

The New World of Talent Mobility: Flexibility Rules



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Internal talent mobility has become a high priority. Not only do companies have many new projects to staff, but the process also reduces recruiting costs, gives hiring managers a new pool of candidates, and dramatically improves employee development. But despite these enormous benefits, a Deloitte study showed that more than half of employees think it's easier to find a new job outside their company than inside. And recruiters, who are often paid to find candidates, are often kept away from internal candidates.

And now that this process is picking up speed, companies are realizing they have a lot to learn. Only 6% of respondents indicated that they are proficient in internal talent mobility, according to Deloitte's 2019 Global Human Capital Trends study.

Talent Mobility in the Pandemic: More Urgent Than Ever

The pandemic has only increased the need to move the right people in the right role quickly and effectively. Our research shows that more than 40% of U.S. workers have changed jobs, managers, or roles in 2020. Companies need to quickly rebalance workloads from areas that see decreased demand to others with increased need. Indeed, our [pandemic response study](#) showed that quickly hiring and redeploying people has the most significant impact on financial success of 53 practices studied. Staffing up is critical because the pandemic is an economic transformation, not just a public health crisis. Our data shows that organizations that quickly hire and redeploy needed talent are 4.4 times more likely to meet or exceed financial targets and 5.3 times more likely to provide meaningful work to the workforce.

Many companies stepped up in a big way to rebalance talent. Norton Healthcare, for example, trained non-clinical people to be deployed as receptionists to ramp up for an onslaught of COVID-19 patients. Walmart and Amazon added 250,000 new employees to their books in record time in order to

meet skyrocketing delivery demands.¹ Schneider Electric and Unilever are using talent marketplaces to facilitate an internal rebalancing of their talent, helping employees find work within the organization where it is most needed. Danone's leaders had to learn how to rebalance people at speed when a production change in Mexico City couldn't be accomplished in person as planned; the company trained Mexican factory workers via Zoom instead of sending specialized engineers from overseas. Sutter Health redeployed more than 1,000 nurses within days from surgery units to other areas as needed; and then these professionals were sent back again to their usual assigned units when surgeries were permitted again. Delta had 40,000 employees take voluntary leave so they could be redeployed from low-need roles like flight attendants to higher-demand roles like reservation agents.

While these are great examples of companies doing this well, our research also shows that only about one in 20 respondents thought their organizations excelled in redeploying people to different roles - so there is much work to be done. Read more about this in our [business resilience study](#).

From Rigid Career Ladders to Agile Development

A few years ago, few were talking about talent mobility. Many organizations were building complicated career paths and competency frameworks, using heavy-handed succession management processes with months-long, paper-rich talent reviews.

But today, roles are shifting quickly, skills become obsolete faster than and organizations need to find people for new roles or projects rapidly. At the same time, employees expect to try new work, learn adjacent skills, work with new managers and teams and take international assignments. So, the old model of planning career moves out doesn't work anymore.

We see three options of talent mobility: planned, facilitated, and agile.

Planned	Facilitated	Agile
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Linear career paths • Planned and managed • Functional in nature 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vertical and horizontal • Facilitated, not planned • Based on aspirations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On-demand need-based • Changeable quickly • Gig and Project oriented
Pros and Cons		
+ Easy to understand, Modeled in job market	+ Supported by leaders, Fits succession needs	+ Badly needed today, New model of work
- Long time to build, May become out of date	- Requires cultural shift, Changes role of manager	- Demands new systems and new company culture
Processes Needed		
Development Planning	Development Coaching	Transparent workforce plan
Self-assessment, Clear career goals	Self-assessment, Purpose and direction	Development need, Current passions

Figure 1: Three Options for Talent Mobility

Planned Mobility: The traditional career management model where employees define annual development plans where they want to go, and managers help guide them there. It’s around jobs (not projects or work) and keeps people within their functional areas. These rigid career paths are only upward, not lateral or in different directions.

This legacy approach is still very common, but it doesn’t help broaden the talent pool or surface unlikely candidates. It is also prone to bias; managers tend to go with whom they know.

Facilitated Mobility: This model is similar to the planned model but includes stretch assignments or non-vertical moves for employees. These moves are usually business-driven and occur because someone is tired of their job or the business needs a hole filled. This is a more dynamic process, and most companies do it in a very ad-hoc way. This is a common practice, but it’s often driven by politics (who you know or a person’s internal brand), so this model may or may not result in the best business outcome. But with a good talent mobility platform, it can become better. Many HR leaders study patterns of mobility to figure out which moves have the highest potential for success.

Agile Mobility: This model is typically used when people work on multiple projects or join various teams or initiatives. Organizations are structured more like a professional services firm and less around a strict hierarchy of jobs and functions. Over time, all companies will be moving in this direction, but

for most, this is a new approach.

Agile talent mobility is quite common *within a job function*. In IT, HR, finance, or facilities, people often move around from project to project all the time. But how many IT managers move into marketing or vice versa? A strong data analyst in IT may be a fantastic hire into marketing analytics, but that type of cross-functional move is uncommon. In an agile mobility model, this could happen on a regular basis.

In an agile mobility model, people often work on more than one project at a time. They may have career managers who help them with their career or functional skills, in addition to project managers or team leaders. Performance management is based on results not reputation. Therefore, the company becomes more accountable, dynamic, and agile as a result.

How Do You Make Agile Mobility Happen?

From an HR process perspective, talent mobility is complex. How do we know what skills people have – beyond what they are working on now? Where do we get insights on what they want to do? What roles do we need? What skills and capabilities are necessary for these roles? How can we develop people for new roles? How does technology factor into role design? Where and when does the work need to get done? How should we reward people? And how do different workforce groups like gig workers or contractors play in?

Talent mobility spans a number of talent-related areas previously. But in today's fast-moving world of work, static, top-down talent management processes don't work anymore. Instead, companies need cross-HR solutions that cover many areas, from work design to recruiting, from L&D to rewards. It all starts with the work to be done – not just jobs, but also temporary roles, projects, teams, stretch assignments, mentoring and internal gigs.

Creating a culture of internal mobility is a top-to-bottom effort. It changes the way careers work; it changes the way you reward and pay people; and it changes the nature of management, leadership, and learning.

An effective talent mobility strategy needs to address all of these and many more questions. The answers will be highly dependent on the business and people strategy of your organization.

Talent Area	Talent Mobility Questions
Talent strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is our approach to talent mobility? • What's our talent philosophy? • What's our goal for talent mobility? • How will we measure success?
Work/ role design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do we structure jobs, roles and projects? • What jobs and roles are available? • If people take on new assignments, how will they balance their time? • Will we let people share jobs?
Workforce planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What's our skills taxonomy? • What skills and capabilities do we need? • What skills and capabilities do we have? • How do we close the gap?
Workplace design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where and when does the work need to be done? • Can we be flexible in regards to location and hours? • How can we rethink the workplace for more flexibility?
Recruiting and selection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What internal candidates do we have? • How do we find and engage them? • How do we assess them? • What if they don't meet all the criteria? Should we just hire externally? • What risk tolerance do we have for people to try out new work?
Learning and development/ career management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do we help employees acquire skills for new roles? • How do we align opportunities with employees' passion and career aspirations? • How do we surface career opportunities to people? • Do we have career ladders or journeys?

Talent Area	Talent Mobility Questions
Succession management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who are our leadership successors? • When will they be ready for the roles? • How do we develop them to get ready? • To what level do we do facilitated succession vs. agile succession? • What happens to internal candidates who don't succeed? Do they get their old jobs back?
Performance management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do we manage and evaluate performance in new roles? • What about projects and teams? • Stretch assignments? • How do people get feedback and coaching? • How do we know the performance of employees when they are interested in a new role?
Pay and rewards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do we reward for skills and roles? • What are the reward implications for people taking stretch assignments? • How do we incentivize managers to move people around? • How do we pay people if they successfully complete a project?
Diversity, equity, and inclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does talent mobility support our diversity goals? • How do we enable equity in talent mobility? • How will we know if people feel they are included and that opportunities are fair?
Employee experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does the end-to-end employee experience work? • How do we support employees with learning, feedback and development? • Do we provide support for offboarding as well as onboarding to the new position?

Talent Hoarding, Risk Aversion, and Static Careers: Cultural Barriers Abound

The biggest hurdles organizations are facing around talent mobility are not related to technology or tools; Rather, they are tied to the corporate culture. The risk of letting people take new roles is significant, especially if it involves a major career change. Hiring managers often set higher expectations for internal people than for somebody outside of the organization. Employees may not be fully qualified and if they don't succeed, their old jobs may be gone. And as most companies reward managers for maintaining operational performance, a manager

might not be interested in freeing up an employee to move to a different area of the company. Most organizations don't have specific people metrics for their managers, but even if they do, these might get in the way too. If managers are held accountable for retaining their people, an internal loss can count against them. This can cause the dreaded talent hoarding effect where managers try to block their most effective people to move to other areas.

"It's easier for an employee to quit and get rehired than it is to get an internal transfer."

CHRO, Large Indian Conglomerate

In the beginning of the pandemic, the rules were off. Moving people around was a business necessity. Companies moved fast and made talent decisions to get work done, as the Delta story shows. HR, IT and business people came together to develop fast-tracked solutions to keep people who wanted to work engaged while filling needs in high-demand areas. But as we settle into the COVID era, old habits are again creeping in again. Now, we need to take the lessons learned from previous months to create scalable and sustainable talent mobility solutions. Technology can be a big help here.

The Role of Technology: Scalable Personalization

Technology can help accelerate talent mobility. For agile talent mobility to work, the technology itself needs to be highly flexible and configurable to adapt to the needs of the organization – today and in the future. Business and people strategies and priorities, the skills and experiences needed to take the company into the future, cultural and process environments are all unique to each organization’s context. And as we saw in 2020, needs and priorities can change significantly as the business shifts. Therefore, a flexible platform that works at scale to adapt to that context is necessary.

At the same time, solutions must be capable of personalization according to employees’ career aspirations and their development needs. Technology can help employees determine which projects or assignments might take them in the right career direction, what mentors can support them in new roles, and the training resources available to build needed skills? Tailored recommendations based on data can trigger people to look into opportunities they may not have considered.

Internal talent mobility also brings organizational benefits. It widens the internal talent pool and increases gender diversity. For instance, women are much less likely to apply for a position for which they are not at least 90% qualified. But a technology solution can lower this threshold with recommendations and nudges.

Various solution providers have built products that encompass aspects of internal recruiting, gig work, career management, mentoring and project assignments. Because these solutions

cross so many talent-related areas, configurability and flexibility are key. After all, no two companies approach talent mobility the same way.

Considerations for Talent Mobility Technology

The talent mobility imperative is clear, and so is the need for scalable, flexible technology to support it. As you think through how to find a technology that meets your unique needs, consider these points.

- **What’s your overall business, people and talent mobility strategy?** Before thinking about technology, consider what problems you are trying to solve. Is it about quickly redeploying people at scale in a rapidly changing business environment, as in Delta’s case? Do you have a hard time finding external candidates for specific areas? Are recruiting cycles too long and candidate quality not be as good as you’d like? Or do your employees tell you they see a lack of career and development opportunities? Do you want to decrease turnover related to that? Is diversity, equity and inclusion a consideration? Being clear about the core problems is key to success.
- **How configurable is the technology?** One size doesn’t fit all. Each company has its own approach to talent mobility, and these approaches also evolve over time. Companies need solutions that go beyond cataloging skills and help create a matching approach that works for them. To ensure your platform can accommodate your needs right now and in the future, look for configurability and flexibility. Consider what development opportunities you want to provide, how career paths should be defined, various employee data models, and custom workflows depending on region, function, level and other criteria.
- **How comprehensive is the solution?** Rather than piecemealing the different steps - finding an opportunity, accessing developmental resources, receiving feedback, and starting a new position -- some solutions provide an end-to-end experience for employees. Employees today look for integrated experiences without requiring use of multiple products or portals.

- **What capabilities do you need today – and in the future?** Identify what's really important for today's use cases. And as you plan for future capabilities, a flexible, configurable technology or platform will be key. Once a solution is implemented, employees and managers will tell you in what other ways it can be useful for them. The more flexibility you have in the technology, the easier it will be to quickly adjust.
- **How useful and accessible is the technology?** Without easy-to-use, consumer-like experiences for employees, people won't embrace the system. Platforms that go beyond listing available opportunities and proactively suggest jobs, roles, projects, and learning resources will win. Also useful is the ability to suggest likely next career moves and development opportunities to prepare employees for future opportunities.
- **How easy is it to connect the platform with other technologies?** As talent mobility touches so many different areas, a solution will need to connect with talent acquisition, performance management, learning and compensation systems, in addition to the core HRIS. The employee profile needs to expand much beyond skills and capabilities in order to provide a holistic view of fit for an opportunity. Profiles should include data from all along the employee journey, such as performance management insights or learning-related information. A solution that enables these integrations easily with pre-built plug-ins will be much easier to adopt.
- **How will you measure success?** Once you know have determined the primary drivers for your search, identify what success looks like and how you'll measure what matters to you. These metrics can be operational in nature – such as measuring time-to-fill or cost-per-fill roles -- but they should also include perception-based metrics such as employee satisfaction and ease of use.
- **Can the technology provider consult on best practices in talent mobility?** Talent mobility is a complex topic, and technology alone won't solve it. It's important to find a partner that provides meaningful consulting and advice on strategic decisions, is willing to listen to your needs, and will flex and adapt to support your success.
- **What has worked for others?** Check with current clients, understand what their experiences have been, and learn from them. Direct conversations are best to help you get the real-world view of their journeys, understand the mistakes to avoid, and leverage best practices.

Case Study: Delta Facilitates Talent Mobility in the Pandemic with Avature's Configurable Workflow Engine

Delta Air Lines, Inc., typically referred to as Delta, is one of the major airlines of the United States and a legacy carrier. It is headquartered in Atlanta, Georgia. The airline operates over 5,400 flights daily and serves 325 destinations in 52 countries on six continents. It is ranked second among the world's largest airlines by number of scheduled passengers carried, revenue passenger-kilometers flown, and fleet size, and has more than 90,000 employees.

As the pandemic started spreading across the world, Delta was hit hard. Travel had come to a screeching stop. To avoid mass layoffs, the company offered voluntary leave to employees – ranging from 30 days to several months. As many as 40,000 people took this offer in order to care for homeschooling children, look after sick family members, or deal with other pandemic-related challenges. The pandemic also had an uneven effect on different jobs. For instance, because many flights were grounded, the company had a surplus of flight attendants. At the same time, there was a huge need for reservation agents to help process refunds and reservation rescheduling.

Before the pandemic, the company had already designed a system for people to express interest in moving to different locations, changing teams, or moving to other roles. Built using Avature, the system incorporated a simplified application, interview, assessment, and transfer process. This workflow provided an excellent foundation for modification to address the pandemic challenges. Within days, the airline modified the existing signup page and underlying workflows. Grounded flight attendants could easily apply for high-need roles. And, as they expressed interest, additional information about their skills and schedule and location was also collected. Employees received the training and development

needed for any new skills and could rapidly move into the new areas.

Avature's user-friendly system made the modified processes easy to implement and easy for employees to use. Skill-related and other pertinent information was collected through the sign-up form and then used by the recruiting team to find people for specific needs. The pandemic made mobility not just a nice-to-have employee benefit but a business necessity because of the massive imbalance of gaps and surplus. Talent hoarding was not an issue in this case as so many people were not working, and the assignments were clearly temporary in nature.

This solution worked well as an interim fix for an urgent need. Now, in phase 2 of the project, people will be able to find temporary or project assignments on the regular career site, as well as to search for full-time jobs. In addition to keeping people who have been on voluntary leave busy, the new system can also be a stepping stone to support them in developing towards longer-term career goals.

'If I want to move into a different direction, I might also be interested in special assignments. Perhaps there's a special assignment that will give me some valuable experience and exposure. So, let me sign up for these while I'm waiting to find my ideal role,' said Myria Peek, manager of talent acquisition technology, process and analytics.

Key to the success of this solution was the configurable technology provided by Avature, which has one of the most scalable, mature, workflow-oriented HCM platforms in the market. Coming from the recruiting side has helped Avature take a marketing and sales approach towards employees, resulting in a sleek and intuitive user experience.

Delta was already using Avature for its applicant tracking and CRM needs, as well as its internal and external career sites. Therefore, it was relatively easy to adapt to meet the pandemic needs of the airline. With the phase 2 deployment, the company expects to build the temporary revisions into the fabric of the organization to allow people to develop their careers through the many different opportunities within Delta.

And Delta is not the only one using Avature for internal mobility. For instance, L'Oréal uses the system for internal mobility at scale, filling up to 75% of open positions with existing employees by helping people find new opportunities, develop into broader areas of the business, and build up new skills.

Conclusion

The pandemic is not just a health crisis but also an economic transformation. New roles, changed skill requirements, massive imbalances of skills gaps and surpluses, and the need to redeploy people rapidly all figured into making talent mobility a key to pandemic success, catapulting this field into the forefront of many organization's priorities. But even once the pandemic is behind us, we'll need to focus on it. Technologies are here now to support this strategic management system. It's a complex area spanning many different areas of HR, talent, learning and rewards, so one size doesn't fit all. Flexibility and configurability are necessary. It's time for companies to provide employees with agile, personalized mobility that helps them move their careers into the right direction while meeting organizational needs with talent from within their own walls.

About Josh Bersin



Josh Bersin is an internationally recognized analyst, educator, and thought leader focusing on the global talent market and the challenges impacting business workforces around the world. He studies the world of work, HR and leadership practices, and the broad talent technology market.

He founded Bersin & Associates in 2001 to provide research and advisory services focused on corporate learning. Over the next ten years, he expanded the company's coverage to encompass HR, talent management, talent acquisition, and leadership. He sold the company to Deloitte in 2012, when it became known as Bersin™ by Deloitte. Bersin left Deloitte in 2018..

In 2019, Bersin founded the Josh Bersin Academy, the world's first global development academy for HR and talent professionals and a transformation agent for HR organizations. The Academy offers content-rich online programs, a carefully curated library of tools and resources, and a global community that helps HR and talent professionals stay current on the trends and practices needed to drive organizational success in the modern world of work.

Bersin is frequently featured in talent and business publications such as Forbes, Harvard Business Review, HR Executive, FastCompany, The Wall Street Journal, and CLO Magazine. He is a regular keynote speaker at industry events around the world and a popular blogger with more than 800,000 followers on LinkedIn.

His education includes a BS in engineering from Cornell University, an MS in engineering from Stanford University, and an MBA from the Haas School of Business at the University of California, Berkeley.

About Kathi Enderes



Kathi is the vice president of research at the Josh Bersin Academy; she leads research for all areas of HR, learning, talent and HR technology. Kathi has more than 20 years of experience in management consulting with IBM, PwC, and EY and as a talent leader at McKesson and Kaiser Permanente. Most recently, Kathi led talent and workforce research at Deloitte, where she led many research studies on various topics of HR and talent and frequently spoke at industry conferences. Originally from Austria, Kathi has worked in Vienna, London and Spain and now lives in San Francisco. Kathi holds a doctoral degree and a masters degree in mathematics from the University of Vienna.