaluate" phases are driven by a detailed assessment of the organization's current-state capabilities for managing work and the workforce. The evaluation process aims to deliver a diagnostic overview that encompasses the universe of contributing factors, identifies gaps and weighs them based on their importance to the stakeholders.

The diagnostic approach for the Universal Workforce Model specifically focuses on the challenges companies face in prioritizing their recruitment and contingent workforce needs. The proven history of using a diagnostic tool in a workforce strategy context makes it uniquely suitable for adapting to the broad questions behind the Universal Workforce Model.

The diagnostic structure ensures that organizations start the journey on common ground. A simple starting point, drill-down detail and actionable results characterize a methodology that leads to a comprehensive plan to move the organization forward.

Figure 4: Strategic Development Stages at a Glance

Engage   Validate   Identify   Build

Evaluate   Benchmark   Translate

The planning and diagnostic progression, reflected in the diagram above, spans the decision and awareness cycle for launching a Universal Workforce Model strategy.

The diagnostic framework provides a simple starting point for addressing key areas that determine how the organization proceeds on the Universal Workforce Model journey. Those four areas include:

- **Organizational Readiness:** Think about how you get work done today and who makes the decisions that affect this. How do divisional stakeholders and personas interact today, and what technology is in place to support the current activity? How do you approach workforce planning and harnessing market data to inform your hiring decisions?

- **Reputation Management:** How is your business perceived in the market, and will it support the future vision and direction? What initiatives impact the way skills and talent enter your business today and how they are retained? Does your employee experience deliver the engagement required to support your growth?

- **Process and Governance:** How are your hiring policies and legal structures set up? How will they need to

change to support the new operation? How are you collecting and utilizing data to define your business structure and inform your workforce budget planning? Are the appropriate stakeholders empowered to make the right decisions on the best way to get work done?

- **Workforce Acquisition:** Are your supply chain partners aligned with your future plans? Have they been consolidated, and is their performance measured in a way to deliver the best value? Have you clearly defined the competency and behavioral characteristics that will inform your engagement decisions?

Within each quadrant of the framework is a detailed subset of best practice statements and data points that apply to every organization. These data points create a level of detail that reflects an organization's unique strengths and gaps. For example, the deep-dive view of the Process and Governance quadrant in Figure 6 reveals a breakout into 16 best practice areas. Each input allows for an open and nuanced analysis (i.e., a consultant-driven conversation, not simply a multiple-choice answer).

Figure 5: Four Key Assessment Quadrants
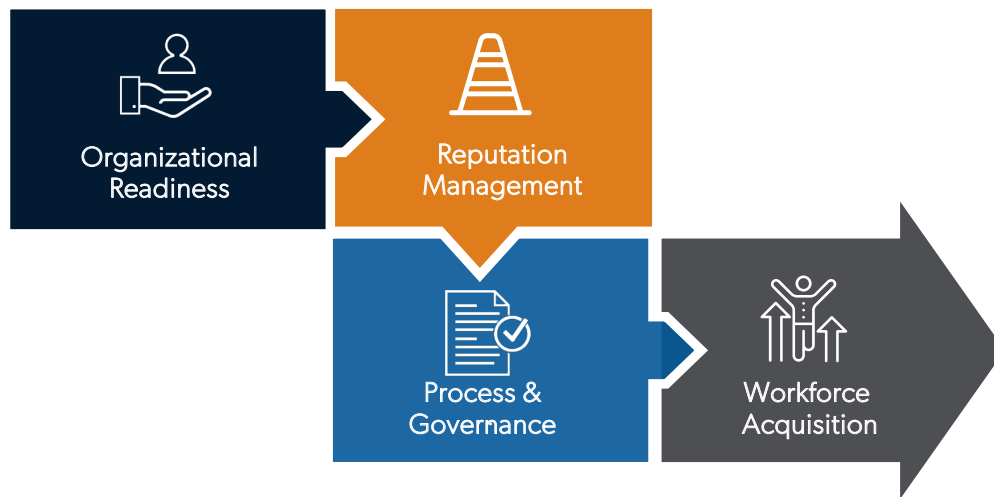
Four quadrants of assessment enable the company to achieve a detailed view of current capabilities and set the stage for starting the Universal Workforce Model journey.

Figure 6: Example of a Detail in a Diagnostic Quadrant

Process & Governance Quadrant *Supported by 16 Best Practice Statements*				
Hiring Element				
Informative, engaging, time-effective and successful hiring process	Process	Expertise	Benchmark	Offer
Legal and Policies Element				
Exposure minimized through supplier, process and contract compliance	Compliance	Audit	Risk	Checks
Management Information Element				
The measurement of key workforce components linked to overall performance	Visibility	Metrics	Strategy	Action
Return on Investment Element				
Cost and capability acquisition optimized to maximize company performance	Retention	Direct Sourcing	Analysis	Investment

A detailed diagnostic structure gives leaders a chance to assess the most critical elements to an effective Universal Workforce Model outcome while preventing them from missing commonly overlooked pitfalls.

Actionable Results and Prioritization

The diagnostic output is a detailed picture that breaks down the current workforce processes across four quadrants, 16 best practice areas for each, and two data points for each of those practice areas (based on level of capability and level of importance to the business) for a total of 128 data points. It then rebuilds the findings into a view from several perspectives, including a gap analysis, a maturity curve and prioritization of needed activities. These interpretations are based on classic consulting and strategic development methods. The outputs set the stage for all analyses to form a unified and simplified action plan.

An example of a gap analysis report is depicted in Figure 7, reflecting critical pain points in each of the four areas of assessment based on performance and importance to the business. Each area sets the stage for prioritizing near-term goals and activities to start the Universal Workforce Model journey.

Figure 7: Example of a Gap Analysis
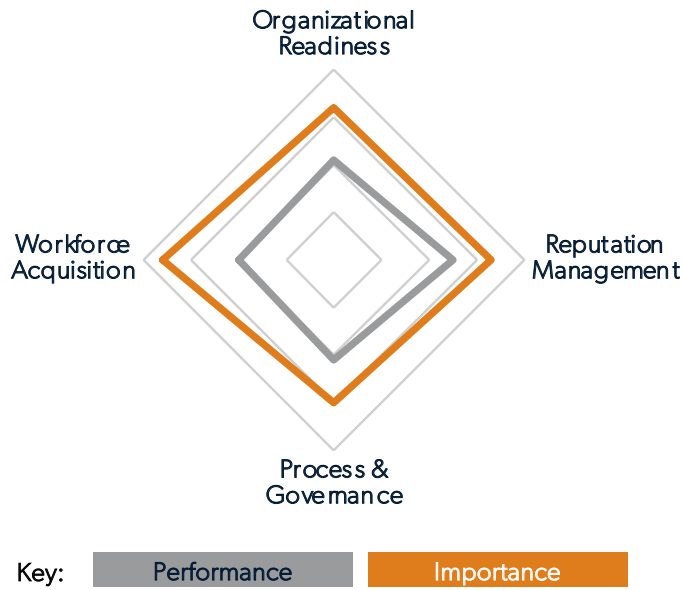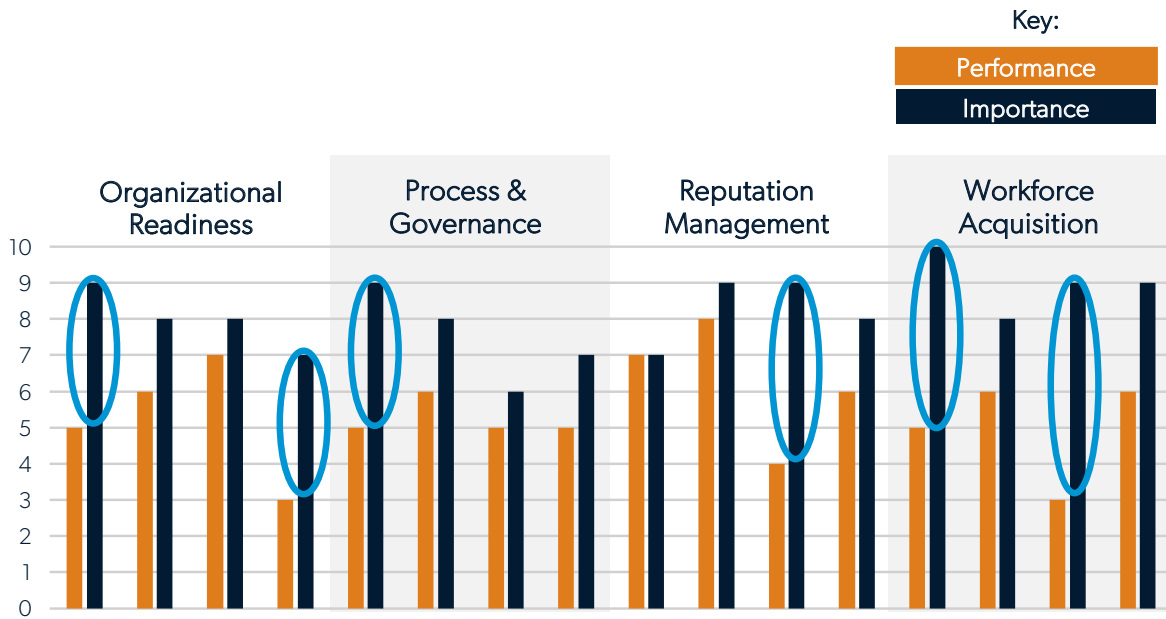
High-level areas of priority help set the stage for creating priorities. Notably, the planning outputs reflected in the diagnostic dashboard encompass both performance gaps and importance to the company, based on expert assessment and stakeholder interviews.

In addition to assessing and analyzing the current state of work and workforce practices across an organization, the diagnostic process also draws on industry data to benchmark findings against an organization's peers in the market. A maturity curve is an output of the planning process. The results help companies prioritize needed actions based on that benchmarking comparison. The maturity curve representation in Figure 8 is an example of how the four areas of the diagnostic can appear in a visual dashboard.

The Delivery of Skills to Drive the Work

The previous highlights represent the detail of the diagnostic framework and output. The final highlight is not a feature but a significant demand of the Universal Workforce Model: securing people and the skills to move the vision forward. As the project gains definition and clear timelines, the organization will arrive at plans for the best way to get work done.

These new paths to outcomes require a range of internal and external partners to source or supply the skills and talent that have been identified.

The emerging skills demands of the Model will impact the supply chain, and there may be opportunities to consolidate and rationalize suppliers or a need to source additional suppliers to align with new demands. In addition, with the evolution of the supplier base, there will almost certainly be a need to reengineer how the company engages partners and how it approaches the skills market.

If a third party can help shape the journey to a Universal Workforce Model and the subsequent delivery of skills required, the new demands may not be a significant issue. Otherwise, the plan will require a dedicated workstream to review, reassess and possibly reeducate the supply chain, supported by an external partner.

Figure 8: Example of a Maturity Curve Based on Diagnostic Results and Benchmarking
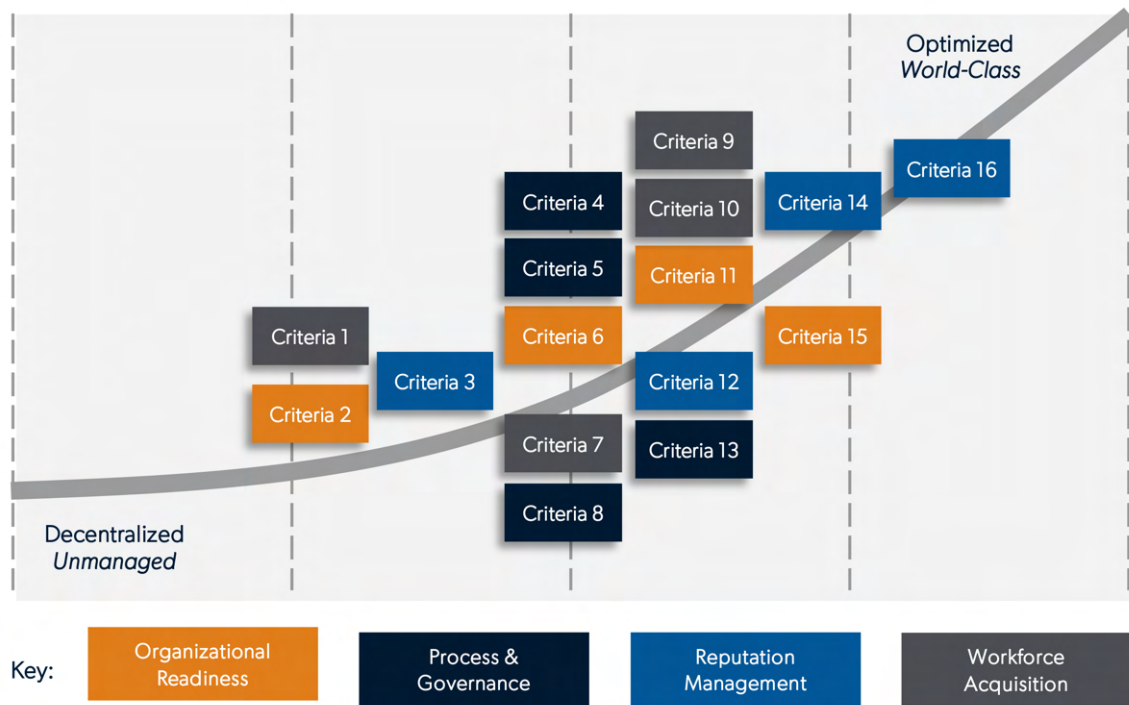
Where does the organization compare to its industry peers? Benchmarked processes create a realistic view of competitive capability based on a maturity curve.

Takeaway: Start with the Burning Platform for Change

The Universal Workforce Model's planning process supports a specific journey of change and transformation. The diagnostic tools and the practices to use them are the keys to creating awareness, understanding and direction. But to return to the initial point, the journey begins when every stakeholder agrees on the urgency for change.

If you are considering the journey, be sure that the company, from HR to procurement, business leaders, the CEO and across the enterprise, is experiencing the challenge that will create change. For example, is the company losing revenue because it can't achieve its goals? Is there a legal challenge or an expansion across locations or product lines? These questions can create a burning platform to bring the business on board.

With the Universal Workforce Model foundations in place, the next chapter investigates how to take the first steps into this future-ready Model and begin reaping the benefits for your organization.

ADOPTING THE MODEL

Once the priorities and roadmap for change are fully developed and agreed upon, the work to operationalize the Universal Workforce Model can begin. While simultaneously moving all parts of an enterprise toward the Universal Workforce Model may appear attractive for all the benefits it could offer, such an approach may not work. A complete implementation of the Model will likely stall due to competing priorities in some parts of the business.

If an enterprise-wide "big-bang" approach is impractical, which in many cases it will be, other options will center around achieving more tactical wins to prove the concept. Identifying a proving ground allows changes on a smaller scale, and it also showcases the benefits and advantages to others in the business. Even after the organization agrees on the concept across functions, this approach will help create champions who can expand internal support for the Model over time.

A Phased Approach Delivers Wins and Support

The advantages of a phased, step-by-step approach include incremental gains in access to skills and talent on the way to delivering the full capability of the Universal Workforce Model. If you are seeking proof-of-concept initiatives, there are numerous options to consider as a starting point. What follows are several examples of early initiatives, along with advantages and challenges for each.

Introduce an Extended Workforce Model

Harmonizing a company's approach to non-permanent hiring is frequently seen as a first step and a quick win that delivers significant cost savings by addressing the "extended workforce paradox" outlined in chapter two. This approach

introduces the Workforce Business Partner role as someone who can engage contingent workers on either a staff augmentation or SOW basis.

- **Advantage:** The work here directly addresses the extended workforce paradox while introducing a single contact as a conduit to multiple ways of getting work done. The effort sets the stage for the natural progression of bringing permanent hiring into the Workforce Business Partner's portfolio later.

- **Challenge:** Extended workforce process improvements may be needed first.

Introduce a Gig Economy to Your Permanent Internal Workforce

Employees' expectations of their employers have evolved dramatically over the last few years, including a focus on greater flexibility in the workplace to support an always-learning environment. Consider introducing a gig economy as an initial step. Gigs are naturally predisposed to a task-based approach that will organically grow this mindset across the organization and help drive internal mobility.

- **Advantage:** Workers benefit from learning opportunities they have volunteered for, and retention increases as they expand their skills and knowledge. The organization "unlocks" previously untapped productivity in the form of additional hours of work.

- **Challenge:** A gig program will require a culture change in many organizations, along with a need for data access and communication capabilities to make opportunities visible across the enterprise.

Adopt an Intelligent Workforce Platform

Technology has evolved to deliver a single view of the workforce supply, collect accurate data across the business and empower teams to utilize its intelligence. A Platform that provides a single view of talent through one integration point will prove well worth the investment as new technologies and data sources join the ecosystem. Being able to review all forms of skills and talent across contingent, permanent, internal or external workers in one place could make your business start to question its current approach. This insight and data should naturally encourage a more open mindset and discussion on the best way to get work done.

- **Advantage:** An Intelligent Workforce Platform that brings all workforce data into view will yield lasting value to procurement, HR and C-suite stakeholders alike.

- **Challenge:** A system to deliver on the complete view of the workforce must enable the simple integration of new sources over time. It must provide actionable intelligence that points to optimal cost and performance outcomes. These qualities require careful attention to selection, timing and budget.

Start With a Small Portion of the Organization

Rather than looking at one implementation across the enterprise, find a division or region as a starting point. For example, identify a leader whose challenges in getting work done have reached a stage where a groundbreaking new approach is their only option. Or, determine the leaders who are naturally predisposed to implementing innovation as trailblazers.

- **Advantage:** Business divisions, departments or locations are historically fertile grounds for starting transformational strategies. Whether streamlining extended workforce processes or introducing a Workforce Business Partner, the limited scope of the project and support of an enthusiastic leader can deliver much-needed success at the outset of the journey.

- **Challenge:** Defining and targeting a project, and building the relationships required to launch it, will take time. Invest early in identifying internal teams that are ripe for improvement.

Beyond the four potential first steps suggested here, there are many other ways to start the Universal Workforce Model journey with a win. The important thing is to begin researching the need and scope of opportunity. Selecting a suitable group or step change to begin the transformation is critical. After the initial step, the journey grows clearer as the transformation gains momentum, benefits are realized and mindsets change.

Looking Forward: Optimizing for the Future

With the Intelligent Workforce Platform in place, the Universal Workforce Model enables future optimization. Since the Model is designed as an active learning system, the organization will draw insight from the data it collects and have the power to act on that information. The key to success is to collect accurate data across the business and empower teams to consume the intelligence it provides. Over time, patterns emerge that inform future decisions with growing accuracy.

If you are leading an organization on the path forward, a focus on continuous improvement will impact several key areas. In addition to boosting your ability to make quicker decisions on the best way to get work done, further efficiency gains will include:

- **Smarter Use of Automation:** Continuously reviewing how you get work done will help you take advantage of the latest automation opportunities, freeing skilled resources from repetitive tasks and increasing productivity.

- **Increased Internal Mobility:** Drive optimization of your internal mobility program to meet the expectations of candidates today and support improved retention.

- **Efficient and Cost-Effective Workforce Utilization:** Embedding a holistic approach to workforce strategy across all facets of the business reveals opportunities for consolidation and economies of scale within the permanent and contingent labor supply chains.

- **Improvement in Diversity, Equity and Inclusion:** Continued focus on objective hiring decisions based on competency and behavioral traits to deliver tasks will increase your ability to achieve a truly diverse, equitable and inclusive workforce.

- **Higher Services Value:** Services providers can be engaged based on performance and delivery data to avoid unnecessary project costs or delays, providing transparency on the value your partners can offer.

With the Universal Workforce Model working across the enterprise, vast amounts of data will be captured, interpreted and translated into decision support material daily. The final decision on how to get the work done requires close collaboration between the Workforce Business Partner and the hiring community. This partnership is based on rules agreed upon throughout the deconstruction of the work process.

There is a journey to achieving this level of partnership. During that time, the hiring community will be familiarizing themselves with this new approach to identifying workforce and resource needs. At the same time, a machine-learning AI functionality within the Intelligent Workforce Platform will introduce automation into the decision-making process and optimize the performance of the Universal Workforce Model.

We are, of course, still dealing with people. The part that expert human operatives must play in acquiring the skills and capabilities to deliver the work will always remain. However, the data-based decisions on the best way to get work done will be made most effectively by technology that can capture, interpret and translate the vast amount of data associated with work and the workforce. The fully mature solution is focused on transforming the nature of work in the future, but the new Model is already taking shape today.

Case Study: Company Proves Value of Changing a Work Model

A global pharmaceutical company with more than 60 locations recognized the need for change. They were experiencing a drop in productivity, rising workforce costs and an inability to access the skills their business growth demanded. The specific area of need centered around the internal legal department.

- *Challenge: Given the lack of comprehensive internal coverage around the globe, and the resulting costly reliance on law firms, the general counsel sought a better return on its $300 million annual departmental spend.*

- *Solution: The company engaged an external partner to identify a better way to get their work done. The partner applied a diagnostic process to define, analyze and improve legal coverage, compliance, client satisfaction, internal talent distribution and legal costs. Findings were benchmarked against the external market. As a result, the delivery process and team structure were redesigned, and a new approach was rolled out.*

- *Result: In 12 months, the general counsel successfully streamlined the service partner network and introduced a more robust internal team structure while driving a projected $80 million in annual savings.*

PART IV

Now's the Time: HR, Business and the Urgency of a New Work Model

Achieving the full potential of the Universal Workforce Model is a journey that yields a positive impact on the organization from day one. The methodology for mapping that path draws from a specific structure to create a strategy that aligns with an organization's unique strengths and challenges.

To be sure, the Model transforms HR, but it is more than just a vision. The first steps of that journey are well within reach today. For example, the Workforce Business Partner role mirrors today's HR Business Partner structure. Likewise, the Intelligent Workforce Platform does not replace HRIS, ATS and VMS technologies; instead, it spans the infrastructures they comprise. And while those changes ultimately lead to a new standard for how HR delivers value, starting that transformation is an effort that is practical and impactful to the business today.

After reading this section, you should have a better understanding of:

- **How HR can introduce agile work design into the organization's culture**

- **What promise the Universal Workforce Model offers to key stakeholders today**

- **What connects the Universal Workforce journey to major priorities such as diversity, equity and inclusion; automation; and smarter use of data and analytics**

PRACTICALLY LINKING
THE UNIVERSAL WORKFORCE MODEL
TO YOUR HR MODEL

By John Boudreau

The Universal Workforce Model portends a substantial evolution in how HR defines its value proposition and leadership.

The Universal Workforce Model reframes today's HR and talent management from today's "employment" lifecycle, with "jobholders" entering, moving within and moving out of a set of "jobs" in a single organization. With more fluid work, the lifecycle still occurs but not within a single organization, not through a series of jobs and not solely for jobholders. This change in the lifecycle transforms traditional HR functions. Here are a few examples:

- **"Employment" planning** is transformed to work and worker optimization, as the Universal Workforce Model reveals new opportunities for work reinvention.

- **Attracting and selecting for fluid work** requires seamlessly integrating multiple systems (procurement, contracting, recruiting, etc.)[24] to attract workers for projects and tasks.

- **Development** now means tracking learning from projects and gigs, non-traditional remote learning from inside or outside traditional learning management systems and stackable credentials rather than formal degrees.[25]

- **Rewards and remuneration** require looking beyond rewards arrayed against "jobs" in a hierarchy and market position to rewarding for projects and capabilities.

Some HR leaders have recognized this trend. For example, in 2015, top HR leaders envisioned the HR profession in 2025 through CHREATE (The Global Consortium to Reimagine HR, Employment Alternatives, Talent and the Enterprise).[26] They identified five forces shaping the future of work and organizations and six necessary future roles.

One of those roles was the "Global Talent Scout, Convener and Coach," who optimizes the relationships among workers, work and the organization, using whatever platform is best. This role was envisioned to encompass several vital areas of focus, including:

- Talent scout and relationship builder
- Developer of communities of talent and "boundaryless" careers
- Nurturer of diverse personal experiences – personal, trusted talent advisor and whole life coach
- Talent platform and contract manager
- Advocate for diversity and inclusion as a critical driver of success

The Future of Work is Agile Experimentation

The most fundamental implication of fluid work and the Universal Workforce Model is to rethink work design as agile experimentation and the HR function as the hub for that innovation. What could be more inclusive than welcoming new and different ideas about work – the thing that your workers arguably know the most about and that matters most to them? What could demonstrate leadership empathy, openness and shared accountability than to give your workers a true "voice" in how their work is designed?

In a 2021 article on work design and agile innovation, Pete Ramstad and I suggested that the best return-to-work policy is, "To all of our valued managers, employees and nonemployee workers: We don't know what the future of work will be. However, we DO know that all of you have learned to innovate continually, as you have crafted your work to meet the unprecedented opportunities and challenges of the pandemic. So, instead of one policy applied to everyone, our 'policy' will be to invite and equip you to design your work through agile innovation and experimentation."[27]

The disruptions of 2020 required workers to be agile and innovative as they redesigned and re-crafted their work, overcame unprecedented work challenges, created new and more productive working arrangements, and became agile in the face of changing circumstances, goals and demands. These changes portend a long-term increase in workers' desire for greater discretion and capability to design their work.

The Universal Workforce Model invites leaders to "retool" the question of agile work design by reframing it using existing agile design frameworks used in product development, marketing, digital transformation or other disciplines. For example, if we see work as a product, and workers as customers, then the analytical tools that marketing uses for agile product design can be applied to agile work design: Customer segmentation tools become employee and applicant segmentation tools. Lifetime customer value tools become lifetime worker value tools.

Agile innovation frameworks follow principles such as:

- Experiment
- Fail fast
- Learn the lessons from failures
- Don't kill questions or ideas too early
- See challenges to the status quo as opportunities

If you have fully embraced agile innovation, you enjoy many advantages in a fluid work environment. Today, your existing agile innovation hubs equip leaders with tools for nurturing lots of ideas while keeping a focus on the overall goal. You equip workers with the freedom and opportunity to ask tough questions, challenge accepted wisdom, listen and translate the voice of customers into new ideas, and fail productively. You celebrate the innovations that fail, understanding that it's necessary to find the ones that are truly transformative.

Why not apply these same ideas to future work design?

What function or discipline should lead and drive agile innovation in work design? HR can become a hub for agile experimentation and learning applied to work design. Rather than HR taking the role of explaining or enforcing policies and ensuring compliance, HR could be accountable for the organization-wide approach to agile innovation in work design.

HR would develop agile tools and frameworks, collaborating with your agile innovation experts to modify existing, successful tools and apply them to work design. HR would lead in equipping and training managers and their workers to apply agile design tools to work design, and evaluate and monitor results. HR would become the repository for lessons learned in targeted experiments and be accountable for integrating and translating those lessons for the entire organization. HR would develop and constantly improve your frameworks and resources to support a system for agile innovation in work design, including what work means, where and when work is done, and how work value is created and shared among organizations, workers and society.

Fluid work and the Universal Workforce Model offer pillars to establish this relationship with the CHRO and HR function.

MEETING STAKEHOLDER DEMANDS: GETTING WORK DONE WHILE DRIVING CHANGE

A strategic transformation journey only lasts if it offers solutions to the challenges faced by the people who bring it to life. The stakeholders touched by any workforce strategy today span the entire business, from line-level practitioners to key executives, including business leaders, the CEO, CPO, CFO and CHRO.

The following is a brief exploration of the unique perspectives key leadership stakeholders bring to the table. Acknowledging and addressing their challenges paves the way for leadership to embrace the Universal Workforce Model and the journey it requires.

The Business Leader: "How do I identify where resources should come from?"

When leveraging people to get work done, most organizations segment the workforce into three broad categories: employees, contingent workers and services providers. Separate channels, policies, processes and systems characterize each channel. So which channel is best and who decides? As a straw poll, we looked at multiple global organizations – leaders and household names across various industries. For 82% of these organizations, the hiring manager or business leader makes this decision, which is the core of the issue. For example, does the hiring manager have the right data and expertise to know the optimal path to get a particular task done?

Once organizations decide which workforce channel to use, they typically rule out other options as a comparison or fail to consider hybrid approaches to optimize results. Managers need objective support and expertise nourished by data to address the issue. They need an ally whose job is to help them navigate the workforce landscape. This guidance is central to the Workforce Business Partner's role within the Universal Workforce Model.

The Chief Human Resources Officer (CHRO): "How can I increase the impact of the workforce for the good of the organization?"

The CHRO typically struggles with two significant concerns: creating impact through people and enabling that human impact through better use of technology.

Impact Through People

The role of the CHRO is to deliver the organization's strategy through people, but the definition of "people" typically refers to employees and not the broader extended workforce. Individuals who are temporary workers, contractors, freelancers or delivering work through services providers or consultancies (typically under an SOW) are rarely the responsibility of the HR department in the same way that employees are. Therefore, the CHRO function only impacts the business through a small proportion of the workforce, limiting its influence.

The Universal Workforce Model expands the CHRO's influence beyond the employee population by bringing the contractors and services providers of the extended workforce into the decision process. This arrangement enables the CHRO to ensure all resources are strategically applied, giving employees the best opportunities to deliver value through their strengths. At the same time, flexible workers take on the activity that best suits their backgrounds, right down to the task level.

Technology Enablement

The CHRO will also look to create impact through the many new technologies currently available. These technologies touch every element of the workforce. For example, they can harness video, automatically source new talent, and offer consumer-grade experiences for applicants and employees. These innovations stem from new AI capabilities that can help deliver the perfect hire and employee experience.

Unfortunately, as mentioned earlier, adopting new workforce technology requires an understanding of a vast, complex and rapidly changing marketplace. It also requires agreement on the right tools; vetting, approval and sign-off; budget; IT department buy-in on integration; information security clearance; and communication and change management. A complicated implementation will follow if the organization chooses to integrate the technology.

As a result, it is usually too difficult, slow and expensive to adopt new workforce technologies, so the talent acquisition or HR function retains the status quo. Such limited innovation creates constant overload for recruiters, stalls improvement of the candidate and employee experience, and slows results on achieving overall talent acquisition goals.

The Universal Workforce Model solves the integration and adoption question that has been holding companies back by utilizing a gateway approach to bringing new technologies and data sources into play. New solutions are easily incorporated into the talent acquisition ecosystem outside the company firewall through the Intelligent Workforce Platform. The Platform architecture then seamlessly brings

those innovations to bear within the organization, making the addition of new technologies a practical option for the talent acquisition function.

The Chief Procurement Officer (CPO) and Chief Financial Officer (CFO): "How do I navigate the extended workforce paradox?"

It is common practice for the nonemployee extended workforce (including temp staff, contractors, freelancers and consultants) to be the responsibility of a procurement function. This setup offers a helpful line of demarcation between employees and nonemployee staff, and procurement is typically best placed to bring downward pressure on managing extended workforce costs.

As covered in chapter two, the extended workforce paradox continuously challenges the CPO's ability to control costs as managers move their workforce spend from mature contingent workforce processes to less-disciplined services spend. The more improvement the CPO makes at controlling contingent workforce costs, the more spend that flows into services procurement, often resulting in a rise in overall costs.

Through the Universal Workforce Model, a decision-making process built around the task and all available

resources replaces the either/or choice of staff augmentation or consultant-based resources. At the same time, the Workforce Business Partner has no reason to move spending to undisciplined processes or take a path of least resistance. Thanks to the new Model, the goal has shifted from securing a resource to achieving an outcome. The unintended consequence of increasing costs is avoided by removing traditional siloes and harmonizing the approach to accessing the workforce.

The Chief Executive Officer (CEO): "Can we just get work done, please?"

The CEO's role is complex and multifaceted, and a large part of that role includes managing an organization's resources to ensure it achieves its objectives. Concerning the workforce, a CEO wants to see a model that unites the business leadership to unlock and maximize people's potential while managing costs and getting work done the best way possible.

Indeed, these are achievable goals. Yet, while innovative leaders seek strategies to maintain that people advantage, CEOs are, and must be, skeptical. So how does an organization maximize human potential today and provide proof through tangible results? And how does the organization build credibility for sustaining a journey that will navigate the complexities of fluctuating and unpredictable markets?

The Universal Workforce Model creates a credible plan of continuously increasing value by delivering data and human insight, all in the context of what matters most: business outcomes. Remember, when traditional performance metrics like cost-of-hire and time-to-fill might not catch the CEO's attention, the total delivery on a particular project will.

Whether opening a new facility, creating a business line or pivoting to a new market need, the Universal Workforce Model is uniquely aligned to connect resources to outcomes.

DON'T WAIT FOR THE FUTURE: THE JOURNEY STARTS NOW

We are proposing a transformation in how we bring people into organizations to get work done. If your organization faces workforce challenges, and nearly every company around the world does, then this is a move that cannot wait. Workforce transformation is not a vision of the future; it is a journey that begins today.

Why now?

Consider the economic and social forces at work. Organizations continue to emerge from a global pandemic that has compelled business leaders worldwide to think differently about getting work done. A 2021 survey found that 71% of CEOs are undergoing workforce or talent transformation,[28] and we see previously unchallengeable elements of the working culture, such as location and full-time presence in an office, being redefined around us every day.

How Things are Different Today: A Convergence of Challenges

While transformation is not a new idea in workforce strategy, what is new is a convergence of several urgent issues that can bring the business together to solve. Among them are unprecedented skills shortages, the necessity of agility, other drivers for task-oriented work, and the arrival of data and intelligent decision-making as table stakes for organizational design and in competing for talent.

Skill Shortages and Workforce Agility

Perhaps the most surprising aspect of the coronavirus pandemic within the world of work has been the global skills shortage that arose in 2021. Unfortunately, even as the market changes, many workers who left the market are not returning, and the shortage will remain a stubborn reality.

In the Universal Workforce Model, a Workforce Business Partner will work closely with their leadership and act as the single access point for the entire workforce – permanent hires, contractors and consultants. The Model directly addresses skills shortages by breaking down workforce silos when hiring, keeping our options open and considering hybrid solutions to help get work done. So now is the perfect time to move to the new Model.

New Trends Pushing Toward Task-Based Planning

Another essential element of the Model is a move to "task-based" strategies for planning resources and getting work done. Chapter three explored the benefits of deconstructing jobs and moving away from a role-based approach. A task-based approach enables the following.

Trend 1: Automation and AI

Optimizing opportunities for how automation and AI can support the workforce and promote efficiencies depends on deconstructing jobs and identifying the core tasks.[29] In the past, companies viewed automation as a way to offload

simple, high-volume activities from human laborers. In that capacity, workers often considered it a threat to their jobs.

Today, AI has opened up the scope of automation to a wide variety of tasks that span high and low skill levels. Notably, it does not threaten or replace a worker's entire job. Instead, modern, AI-driven automation takes on certain cumbersome aspects of a job. For example, an automated solution can screen resumes for a recruiter who previously had to review hundreds or even thousands of resumes for every role manually. Automation frees the person to focus on the more strategic or challenging parts of their position. The Universal Workforce Model provides a task-based view uniquely suited to identifying where automation can best take on pieces of the work rather than replace an entire job role.

Trend 2: Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

A diverse, equitable and inclusive workforce is a core expectation for today's successful company. But unfortunately, fighting the biases that hinder progress is not easy at any level and requires constant attention and action.

Indeed, traditional role-based recruitment is susceptible to unconscious bias, but structured, task-based interviewing helps address that challenge. The process is much easier to measure, evaluate and score objectively as recruitment practices replicate existing structures and workforce demographics. A task-based Model promotes a diverse, equitable and inclusive workforce as it focuses on what needs to be achieved and the competencies of the relevant individual to deliver on that goal.[30]

A task-based approach, coupled with a holistic view of the workforce, also breaks down boundaries by promoting flexibility in terms of hours, locations and working practices. Once again, the focus is on achieving the task and not restricting work to dated parameters, such as working hours and location.

Trend 3: Internal Gig Opportunities and Current Employee Recruitment

A "gig," usually defined as a part-time or short-term assignment, is essentially a task. This approach makes it easier to offer the tasks as gigs for existing employees – internal gigs. In our experience, many organizations see internal recruitment as a process characterized by rules and restrictions that ultimately hinder internal movement.

As a result, employees in many organizations know they can find an external job more easily than a different job within their company. Internal gigs are an easy way to benefit the organization and the individual. The key is to think about the task that needs to be completed and offer the opportunity to existing employees.

Trend 4: The Arrival of Data-Driven Intelligence in Everyday Decision-Making

The Intelligent Workforce Platform has arrived, which is good because we need it. The level of expectation from business leaders concerning data and analytics has heightened. Leaders expect decisions to be data-led, and the scope, accuracy and immediacy of the information create a challenge when the workforce is siloed. Data is typically stored in multiple systems for existing employees, external applicants, contractors and consultants.

These isolated systems represent distinct workforce categories, but they do little to inform the best path to accomplish work. Transformation is needed to determine the tasks that need to be completed and then consider the best options to achieve them by understanding the capabilities, costs and risks across all workforce categories.

The Intelligent Workforce Platform delivers the data-driven functionality needed to inform how companies approach work. The Platform links to external data feeds to provide a broad view of the external workforce. It houses information about existing employees, previous applicants and non-permanent employees, and it harnesses AI to interpret the data and support the Workforce Business Partner.

Technologies have arrived to deliver this capability, and when embraced by the business and fully implemented, the Intelligent Workforce Platform will become central to how organizations get work done.

Starting Point: Ask the Right Questions to the Right People

While the journey to a mature Universal Workforce Model may take time, the development strategy delivers a positive impact every step of the way. That journey starts simply, with leadership agreeing to ask how work can be done better across the organization.

Once that conversation begins, the vision will start to take shape. You can – and probably should – start in one division, geography or function. However, the conversation will need to elevate across more than one department to gain meaningful support and sponsorship.

Executive leadership, procurement, HR and line-of-business decision-makers need to decide to act. They may not yet agree on the first step, but they must be open to a discussion. Today, that case is more common than ever, as nearly every element of business is changing. So then, it may be time to engage a resource with deep knowledge in workforce strategy to help set the stage for engaging in the initial assessments and strategy development effort. Any partner in the endeavor must have a credible background in the worlds of talent acquisition, workforce management, business leadership, HR and procurement alike.

The world of work will continue to evolve and change, with many positing that the pace of change will only increase. The Universal Workforce Model cannot predict what the world of work will look like in the decades to come. However, it will enable companies to gain a competitive edge through organizational readiness and define a path to get work done more effectively to achieve the business results we all desire.

Start the conversation today because now is the time. Once the conversation starts, the journey begins.

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Head of Strategy, Allegis Global Solutions

Bruce Morton has more than 40 years of experience in the human capital industry and is well known as a global workforce design and talent acquisition expert. He has designed, implemented and managed large enterprise resourcing solutions across many different parts of the globe, and he has been recognized as HR Thought Leader of the Year by HRO Today both in EMEA and in the US. His book, "Redesigning the Way Work Works," available on Amazon, addresses the challenges of the new world of work based on his deep practical experience and innovative perspective.

ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

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Senior Research Scientist and Professor Emeritus at University of Southern California

John W. Boudreau is recognized as a leading global visionary on the future of work and organization. He has produced over 200 publications, including more than 10 books, and his research has been featured in Harvard Business Review, the Wall Street Journal, Fortune and Business Week. His research studies and field research address the future of work and the global HR profession, work automation, HR measurement and analytics, decision-based HR, executive mobility, HR information systems, and organizational staffing and development. Boudreau is a professor emeritus of management and organization and a senior research scientist with the Center for Effective Organizations at the Marshall School of Business, University of Southern California.

Ewan Greig

Senior Manager of Workforce Solutions, Allegis Global Solutions

Ewan Greig has over 20 years of experience, encompassing traditional recruitment services through to MSP, RPO and SOW solutions. Using design thinking principles, he now works with teams to harness data analytics, combined with expert people and delivery teams, to impact and drive strategic workforce solutions.

Jessi Guenther

Vice President of Client Delivery, Allegis Global Solutions

Jessi Guenther oversees North America operations and delivery excellence for customers. In her more than 25 years with Allegis Group companies, including AGS and Aerotek, she's led teams across the globe in recruiting, organizational development, operations and strategic leadership. She was also instrumental in expanding AGS' MSP business into Canada, Europe, Asia and India.

Sarah Wong

Vice President, APAC Region, Allegis Global Solutions

Sarah Wong is responsible for building and growing AGS' RPO and MSP business in the Asia-Pacific region, as well as in continuing to drive customer satisfaction and excellence. She has over 25 years of experience developing and managing meaningful recruitment and workforce solutions, and 20 years of experience in RPO.

"For years, the job description has been the fundamental currency of hiring and employee performance. Today, that is changing. The actual work being done is defined by outcomes, not roles. … The time is now to reinvent the HR profession. HR has been talking about what it is for years and never had the C-suite attention or the capability or urgency to do something big. Now it does."

Dave Ulrich, Co-Founder & Principal, RBL Group

"Now more than ever, it is important for organizations to clearly consider all of their options to get their critical work done. Congratulations to the authors for tackling this important topic head on."

Barry Asin, President, SIA | Staffing Industry Analysts

"The Universal Workforce Model provides a unique angle on the roles of procurement and HR in the future of work. It's a practical perspective on a transformation that is already happening today."

Dawn Tiura, President, Sourcing Industry Group, SIG University

"For years, Procurement, HR and business leaders have been forced to struggle with an incredibly complex set of talent acquisition and workforce challenges. Applying a different mode of thought and a new model to rethink, reimagine, and redesign today's workforce has the potential to bring the focus back on the work itself."

Arkadev Basak, Partner, Everest Group

"Companies face immense pressures as they adjust to the ever-changing workforce. What's important moving forward is that they treat workforce challenges as a priority across the entire business. The concept of the Workforce Business Partner doesn't replace the work that HR, hiring managers, recruiters, and staffing and talent solutions partners do, but it provides the impetus that enables them to work smarter and with more agility on the journey to a Universal Workforce Model."

Ken Brotherston, Chief Executive, TALiNT Partners