



2021 HIRING AND WORKPLACE  
CULTURE

# TRENDS REPORT

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Technically<sup>®</sup>

*TIPS AND  
GUIDANCE ON  
HOW TALENT  
ATTRACTION AND  
RETENTION  
CHANGES NOW*

*Now what?*

# AFTER CRISIS, WORKPLACE CULTURE MATTERS MORE

Corporations were invented 400 years ago to capitalize investments. Nonprofits were devised to incentivize donations. The LLC was created to defend shareholder interest.

None were designed for employee value first. In some sectors and at some times, unions did that work. Today, the most widespread tool for securing the interests of the people behind organizations is a fuzzy concept we call “workplace culture.”

Following a year with as much turmoil as 2020, we all could use a bit of stability. For workplace culture builders, and anyone developing a hiring and retention strategy, we must consider how much stability we can offer professionals.

You know why this is important. For an increasing portion of the American economy, no longer is the ship, nor the inventory, nor even the machine the most valuable asset of an organization. It's your people. How those people interact, how they identify, what mission, vision and values motivate them, and why they show up everyday — these are the questions that define company culture.

In this, Technical.ly's inaugural Hiring and Culture Trends report, we pull together our journalism, client interviews and industry watching to give you a foundation in how you can be best prepared as a workplace culture, HR, hiring and operations professional to hire and retain your workforce.

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Our  
INTRODUCTION

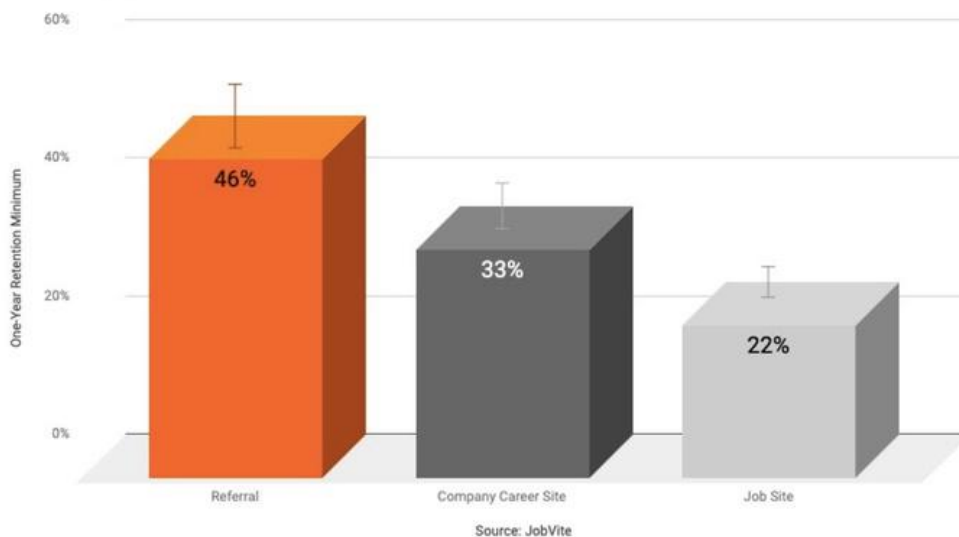
The likelihood an employee will stay for at least one year at an organization is doubled if that person is informed about company culture. It might remind you of the old HR pro joke:

A man is given the choice between spending the afterlife in Heaven or Hell. The Devil says, "Give us a chance, Hell isn't as bad as you've heard." The man agrees to take a visit, and he is shocked to find a beautiful setting with everything he could want. The Devil says: "A lot of people just don't like the humidity!!" Excited, the man decides to choose Hell. When he shows up on his first day, Hell is nothing like what he had visited — there are flames and threats of torture. The man asks The Devil, "Why is Hell so different now!?" The Devil replies coolly, "Oh, well, we were just recruiting you!"

In 2020, intertwined crises in public health, racial justice, economic activity, national politics and climate change forced organizations like never before to confront who they were. Nice-sounding claims of mission, vision, values, manufactured employee value propositions and inauthentic "woke capitalism" posts of Black Lives Matter proved little. In contrast, the organizations that invested critical thought on those topics saw real gains. This should be a wakeup call for people professionals and team culture leaders: Return to the foundations of why professionals want to work at your organization.

Referrals from your employees (and amplified through employer brand marketing) will better qualify informed jobseekers — but only if the story told about your org values are authentic.

Percentage of Sourced Candidates Retained for One-Year Minimum



*Candidates informed about workplace culture and organizational dynamics last longer. Employer brand marketing is an effort to add a multiplier effect to one-to-one employee referral programs.*

# Return to your FOUNDATION

Assess your company's Mission, Vision and Values. During the crises of 2020, did your organization follow through with them? What team metrics do you follow that align? Welcome constructive feedback from your team on your employer value proposition.

Two-thirds of growth-stage tech firms told Technical.ly in an informal survey that they added new diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives in 2020. Not all these efforts are created equal.

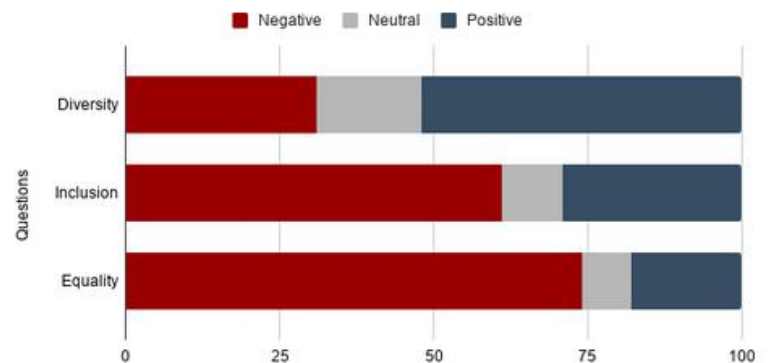
“Where are you casting your net?” That’s how **Inclusiva** consultant **Uva Coles** put it.

Built on years of our reporting, Technical.ly assesses efforts to diversify organizations and workforces by grouping those efforts into three broad approaches: (1) **future pipeline** (from youth through higher ed); (2) **workforce development** (upskilling, reskilling and other career changers) and (3) **organizational dynamics** (hiring, retention and workplace culture efforts that support existing diverse professionals).

To Coles, and other diversity consultants, DEI efforts must be understood as both a vital business case, and a moral imperative, for them to last and thrive. But one lesson from 2020 is that if an organization is not thinking critically about its efforts to diversify its workforce, business necessity and moral imperative aren't the only consequences: Current staff will increasingly demand it. According to a 2020 McKinsey report, just half (52%) of employees surveyed viewed positively progress on workplace diversity, and three-quarters (74%) viewed negative progress on workplace equality.

So what do you do? If you don't already have one, forming a diversity committee is both cliché and necessary (find tips on next page). You can start with a thorough evaluation of what you are or aren't doing in those three categories.

How do you rate the progress your organization's initiatives are having on improving the following:



Data from McKinsey "Diversity Wins" report; May 2020

## How to diversify your talent pipeline



**Future Pipeline**  
Youth training



**Workforce Development**  
Career changers



**Organizational Dynamics**  
Hiring, retention, culture

# Audit your DEI COMMITMENT

You must go beyond platitudes. This is the issue of our era, and your workforce will demand the progress that your business needs. Here's the start of what to do about it.

# Improve your DIVERSITY COMMITTEE

Here is your game plan for the very first step on your never-ending journey to a greater commitment to diversity.

Committees have a reputation for falling to inaction.

By design, they're often filled with competing goals and perspectives, and they aren't always the top priority of their members. It can be hard to determine when a leader is taking a complex issue seriously with a committee, or when that issue is being buried in meetings. As comedian Milton Berle is said to have put it: "A committee is a group that keeps minutes and loses hours."

This question of whether your committee is a force or farce takes on special meaning when the subject is dire and structural — like representation and inclusion, or lack thereof, in your workplace.

Racial inequality is again taking its rightful place as an urgent issue for founders, CXOs and people operations leaders across the country (and world). That means new workplace diversity committees are being launched, and existing ones are being revisited. Employee resource groups, task forces and, yes, committees are not themselves mistakes. The question is what happens because of them — whether Berle's 20th century quip remains apt or not.

To get tips on doing this better, Technical.ly interviewed **Whitney A. White**, who runs innovation firm **Afara Global**, and **Angie Jean-Marie**, the director of advocacy and engagement at **TIME'S UP**, the anti-harassment nonprofit.

- **Consider: How involved is top-level leadership?** Is your company's diversity program an afterthought or is it as central as any other company initiative?
- **Look at your company's longest-tenured and most senior leaders.** Do they reflect the communities your organization serves?
- **White people should be featured prominently in your diversity efforts, White confirms.** Though it's unique to your own staff preferences, White says it can be successful to have these initiatives led by white employees "in consultation with those with the lived experience" the committee is addressing.
- **Consider retaining outside experts, consultants or assessors.** "We can't see the backside of our own heads," said White.
- **Compensate effort beyond responsibilities.** If this is an ongoing committee that goes beyond the existing scope of your team (that is, if you're including perspectives beyond, say, someone in human resources), then compensate that additional effort.
- **Set clear goals.** Are you intending to close a pay gap, or change staff makeup or the look of a leadership team? Do you have other culture or processes you're looking to change? Set deadlines. These should be able to be either met or missed. What happens after?
- **Be transparent.** Share with your team and other stakeholders what your goals are.
- **You will never be done.** There is no end destination. After certain goals and deadlines are met, there will be new ones.

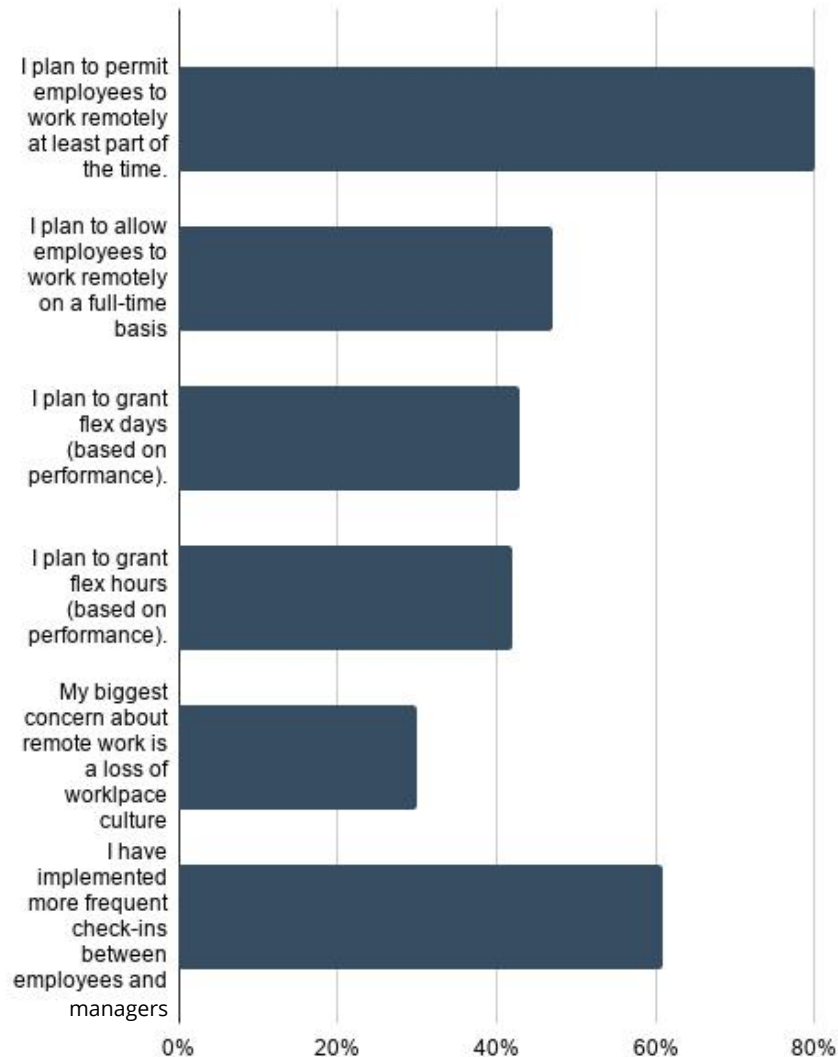
In April 2020, an estimated two-thirds of all Americans were working from home. The pandemic caused a remarkable surge in an activity that had steadily become more popular as web-powered communication became more stable and normalized.

Technical.ly quickly spotted a kind of sorting among the employers and hiring managers with whom we spoke. As it became clearer that this remote necessity would last long enough to result in permanent behavior change, companies seemed to identify with one of three broad approaches to work being done offsite:

- **Remote flexible:** Employers would offer some range of openness to work being done outside the office, allowing them to hire anywhere but still prioritizing those who live in proximity.
- **Remote first:** Employers would prioritize hiring without geography in mind, while seeing close proximity as a "bonus."
- **Remote only:** Employers would be entirely agnostic to geographic location. Employers broke leases or opted not to renew them.

In most cases, employers reported that this was just an acceleration of existing trends. But there were dramatic rethinks, too. In short, every company needed a clear policy. **We recommend employers take a firm stand in one of these three remote categories.**

## How do employers plan to incorporate remote work post COVID-19?



Source: Gartner, July 2020

Confirm remote  
**FLEXIBILITY**

Whether your company will be remote flexible, remote first or remote only, you must have a clear stance for who and where you plan to recruit. There isn't a right answer, just the right choice for you.

# Build your TEAM CULTURE VIRTUALLY

Company culture is a way of describing unwritten rules that guide behavior at an organization.

It's about how things get done, how ideas are shared and who will thrive in the workplace. Mission and vision statements and value words all help. Good ones help explain those unwritten rules — others are “just words painted on a wall,” said **Beth Perkins**, an HR consultant.

Like a vacant lot, culture is always growing, whether you're intentional or not, says Perkins, an HR veteran who was most recently the director of people and culture at 40-person digital product agency **O3 World**. You can end up with weeds or a cultivated garden. Culture can guide healthy behavior, or it can breed toxicity.

There is no end destination. Good cultures can turn rotten, just like that garden lost to weeds. Organizational leaders need to offer ceaseless attention and care, notes **Natalie Vittese**, the people and culture manager at **xtraChef**, a 30-person operations management platform serving the hospitality and restaurant industry.

Culture building can feel natural to many people professionals under normal circumstances. But the forced all-remote workplaces we're now leading due to the COVID-19 pandemic has made this trickier still. Technical.ly asked advice on building team culture virtually from Perkins and Vittese, both of whom have worked at organizations with strong in-office culture and all-remote teams.

Whether you've returned to an office or not, you need strengths in virtual culture building.

Here is your game plan for improving your skills in developing and supporting organizational culture virtually. Whether or not you've returned to an office, remote culture is here to stay.

- **Hallways are magic.** Remember the serendipity and space for creation that can take place in in-person offices. Play games, make jokes or anything else that was your custom in any environment.
- **It starts with leadership but should go beyond.** Culture begins with founders and leaders but at its best culture extends beyond any individual.
- **Go into the Zoom meeting early.** Perkins advises that organizational leaders should make it a point to get to video meeting just a few minutes early to allow for chit-chat.
- **Don't force what you did in-person to the virtual realm if it doesn't translate well.** Recognize the strengths of virtual environments. That will mean much more asynchronous work; start and end times may range more. You may change your all-time and one-on-one meeting schedules. Trust.
- **Experiment.** Try new approaches and ideas. Be OK if something doesn't work.
- **Spend time on people.** Remote environments make it very easy to operate even more efficiently than in-person. It's OK to talk about people and feelings and experiences. It's crucial.
- **Encourage affinity groups.** Whether people form bonds around cooking or parenting or about their backgrounds or living situations, these bonds are powerful. Don't mistake them for distractions.
- **Check your blindspots.** Virtual environments are easier for people to feel isolated or unsupported. This is especially true if your organization lacks diversity among its leadership.

Crisis gives permission. If your office culture was more rigid than you wanted, if you're prioritizing the wrong goals or you need a reorganization, the time is now.

After a dramatic series of crises like what took place in 2020, organizations must assess what matters most — outputs, not the inputs. In conversations with CXOs, people professionals and other company leaders, here's what we hear companies doing to shuffle this focus:

- **Reassess why your product and services matter.** How will the world change after the pandemic in ways that you can become more valuable? Grow now to serve needs you see in the future.
- **Evaluate how you track performance.** Are you satisfied with your project and task management efforts? How is your quarterly goal tracking (EOS; KPIs; OKRs, etc.)? What are your weekly check-in and annual performance checks?
- **Embrace asynchronous work.** This is best for experienced and high-performing teams. Remote work ought to remind you that individual work can take place whenever is best for that individual. Coordinate on collaborative meetings, otherwise use deadlines, clear metrics and goals to give space.
- **Use the office as a tool.** Get your plan now to shake up stuffy office culture. Make the office an experience. Coordinate team meetings to maximize collaborative time together; preserve certain "get stuff done" days to ship deliverables. Prioritize perks that benefit team building.



Above, a Technical.ly conversation on hiring during a recession, with (clockwise) Jenna Frey, Whitebox; Chris Wink, Technical.ly; Rachel Kargas, Pie Insurance; Jenna Frey, Whitebox; Mawulom Nenonene, LTSE and Joe Gomez, Guru. Below, the Technically Media team in December 2020.



## Focus on OUTPUTS

After a year of crises, this is your opportunity to shake organizational culture to focus on what matters most: results. Take a hard look at how your teams perform now, knowing you have a chance to shape for the better.



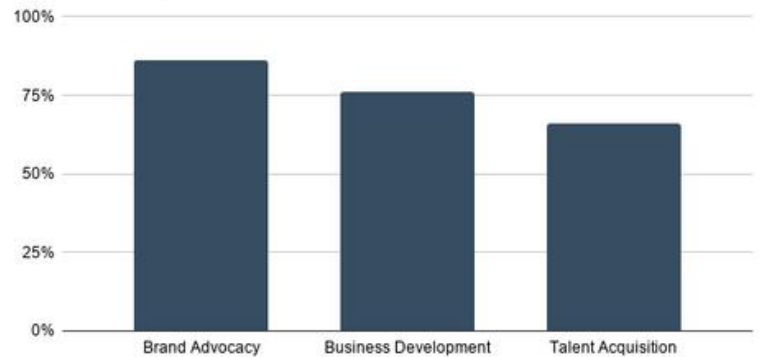
Employee experience can start before a professional even realizes they might want to work at your organization — that realization gave rise to branding. Employee experience can extend far beyond employment, too.

Almost a quarter of professional services firms maintained a formal alumni network of former employees for at least a decade, according to a 2017 analysis from industry firm **Conenza**. Others did so informally through peer networks. Most companies officially sanctioned them for reasons like brand advocacy, business development and talent acquisition (those so-called "boomerang employees" and a recognition of the employer brand value). Many individual professionals report they are also a recognition of the humanity in work. Simply, we like to work with people we like, and we don't want to lose those relationships when we move on for good reason.

This old concept is getting new life among a new generation of growth firms and after a year of stressful chaos. We all could use a bit of humanity.

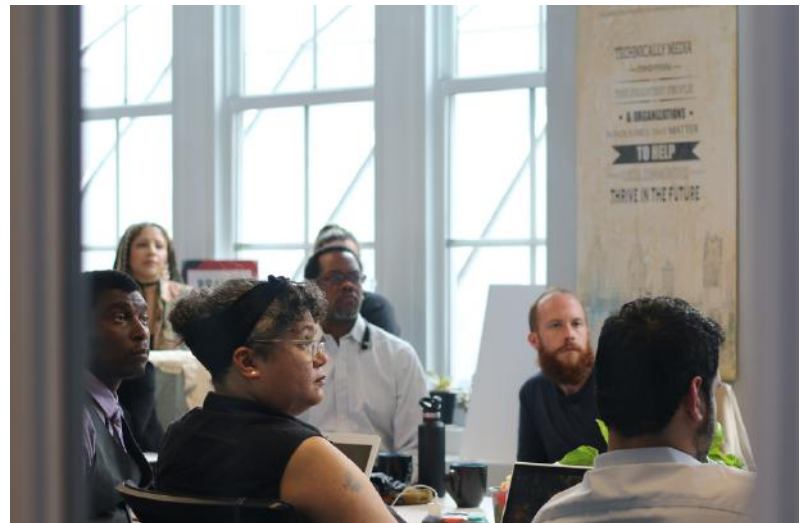
Whether you have a formal alumni network or have considered engaging one, now could be the time to invest the time. Start with those former employees you know best; what would they find valuable and enjoyable? Build a plan, now; what could our organization do in the future? Slack channels, Facebook groups, newsletters and Twitter lists are common. An annual gathering is common, as are more frequent happy hours. In all, consider the accountability of treating your employees well enough that they'll always be a part of the team.

### Why do companies maintain alumni networks?



Source: Conenza's 2017 Alumni Program Benchmarking Report

*Above, companies with existing employee alumni networks report various benefits. Below, former and current Technical.ly teammates gather together for our own annual in-person alumni event, last held February 2020.*



## Consider your ALUMNI

Following a year of distance, it's time to remember the humanity. Invest in your employee experience, from applicant to alumni.

## IN CONCLUSION

# WILT OR RISE

Set aside business as usual. Your playbook from 2019 is as dated as any year-old strategy could be. Your applicants, employees and other stakeholders are living through one of the most disruptive years in a generation or more. They're expecting, and deserving, something responsive to the moment. What can you do in response? Over the last year, Technical.ly has interviewed hundreds of business leaders

and people professionals representing many of the fastest-growing companies in the American economy. There is a sense of great disruption, and enormous opportunity. Many organizations are stumbling in the face of crisis. Others are seeking to rise to the occasion.

This inaugural **Technical.ly Hiring and Workplace Culture Report** was a synthesis of many of the most common responses we are seeing take place. This is a chance for you to be inspired and reminded of what to do next. We'd love to help more. Feel free to contact me for a conversation on working together.

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