

The Great Realignment

5 ways to bring more meaning to your employee journey

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Ushering in The Great Realignment

In a great collective wake-up call, the priorities of employees have categorically shifted, and they have realigned their needs at work—and their choice of employers—with their values, goals, and personal lives. According to a recent study from Workplace Intelligence, 88% of workers said the meaning of success has changed for them since the pandemic, citing work-life balance, mental health, and flexibility as their new top priorities.¹ Nearly a third said that having a meaningful job contributes more to their success than a steady paycheck.²

It's also a new era for employers and those hoping to return to the normal we knew in 2019 will be waiting in vain. Today, employees are willing to resign if their employers don't offer them the flexibility, purpose, and growth opportunities they're looking for. According to Chief Executives for Corporate Purpose (CECP), Imperative, and PwC's Fulfillment at Work study, 7 out of 10 employees said they'd consider leaving their current role for a new, more fulfilling opportunity, and 3 out of 10 said they'd take a pay cut for it.³ And the exodus is underway. 4.4 million people left their jobs in September 2021 alone in a year of record-setting departures, a massive trend that has been coined The Great Resignation.⁴



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People are heading for the door, but they're heading for the door for all the right reasons. They're saying, 'I want something better. I want something more from work. I want better relationships. I want a connection to purpose. I want to be paid fairly for what I do.'”

Pamela Stroko

Vice President, HCM Transformation and Thought Leadership at Oracle

It's clear that workers have been leaving jobs in record numbers, but Pamela Stroko, Vice President of HCM Transformation and Thought Leadership at Oracle, says that “The Great Resignation” is a misnomer. “Workers aren't leaving their jobs for no reason,” she says. “They're leaving to find jobs that value their contributions and align with their values.” Instead, Stroko describes this shift as “The Great Realignment,” a clear message for employers to heed the call of their workforce to evolve beyond old paradigms. Today, more than ever, employees want to work for an organization with a clear purpose.⁵ They want to develop their careers and gain valuable new skill sets.⁶ They want to have connections, not transactions, at work.⁷ Ultimately, they want their work to be a meaningful part of their lives.⁸

As employers set their course for 2022, they have an opportunity and imperative to match The Great Realignment of the workforce with a shift of their own by redesigning the employee journey to facilitate an experience that reflects the wants and needs of the workforce now—and the permanent ways work has shifted—long into the future. In return, organizations will have employees with the commitment, critical skill sets, and passion required to help an organization thrive.

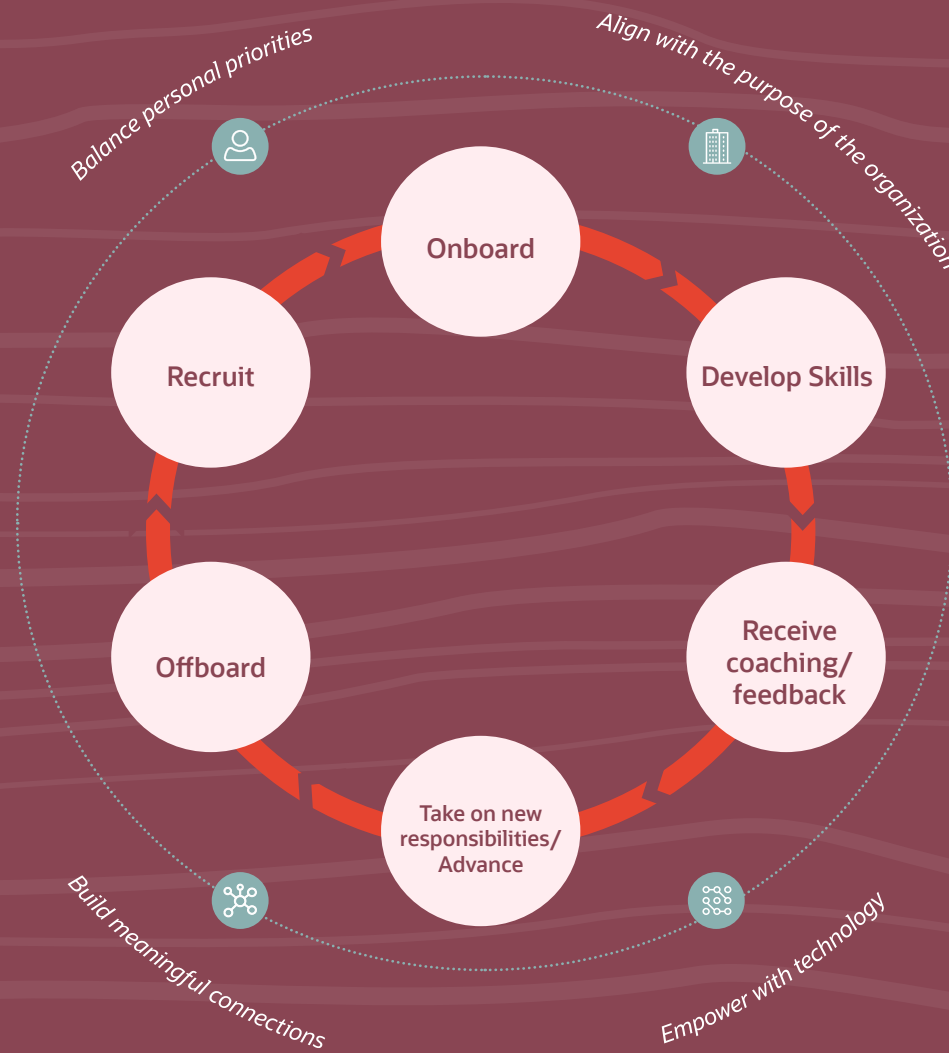
Start with a long-term commitment to employee experience

Employee experience is every touchpoint an employee has with an organization, from the first recruiting post, to onboarding, to supporting career development, to creating genuine relationships at work, to offering technology that can enhance all these areas, employers have an opportunity at each touchpoint to bring more meaning to the workplace. Against the backdrop of The Great Realignment, organizations must reevaluate how they approach each step in the journey, optimizing for an employee-centric experience that allows their workforce to find fulfillment and meaning in work.

This change must start with a long-term commitment from employers that goes beyond reacting to external market dynamics at play now. Too often, Stroko notes, initiatives come and go, diluting trust that needs to be built by demonstrating consistency over time. The pandemic, in particular, exposed gaps in employee-employer trust. Whether employers didn't do enough to support employee safety or rushed into inflexible back-to-office policies after a year of hard-earned adaptations to remote work, there were many examples of employers not living up to their value proposition.^{9,10} Stroko says that trust is established when organizations live up to their values, noting, "Whatever promises you make, you keep them. You do what you say."

Organizations that have always talked about purpose, career development, and inclusion have a greater need than ever to live up to these messages. Now, Stroko says, employers must deliver. "These things that were nice to have before the pandemic are now moral imperatives," she says. In other words, this realignment is an opportunity for organizations to match intent with action both now and long into the future.

The employee experience journey



Invest in five vital areas of employee experience

1. Build trust even before an employee's first day

The opportunity to build or lose trust starts with the first interaction with an organization. Companies looking to create an exceptional employee experience must recognize that the journey begins well before an employee's first day with the company, starting with recruiting. Stroko says that job seekers today, shaped by learnings from the pandemic, are looking for specific things, including organizations

with a clear purpose that matches their own, companies where they can belong and be included, and opportunities with real growth and paths for people to learn and build their careers. Most importantly, and assurances that what they're hearing during recruiting will be consistently reflected in the experiences they'll have as employees.

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The first employee experience is about building trust. It's about creating a sense of belonging and inclusion. It's also about all the actions that come after to cement that belonging.”

Pamela Stroko

Vice President, HCM
Transformation and Thought
Leadership at Oracle

A vital part of building consistency into the journey is onboarding. Organizations have an opportunity to match the high energy new employees bring to roles with tailored onboarding programs that move beyond sharing policies and processes. Additionally, onboarding is an important opportunity to help employees understand the company's purpose, how they fit into the organization's broader vision, and what the goals and expectations for their specific roles are. Stroko notes that onboarding should allow employees to know what "good" looks like from day one.

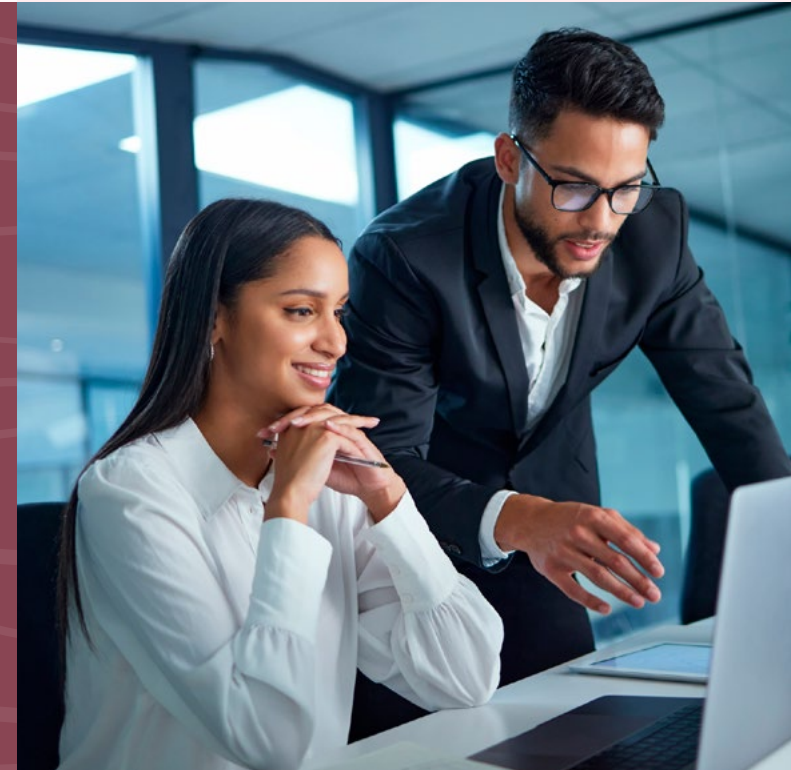
Building trust at the beginning of the employee journey

- ➔ **Recruiting:** Build a brand respected in the eyes of prospects and ensure your recruiting messaging is an accurate reflection of the actual experience on the job
- ➔ **Onboarding:** Set clear goals and expectations for the employee's specific role, helping them understand what "good" looks like from day one

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If an organization has a clear purpose that people can connect to, it will be more productive. Fewer people leave. People are happier on the job. They contribute more. There's a sense of psychological safety. There's a sense of fulfillment, the fulfillment being that employees fulfill what they want to do in their lives at work.”

Pamela Stroko
Vice President, HCM Transformation and Thought Leadership at Oracle



2. Make career development a 51%/49% partnership between the organization and employee

Career development and fulfillment require a successful partnership between employees and employers, with both sides taking ownership. Employees today already recognize they are accountable for driving their own fulfillment. According to an Harvard Business Review study, 68% of workers—blue and white-collar alike—are willing to retrain and learn new skills.¹¹ Another study shows that 82% of employees agree their level of fulfillment at work is their own responsibility.¹² However, even the most motivated employees need partnership from their organization, whether in the form of technology and resources to help match them with the right opportunities or internal hiring programs that allow them to experiment with different skill sets and projects.

Stroko says that organizations should adopt a 51%/49% mindset, taking ownership for 51% of the partnership by providing employees with clear opportunities for advancement alongside the training and mentorship needed to take advantage of those opportunities. Employees need to respond by taking ownership of their own career growth, stretching to develop new skill sets, and aligning their work to help an organization meet its business objectives.

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People would much rather have a career experience and learning experience in the company where they are now than to have to change careers or change companies to do it. And companies would rather find their ideal candidates inside the organization than spend valuable time, resources, and energy looking outside the company.”

Pamela Stroko

Vice President, HCM
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One initiative Stroko recommends is setting up an internal talent marketplace that showcases not only roles, but project opportunities available across all departments and regions in an organization. This creates ways for employees who otherwise might look outside the organization to cultivate new skill sets, be mentored, and be matched with the job opportunities that most interest them. To truly set an internal marketplace up for success, its use must also be embedded in the culture of the organization.

Employers also need to ensure career planning happens across all levels of the organization, not just for top talent. HCM technology can be a helpful tool here, pairing employees with new skill set recommendations and providing scalable feedback mechanisms to identify pain points and employee passions.

Tactics for creating meaningful career development opportunities

- ➔ Adopt a 51%/49% mindset —organizations should take accountability for 51% of the responsibility of surfacing opportunities to the workforce for mobility and advancement
- ➔ Build an internal marketplace that democratizes opportunities across teams and functions
- ➔ Ensure career planning happens across all levels of the organization, not just for top talent
- ➔ Leverage technology that supports career growth and planning equitably and consistently across the organization



3. Offer more meaning and more meaningful work

Employees today crave fair, flexible, and meaningful work. “The Great Realignment is as much driven by looking for meaningful work as it is looking for better pay,” Pamela Stroko says. “Whether you’re sitting in your home office or you’re going into an office or a grocery store or a restaurant, people want meaningful work.”

Meaningful work is especially important for employees against a backdrop where automation and AI transform the way work gets done in organizations. Employees recognize that work can be about more than doing rote or even skilled tasks. Instead, they want to leverage the opportunity for work to be a unique expression of their talents, values, and skill sets in ways that truly impact their organizations.

To make work more meaningful, employers must show each employee the impact their work has on the bigger picture of business success, regardless of role or level. “It’s about feeling included,” Stroko said. “Everybody wants to be an insider. If I’m talking to you about coming to your company and I don’t feel that I can be an insider, or I feel that I’m always going to be on the outside looking in, I’m probably not going to take that job.”





While not every role in an organization may be traditionally “strategic,” organizations can make every employee an insider by emphasizing both accountability and flexibility. By aligning work to core team and organizational goals and providing employees’ flexibility to achieve those goals on their own terms, organizations send a message that they trust employees and value both their autonomy and contributions.

Performance review processes can also be updated to be more meaningful and flexible. Employers should opt for an approach that

integrates employees’ achievements and a sense of purpose into the day-to-day fabric of the organization. Employers can implement more frequent “pulse check” surveys that gauge employee progress and fulfillment. “We want goals to be part of what we do every day,” Stroko says. “We want performance to be an ongoing conversation and not a feedback event once a quarter. It should really be a conversation about how I’m doing, how the work is going, how I’m contributing, what I care about, what things I want to learn, and how you can help me learn that.”

Tactics for offering more meaningful work

- ➔ Clearly connect an employee’s specific role to the larger purpose and goals of the organization
- ➔ Provide employees with both accountability and flexibility
- ➔ Make performance and career development an ongoing conversation, not just quarterly or annual check-points

4. Adopt technology that powers the employee experience you want

As organizations redesign their employee journeys, technology is the engine that can power better and more meaningful touchpoints. This is especially true in a world shaped by the ongoing pandemic, where the workforce will be permanently more geographically distributed and flexible, and creating connections will continue to be a challenge. HCM technologies like chatbot or digital assistants can now help with everything including surfacing career development opportunities, supporting the holistic wellness of the workforce, and building meaningful relationships in a virtual environment.

Employees are more receptive than ever to using technology to help them achieve meaningful careers. Over half of the

Workforce Intelligence study respondents say technology can help them identify the skills they need, keep up with the pace of change, feel more empowered in their career, and feel more in control over their career.¹³ 55% said they're more likely to stay with a company or work for a company that uses AI technology to support employees' career growth.¹⁴

"Technology is the engine that can help all this happen," Stroko says. "It could be something as simple as a technology that brings you the right candidates. It could be social tools that you can use in the organization to build relationships. It can be tools that drive appreciation and recognition."

Powering employee experience with technology

- ➔ **Power the internal marketplace:**
Leverage technology to surface opportunities and projects across an organization
- ➔ **Support employee wellness:**
Help employees prioritize physical and mental wellness with tools like telehealth, meditation reminders, and real-time incident reporting
- ➔ **Build connections:**
Use technology to help employees build personal profiles, establish mentors, and find others with common goals and interests



5. Ensure your employee experience accurately reflects your culture

Employers must do more than talk the talk to create an employee experience that prioritizes purpose and fulfillment. They also must do long-term work to ensure that their values are reflected in the company's day-to-day culture. Culture is, quite simply, how a company does things—how they treat, train, mentor, and communicate with their employees every day.

Most, if not all, leaders realize that the work landscape has changed. In fact, the Fulfillment at Work study shows that 80% of executives believe that their culture must evolve in the next five years to succeed, grow, and retain the

best people.¹⁵ “The future,” Stroko says, “is more of what we wanted the past to be about; it is more about mission and purpose and values.”

“People will read into how they’re being treated,” Stroko says. “And if actions speak louder than words, companies need to make sure that they’re taking action to create a culture that reflects their values and promises.”



Culture is bedrock to a great employee experience. And the employee experience that comes out of culture is basically an expression of culture, so you have to start here.”

Pamela Stroko

Vice President, HCM
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Conclusion

The work world is being ushered into a new era, permanently shifting the relationship between employers and employees. The emphasis in 2022 needs to be on partnership, with employers and employees jointly working together to align successful business outcomes with the fulfillment, growth, and purpose employees need and deserve. Stroko says that the fundamental question every organization should ask is this: What is it about this company that is meaningful and inspires someone to learn, grow, and want to spend their careers with us? By committing to bringing more meaning back into the employee experience long-term, organizations can confidently step into the future with a thriving workforce.

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