



unLeash
INSIGHTS REPORT

Why HR Projects Succeed

In partnership with

servicenow®



Contents

- 3 About Us - UNLEASH
- 4 About Us - ServiceNow
- 5 Executive Summary

6 SECTION 1: THE STATE OF PLAY

- 6 Measures of Success
- 7 The Organizations' View
- 9 Challenging Circumstances Must Be Accounted For
- 10 HR Technology Stakeholders are Key
- 11 HR Operating Models Matter
- 12 The Employees' View
- 13 Employee Engagement and Satisfaction Counts Like Never Before
- 13 HR Tech Solves for Productivity
- 14 There is a Change Management Conundrum

15 SECTION 2: WHAT IS HR DOING RIGHT?

- 15 Prioritizing the Employee Experience
- 16 Making Employee Experience #1
- 17 Using Experience-led Technology
- 18 Setting Measures for Success
- 18 Creating the Right Culture and Conditions
- 20 Preparation that Prevents Poor Performance

22 SECTION 3: WHAT CAN HR DO NEXT?

- 22 Start with the End in Mind
- 24 Build on Cultural Foundations to Support Change
- 24 Close the Employee Experience Gap
- 25 Focus on Future Fit

27 SECTION 4: 7 HABITS OF HIGHLY SUCCESSFUL HR ORGANIZATIONS

- 27 Start With Why
- 28 Create the Right Culture
- 28 Be Employee-centric
- 29 Set Measures of Success
- 29 Partner Proactively
- 29 Unify the Experience
- 30 Keep it Human

31 APPENDIX: ABOUT THIS RESEARCH

About UNLEASH

UNLEASH is a global information business providing the latest HR, learning and recruitment news & analysis, trends and events on the challenges and opportunities shaping the new working world.

Since 2011, UNLEASH has served as a strategic transformation engine for the most powerful network of human resources leaders. They represent a range of organisations from the world's leading employers from the Fortune 2000, public sector organizations to innovative start-ups and everything in between. Built to inspire, connect and empower leaders to navigate the fast-changing world of work and exponential technologies.

We love our community. They are a diverse group of innovators laser focused on the future of work, who are passionate about people and getting the most out of technology. They reimagine work and new ways of working that improve the lives of 10's of millions of people each year.

Ultimately, we provide a platform to share ideas that work, network and do business.

UNLEASH's mission is to be the world's #1 destination and marketplace for human resources, recruitment and learning leaders globally.

unleash.ai

[Learn more](#)



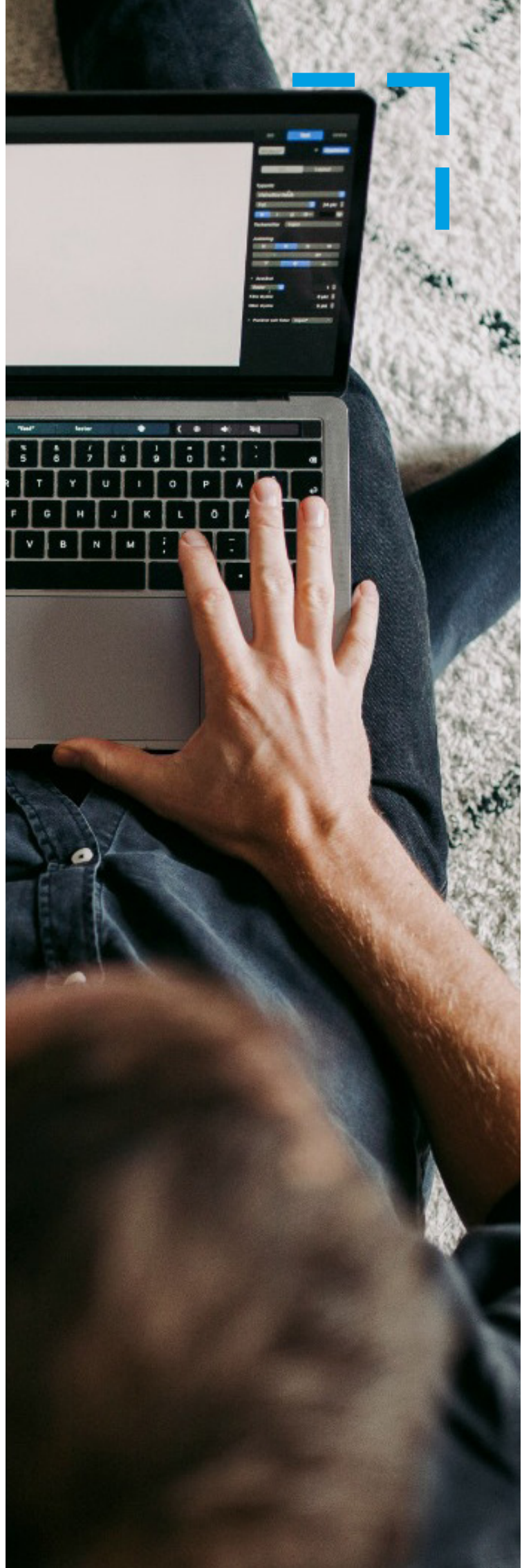
About ServiceNow

ServiceNow makes the world work better for everyone. Our cloud based platform and solutions help digitize and unify organizations so that they can find smarter, faster, better ways to make work flow. So employees and customers can be more connected, more innovative, and more agile. And we can all create the future we imagine. The world works with ServiceNow.

servicenow.com

[Learn more](#)

The world works
with ServiceNow



Executive Summary

As we have all continued to navigate turbulent times, HR teams have emerged from the last two years as heroes in the world of work.



From initially keeping the lights on as the pandemic struck, to adapting to hybrid work, battling the “Great Resignation” and now operating against the backdrop of an unfolding humanitarian crisis, HR has stepped up to support the wellbeing and performance of their people and their organizations.

And technology has been our enabler.

The innovation that has happened in HR solutions has been astonishing as they evolve to meet the changing needs of the people they serve. The subsequent explosion in suppliers and huge investment in the market has created exciting choice for HR buyers, with scope to provide better employee experiences. But knowing when to invest, where to invest and how to invest precious budgets when faced with so much choice can be a challenge.

And that is only the first step.

The goal of this research is to unpack what you need to make your HR technology projects succeed. The right technology for your unique context is of course, key. But assessing broader human factors like your organizational culture and approaches to change management are just as critical.

This unique study takes into account not just the views of global HR, talent and learning leaders across some of the world’s largest organizations, but we also spoke to over 1000 employees to make sure their voices are heard. And at a moment in time when we are all competing to acquire, develop, nurture and retain the best people, it is imperative we listen.

Culminating with summaries of the **Employee Experience Gap** and the **7 Habits of Successful HR Teams**, we hope you find this research useful in understanding the trends of the last two years. And while we have all learned our lessons when it comes to making any kind of predictions in today’s world, we also hope it helps plan for the future when it comes to making sure your HR technology projects succeed.



MARC COLEMAN
CEO
UNLEASH



GRETCHEN ALARCON
VP & GM
ServiceNow

Embedding
HR technology
successfully into
an organization
can seem to be
part science and
part magic!



The State of Play

1.1 Measures of Success

In asking the question “Why do HR projects succeed?” we had to step back and ask the bigger question; do they – in fact – succeed? The picture is mixed as we shall see. There has been progress since we ran our original “Why HR Projects Fail” research in 2020¹, but possibly not as much as we might have hoped.

It is important to begin with defining what success looks like. It can, of course, come in many different shapes and sizes. Every organization is unique and will have its own checks and balances that contribute to what ‘good’ means for them. However, for the purposes of this research, UNLEASH wanted to keep the measures consistent with our original research two years ago. So, we asked respondents to define the success of their HR technology projects based on the following criteria:

Throughout the report, when we refer to the HR projects that have been successful, it is important to note that this is judged with reference to these factors. Some areas emerge stronger than others. But all are regarded as key measures in their own right – and have enabled us to compare and contrast the results with “Why HR Projects Fail.”



“Defining success here isn’t about ‘does it work or not?’ Of course it should work, but what’s the impact? And what was your prediction about that impact from the outset? Does it meet that? Does it move the needle?”

MARK OEHLERT, INNOVATION SUCCESS MANAGER, AMAZON



1.2 The Organizations' View

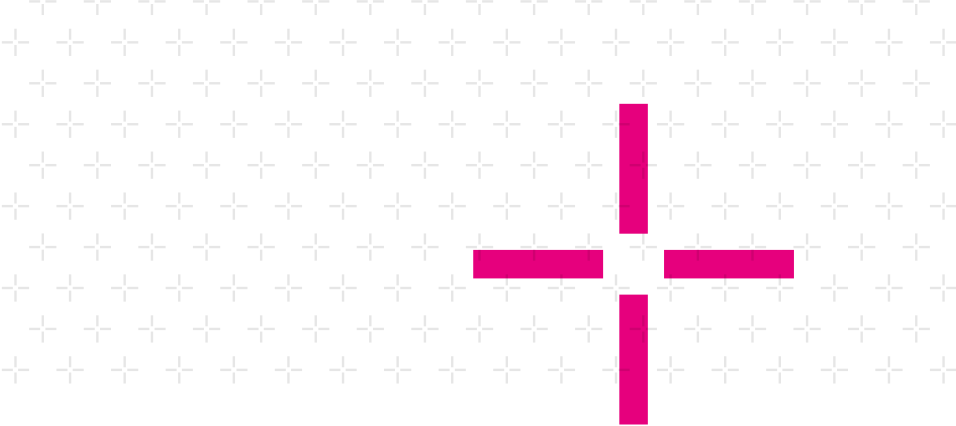
This research set out to gather the views of both the organization and the people they serve - the employees. Is there a gap between what leaders believe the organization is delivering and what employees think of what they are being given? We shall see as the report unfolds.

The organizations' view is represented by leaders from across HR, IT and the broader business. With 1,385 responses – and a broad spread of roles and responsibilities therein – it is fascinating to see the results.

When we examine the big picture, we see that HR technology projects are succeeding. The fact that the global economy is projected to grow 4.9% in 2022² and organizations have been able not just to survive, but thrive – despite the havoc wreaked by the pandemic – shows HR technology is doing something right.

Beyond keeping the lights on when COVID-19 first struck, from supporting remote work, facilitating wholesale changes to shifts and workforce planning, providing access to self-service delivery, managing tax implications, reskilling and redeploying people – often on a global scale – HR technology has managed to truly innovate how we work. The reimagined workplace is a journey, not a destination. And the innovation that's happened in HR technology along the way in the last two years is the real deal.

The initial headline, however, is stark. Less than one third of organizations (32%) rate their HR projects as highly successful.

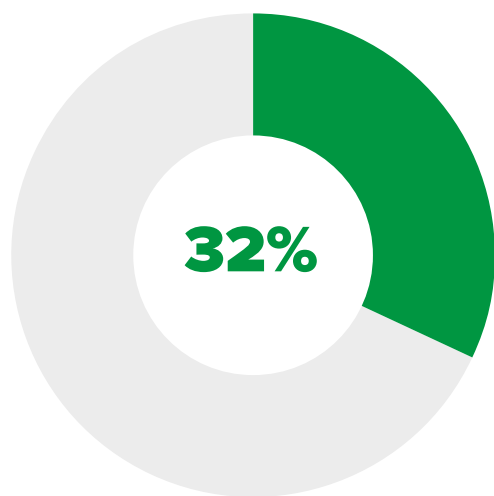


“Especially when you’re implementing new technology there can be unknowns, so success needs to be judged in the short term and the longer term. It can come in small incremental pieces, especially in an agile environment. Short-term: New functionality or getting people accessing a new platform help you pass through certain milestones.

Longer-term: Are you creating cost efficiencies? Does your solution deliver process improvements/productivity/ free people up to do more strategic work? How good is your stakeholder satisfaction - are people enjoying using it? You can design success criteria to suit a project, whether that’s brand-new systems or opening a new building.”

ALEXANDRA MINOR, DEPUTY – HUMAN CAPITAL IT, NASA





Less than one third of organizations rate their HR technology projects as **highly successful**

However, this number is **twice** as high as UNLEASH's original "Why HR Projects Fail" research. HR is clearly making progress which is great news. But is this number is still too low? With over 13 million people impacted by the HR technology decisions of this survey sample alone, there is still work to be done.

Against the backdrop of a \$5 trillion+ spend by organizations on HR tech annually³, HR could and should be aiming for more than only a third of its projects being rated as highly successful. Otherwise that is potentially a tremendous amount of money being ill-spent.

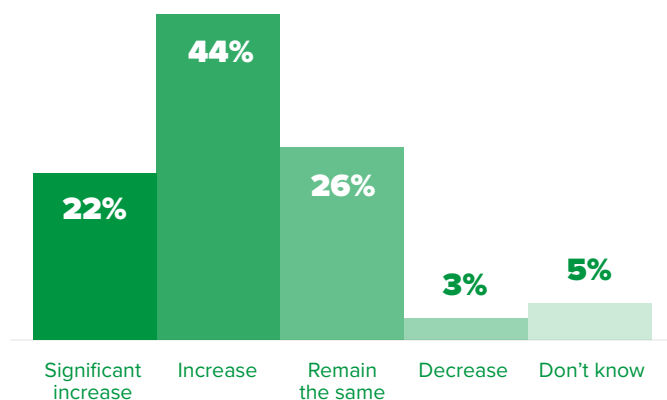
The organizational view reveals that 80% have implemented new HR technology in the last two years. This figure is hardly surprising even under normal circumstances. But with the pressures of the pandemic and the "Great Resignation" still in play, it is even less so.

In line with other research⁴, the results show that investment in HR technology is set to keep increasing. In 2020, 54% overall planned to increase spending when we conducted "Why HR Projects Fail" pre-pandemic. Now, 66% are planning to increase investment. Healthy growth, especially against the current macro backdrop.

It is perhaps a good thing that investment is increasing in order to cover the budgets and sometimes spiraling costs of these projects. Only 5% of the HR tech projects surveyed come in under budget and nearly one third are over. But with nearly half "mostly on budget," HR projects are clearly not running out of control.

Investment in HR technology is set to keep increasing

What are your plans for investment in HR technology in 2022?



1.2.1 Challenging Circumstances Must Be Accounted For

Unfortunately there is no such thing as a perfect world (if the last two years have taught us anything, they have taught us that). So there is a predictable gap between the full potential of HR systems in a perfect world - and the reality of implementing them into complex, challenged and pressured organizations, which are unfortunately, far from perfect.

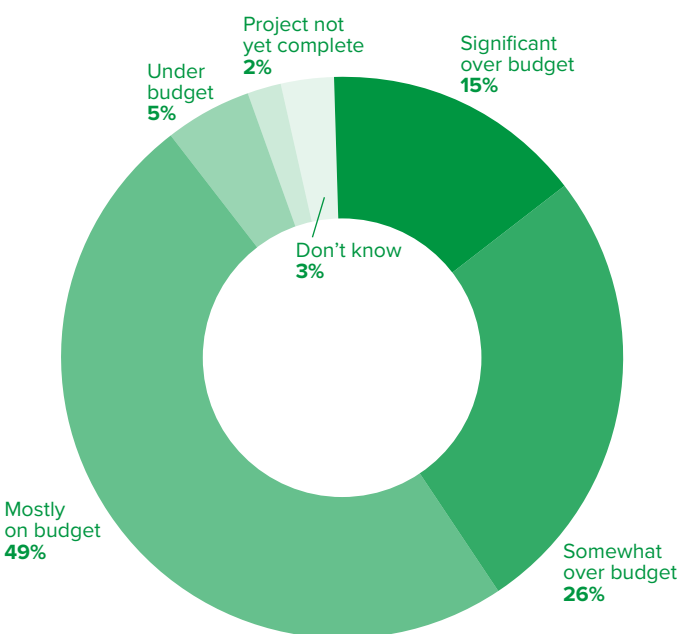
Despite the pressures of the past two years, HR technology is not being implemented in organizations any faster. In fact, this year's research shows that it is actually taking longer:

- **43%** of projects are taking over a year to implement.
- This is an increase of **10%** on 2020.

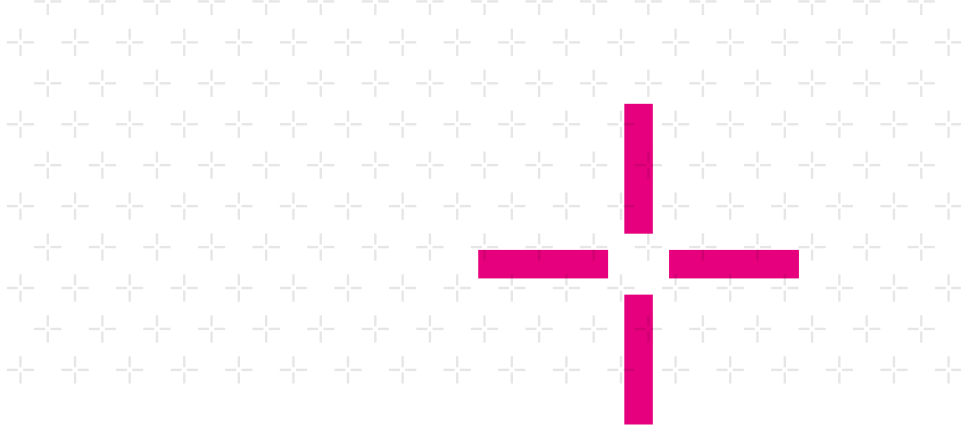
It is interesting to understand the types of HR technology that have been prioritized for investment and implementation during this time - and the impact that can potentially have on the length of the project. For example, payroll transformation is never a project to be taken lightly as it often falls into the "if it ain't broke don't fix it" school of thought. Enter payroll at number two on the list of new HR systems that have been implemented in the last two years.

In the top three, payroll finds itself sandwiched between talent management and workforce management. Both of these are overarching solutions that affect large populations of people. Neither lend themselves to being quick or easy projects. It's interesting to consider this in the shift to work from anywhere and hybrid ways of working, and how technology implementations are reflecting these changes, shoring up that they're here to stay.

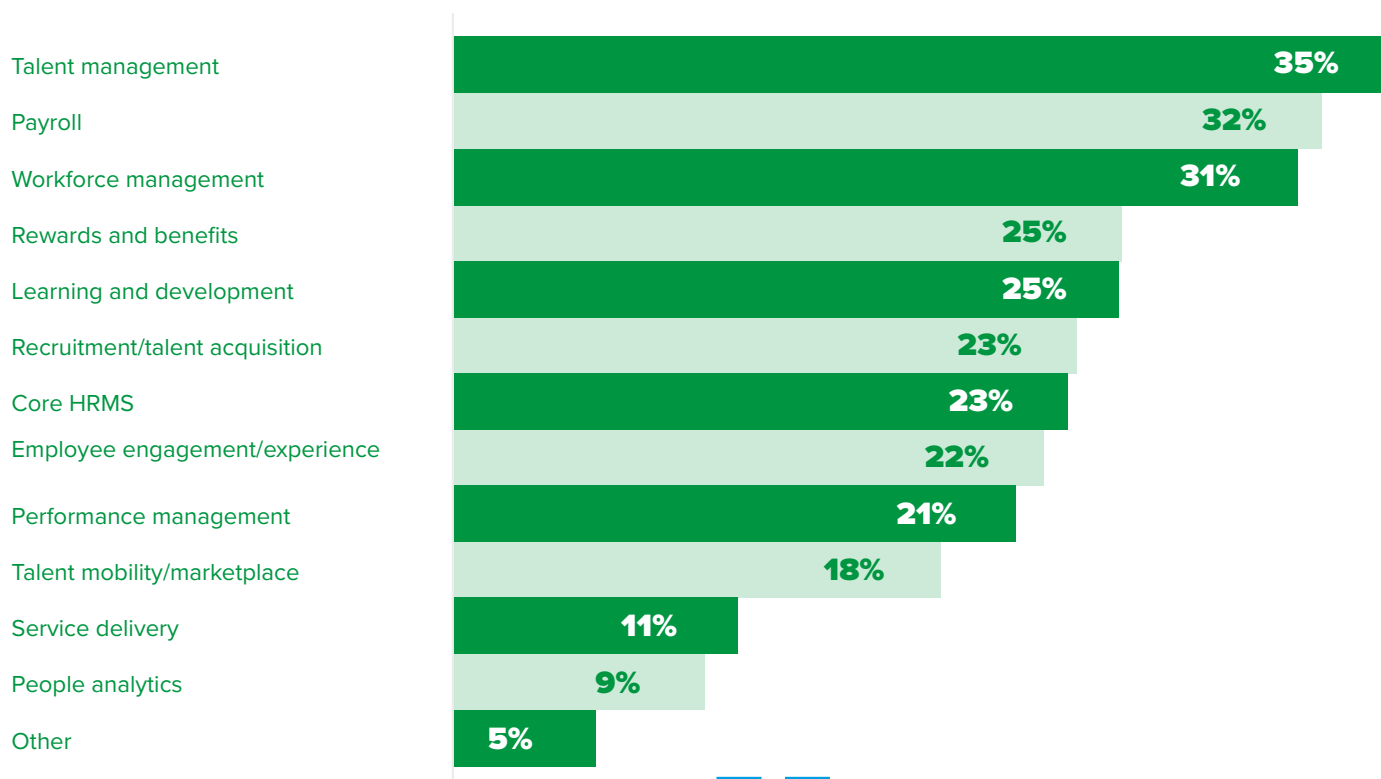
As ever, there is no one size fits all when it comes to HR technology.



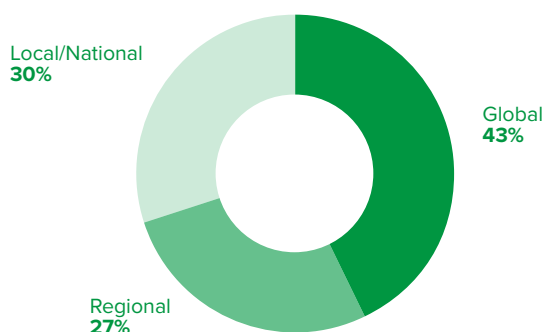
How did the final costs for the project compare with the original budget?



What was your new **HR technology** for?



Furthermore, nearly half of the projects undertaken have a global scope, further adding to their complexity and the time it will take to implement.



What was the **geographic scope** of the project?

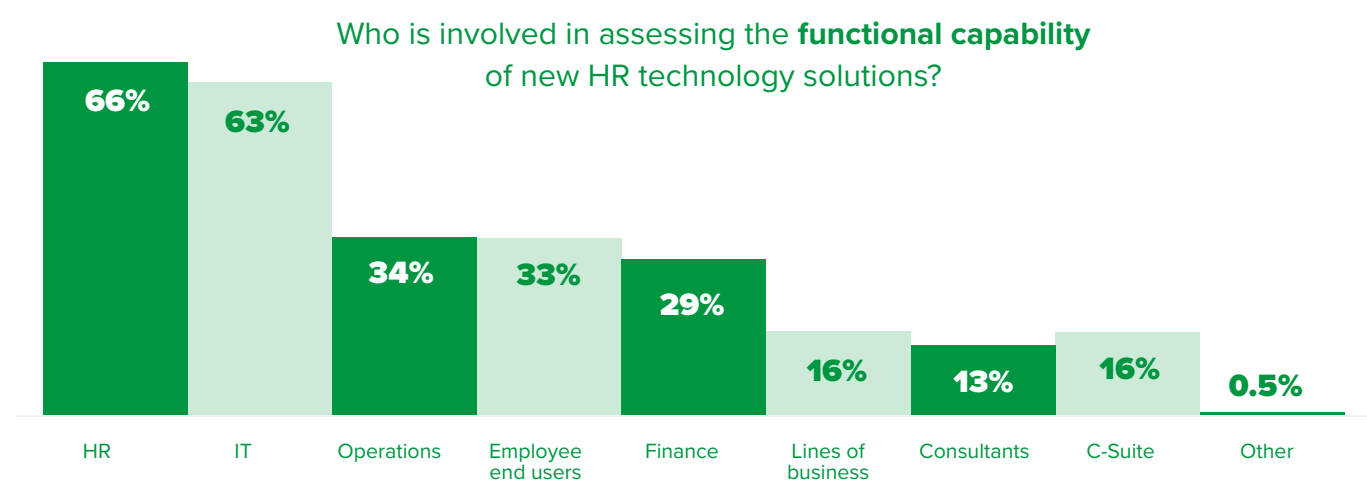
“Moody’s HR technology projects are funded within IT which means the partnership with HR is implicit from the outset. But if that isn’t the case, work together on what your measures of success look like, interrogate vendor roadmaps and always engage line managers and middle managers wherever possible. Bringing them into key decisions will help with the change management and adoption post-implementation.”

ALLISON DETITTO, VP CORE HR TECHNOLOGY, MOODY’S



1.2.2 HR Technology Stakeholders are Key

It is said that “no man is an island,” and in the world of HR technology, this is particularly true. Successful HR project teams set themselves up for success by partnering across their business. Close working relationships with – and buy-in from – IT proves mission-critical according to this research.



1.2.3 HR Operating Models Matter

HR trends tend to come in waves and in some organizations there is an overwhelming need to decentralize, de-risk, tailor and personalize HR technology experiences (not to mention budgets). There are no absolutes here, but if the overall trend is towards more centralized projects, that implies more large-scale “rip and replace” initiatives, typically involving large enterprise HR suites. This easily contributes towards the earlier data we have seen around time-to-implementation or the overall cost increases. These projects are far more complex which immediately makes them more expensive and more time-consuming.

Meanwhile, others are seeing the exact opposite pendulum swing towards a centralization of enterprise systems alongside a consolidation of budgets and spend.

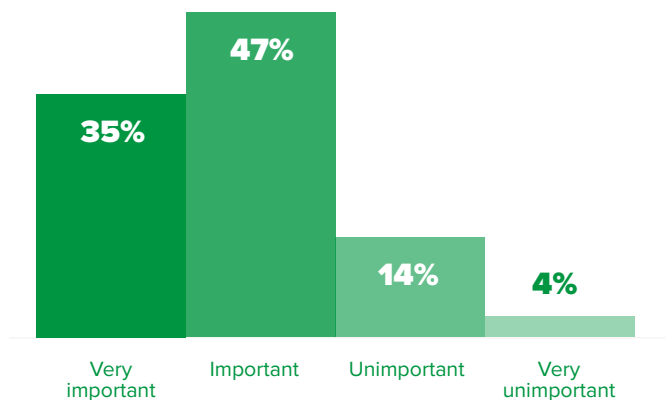
“At Warner Music Group (WMG) we’re extremely focussed on delivering employee experiences through our people, talent and learning systems. In particular, we’ve been looking at how we can deliver these experiences through our innovative technology systems.”

JOSH NOVELLE, DIRECTOR OF DIGITAL LEARNING SOLUTIONS, WARNER MUSIC

1.3 The Employees' View

Asking organizational leaders what they think about HR projects provides invaluable insights. But what about the “voice of the employee” that has been so heavily referenced since COVID-19 hit? We have seen the importance of employee listening skyrocket as organizations navigate the changing needs and requirements of their people. But despite these good intentions, HR will naturally have biases around its own initiatives and strategy. We wanted to hear how they impact the people on the ground who need to use these systems and solutions every day as part of their job. Are HR projects successful from the employees perspective?

How important is **HR technology** in supporting your everyday experience at work?



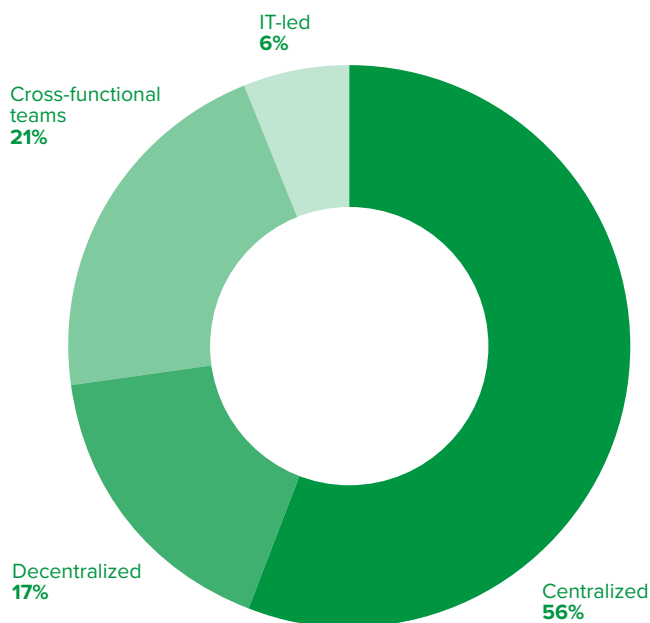
82% of employee respondents told us that HR technology is an important part of their everyday work.

It is encouraging (and possibly even gratifying) to see so many employees recognize that HR technology plays such a consistent role in supporting their everyday experiences at work.

But that is, unfortunately, where some of the positivity stops:

- Less than half of employees (**45%**) are satisfied with the current employee experience in their organization
- Less than **20%** are fully satisfied with new HR technology that has been implemented in the last two years
- Less than one quarter (**24%**) find it very easy to find the right HR information or access the right HR system at the right time

This all comes at a moment in time when organizations try to reset and recover post-pandemic, two of the major challenges facing business leaders are battling the “Great Resignation” and powering productivity.



How are **strategic decisions** about HR projects currently made in your organization?

“Part of NASA’s digital transformation is moving towards centralized enterprise functions that can scale to support people across all our locations. This is an evolution not a revolution and will bring with it a more integrated HR technology and analytics ecosystem, more standardized experiences and a simplicity that helps streamline processes and support the mission as effectively as we can.”

KEITH KRUT, VP STRATEGY & ANALYTICS, NASA

1.3.1 Employee Engagement and Satisfaction Counts Like Never Before

There's often a correlation between employee satisfaction and staff turnover, but in a labor market like no other and the "Great Resignation" causing turmoil, it is more business-critical than ever for organizations to drive satisfaction and engagement in any way they can. Last year, more than 40% of employees stated they were at least somewhat likely to leave their jobs in the next 3-6 months⁵. If people leave, there are now major risks around the availability of talent and skills in the market to replace them.

Turnover has long been a key company metric. It is now imperative to minimize it, as replacing people is proving tougher every day in the current climate. The consequent financial costs are causing real pain, to the tune of \$1 trillion+ in the US alone⁶.

This evidence suggests that the levels of employee satisfaction uncovered in this research demand redress.

1.3.2 HR Tech Solves for Productivity

One of the outcomes of the pandemic and the enormous changes to work it has wrought is an unexpected surge in productivity⁷. Growth of 1.5% per year is predicted for the 2021-25 period, up from an average of 1.2% per year between 2008 and 2020.

As we move into a world of hybrid work and an uncertain future, prioritizing productivity and supporting people in doing their jobs is paramount. If less than a quarter of employees find it very easy to locate answers and information they need on the job, that presents a very real productivity problem for HR to address.

NASA talks about the importance of its technology as "investing to divest." HR technology drives both process transformation and the employee experience there, and in one project cut time spent on certain work from 30 days to 30 minutes. That type of time-saving applied at scale across an enterprise translates into untold productivity gains, which is enormously beneficial for the organization. Further, it stands to remove or reduce friction and unwanted tasks or administration for the employees, resulting in a better experience and increased satisfaction. Truly a win-win.

"And in using our technology systems, our goal is to create an employee experience ecosystem which works on the premise of prioritizing productivity and enablement without the need for complex integrations or training."

**JOSH NOVELLE, DIRECTOR OF
DIGITAL LEARNING SOLUTIONS,
WARNER MUSIC**



"We took a hiring process that was resource intensive and transformed it using new HR technology. These types of opportunities might be few and far between, but look for them and they stack up. It helps show the benefits of your transformation to the rest of the organization very quickly."

**KELLY ELLIOTT, BUSINESS
OPERATIONS FOR HCM, NASA**

⁵ Great Attrition or Great Attraction, McKinsey, 2021

⁶ Workplace, Gallup, 2021

⁷ Productivity after the Pandemic, McKinsey, 2021

1.3.3 There is a Change Management Conundrum

Crucially, only 18% of employees report that HR's approach to change management is highly successful. This suggests organizations aren't doing enough to take people on a journey through the implementation of new HR systems with them. This will ultimately impact their engagement, which in turn impacts adoption and success. Employee satisfaction becomes directly impacted, which in turn impacts productivity. The opposite of a virtuous circle!



“One great success for us was pitting two LXP providers against each other in a pilot and gave 1000 employees the opportunity to play with both in parallel and evaluate the user experience and benefit realization using consistent criteria. This not only formed a large part in our final purchasing decision. It also gave us insights around what our people were looking for. And the employees involved became core change champions when we implemented the preferred solution.”

BRIAN MURPHY, GLOBAL HEAD OF LEARNING & ENTERPRISE CAPABILITIES, ASTRAZENCA

What is HR doing right?

We wanted to analyze what success in HR technology projects looks like so others can learn from it and emulate it in their organizations. As we have established, context is always key when it comes to HR technology and there is no such thing as a one-size-fits-all approach.

Here we'll deep-dive into projects that are rated as highly successful to gather key insights that will help drive the overall number of successful projects up through 2022 and beyond.

2.1 Prioritizing the Employee Experience

“What is employee experience?

The answer is the sum of all interactions an employee has with an employer, from prerecruitment to post-exit. It includes everything from major milestones and personal relationships to technology use and the physical work environment.”⁸

In “Why HR Projects Fail”, employee experience was identified as the “killer app” in HR technology projects. Since then, the picture around employee experience has exploded. On the surface at least, it now feels more like the price of entry for any HR system. All HR technology should be considering the employee experience. And all organizations too.

But like any hyped up trend, it has become a term that is thrown around or plastered on vendors’ websites and advertising. It requires some digging beneath the surface to understand the reality of what’s really being offered. We’ll put this under the microscope in Section 3.3.

“All of the individual moments of an employee’s experience play a role in how a worker feels about an employer’s purpose, brand and culture. These feelings directly affect employee engagement, retention, performance and development.”⁹

The employee experience trend has clearly driven some positive moves across HR technology, both in terms of the technology itself, and how organizations consider and prioritize the employee who will actually be using their new system. In the context of this research, it’s undoubtedly emerged as a critical part of why HR projects succeed.

**Context
is key**

⁸ Workplace, Gallup, 2021

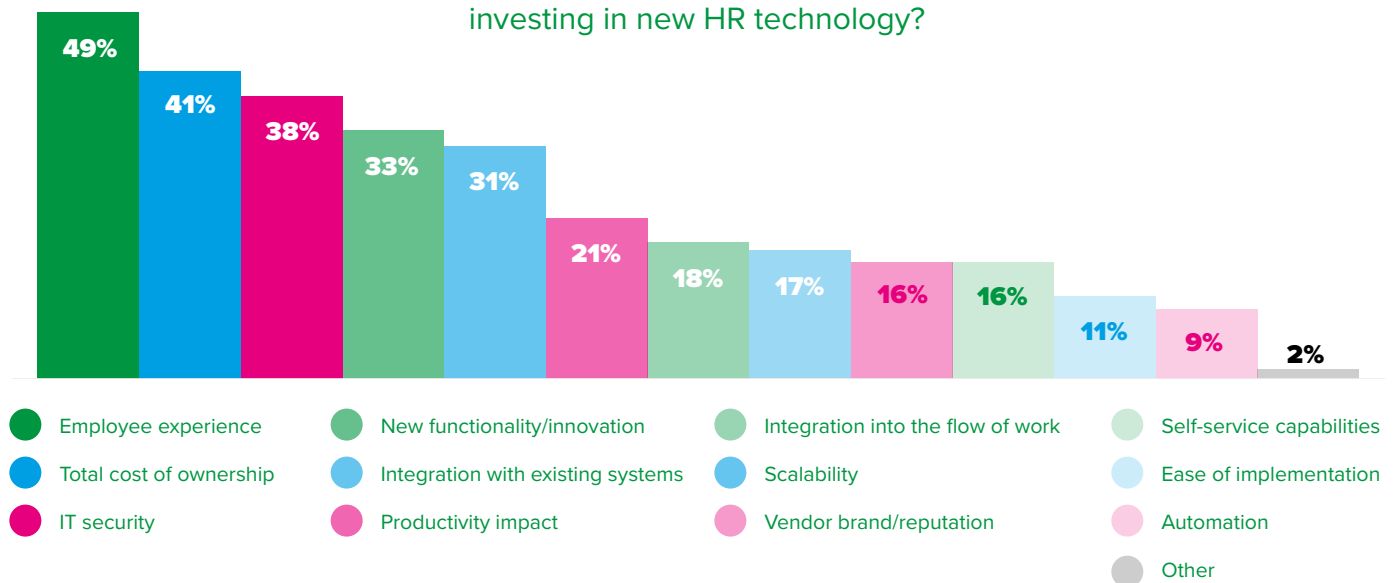
⁹ Workplace, Gallup, 2021



2.1.1 Making Employee Experience #1

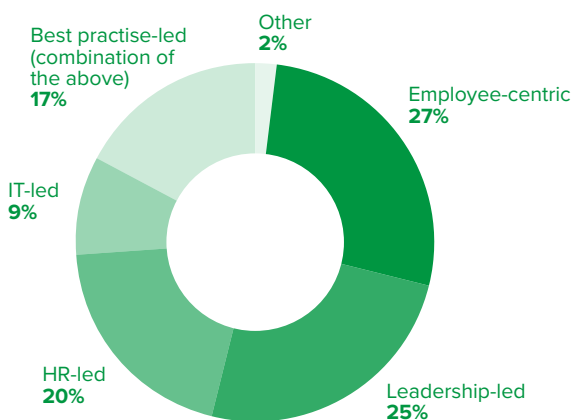
Employee experience is now the number one consideration for organizations when considering new HR technology.

Typically, what are your organization's **key considerations** when investing in new HR technology?

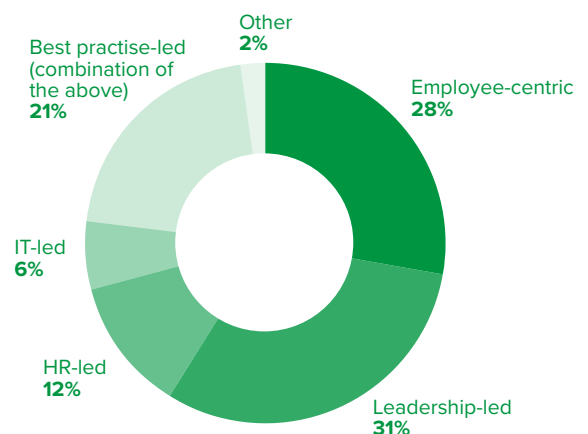


This is an important shift towards greater employee self-service. It is also a build on the wave of improved user experience shifts that HR technology saw earlier in the century. But it is always important to remember that employee experience is about so much more than just a nice interface – or even the technology itself.

To this end, 27% of organizations would characterize their approach to employee experience as employee-centric. This is still less than a third, but is the highest rated approach, beating out C-Suite, HR or IT led approaches. Meanwhile, a little over a third (34%) of employees would agree with this statement. Overall though, more employees still feel the approach in their organization is leadership-led. This marginal gap highlights the gains HR has made in becoming more centered on the employee experience.



Organization View



Employee View

2.1.2 Using Experience-led Technology

Across the board, 35% of organizations are now using an employee experience solution to provide an integrated interface for their HR platforms. This figure rises to 41% in the organizations identified as highly successful in this study. This is compelling for a number of reasons.

Firstly – and unsurprisingly – the number of HR systems that exist within an organization continues to grow. Nearly one-third (28%) of enterprise organizations have 8 or more HR platforms. Is it any wonder that less than one-quarter of employees feel it is very easy to find the right information at the right time?

When we dig deeper, we see that harnessing an employee experience layer is actually a key factor to success. Organizations using one are nearly 3 times more likely to class their HR technology project as highly successful. If three quarters of employees are struggling to find the right HR information at the right time, and this part of their everyday work experience can be improved upon (with 82% saying that accessing HR technology is an important part of their daily work), this is potentially a low hanging lever for HR teams to pull.

In fact, using an employee experience solution positively impacted results across the board.

MEASURE OF SUCCESS	IMPACT OF AN EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE SOLUTION
Improved employee experience	X 2.7 more likely for project to succeed
Increased retention rates	X 2.5 more likely for project to succeed
Adherence to budgeted costs	X 2.4 more likely for project to succeed
Adherence to project timelines	X 2.1 more likely for project to succeed
Attainment of project goals	X 1.9 more likely for project to succeed
Increase in employee self-service	X 1.7 more likely for project to succeed

2.2 Setting measures for success

How can any organization judge the success of their HR project if there aren't any measures in place? The good news is that 75% of companies we surveyed are establishing these measures from the outset. But as ever, tracking and analyzing them can be challenging in reality (note that nearly half of organizations surveyed feel their HR teams need to improve their data and analytical skills too).

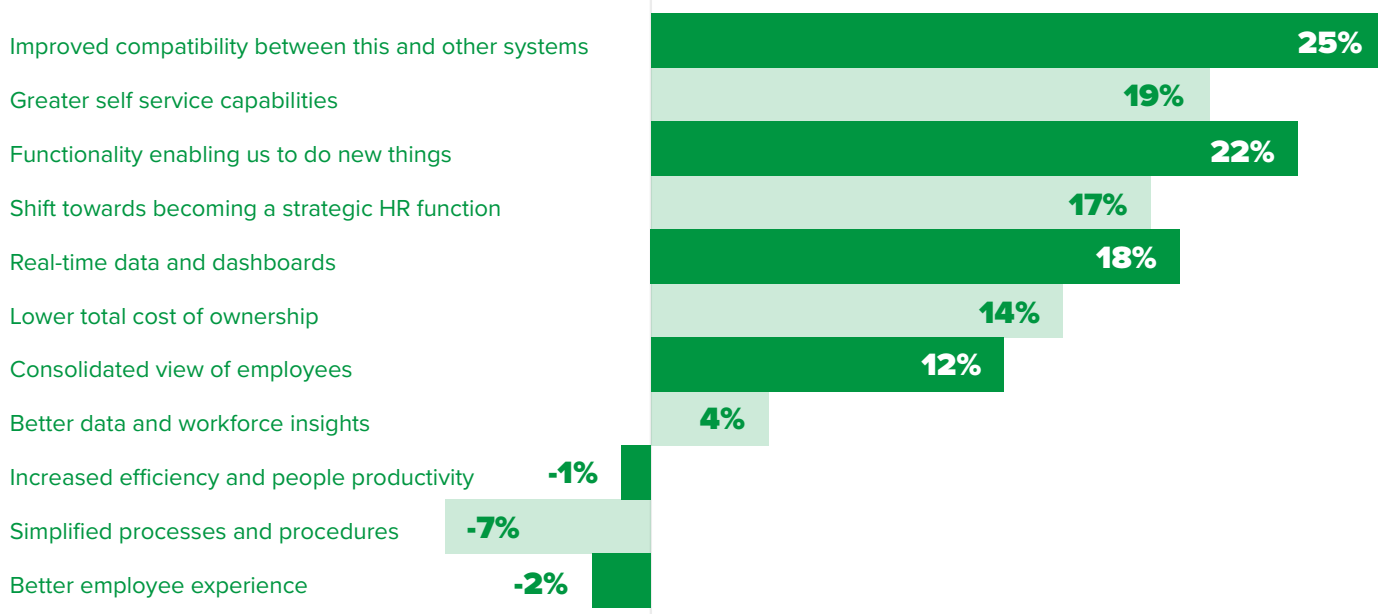
“The way HR wins with its technology projects, is to step back and ask: What is the business problem we’re trying to solve with new HR technology?”

We need to be intentional in our approach and have intention to solve real problems – that’s what breeds success. HR projects fail because they don’t achieve what they intended. You have to do the work at the front end to define what success looks like. Because, ultimately, how costly is it if you invest in something that doesn’t solve problems?”

QUENTIN SALAY, VP HUMAN RESOURCES, COMCAST

We asked the leaders how their expected benefits stacked up against the actual benefits they feel they have realized as a result of their HR projects. Most areas exceeded expectations.

Improvement on **expected benefits** of HR projects versus **actual benefits** achieved



Interestingly, the lowest expectations were around the improvements in compatibility between the new systems and other existing systems in the organization. Only 15% expected to see benefits here, but 41% recognized them after implementation. With expectations so low, perhaps it is unsurprising there is such a big variance here.

Tellingly, half of these organizations anticipated a better employee experience – the #1 expected benefit and also the #1 consideration when investing in new HR technology. But only 48% achieved this. Are expectations too high? Arguably not, if only half have the expectation of a better employee experience at the end of the project when it is clearly such a priority across HR today. So, it is disappointing not to see stronger actuals being recognized here post-project.

So while it is positive to set measures for success and adopt a more evidence-based approach, it is worth reflecting that that alone is not enough. What are the actions that generate successful outcomes in reality?

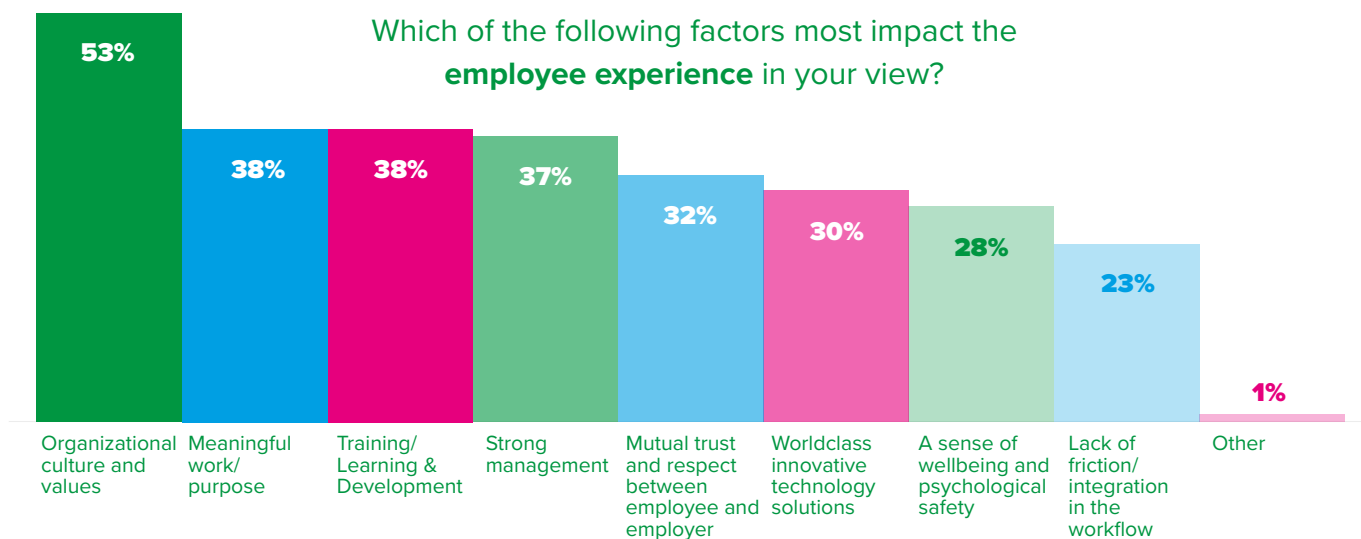
2.3 Creating the right culture and conditions

Part of the original hypothesis of this research was that even in a technology-led project, it is the human factors that make the difference between success and failure. The culture of an organization is what forms the backdrop to the HR technology's success – with the two ideally coming together to create the employee experience.

“Culture eats strategy for breakfast...”

PETER DRUCKER, AUTHOR AND MANAGEMENT GURU

This research shows that organizational culture and values are the **top-rated factor** by employees in impacting their experience at work. This is closely followed by meaningful work and purpose, and opportunities to train, develop and learn.



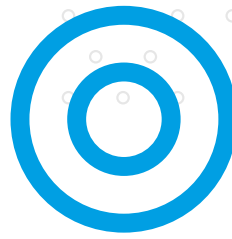
72% of organizations believe that their visions, goals and values are well communicated to, and understood, by their people. Employees ranked culture and values as the second highest factor in them leaving an organization if these do not align well with them. And in the current labor market, this propensity to leave is higher than ever before.

Organizational culture also heavily impacts attitudes to innovation.

“If you haven’t addressed the cultural piece of a HR technology/transformation project, then it will fail!”

MARK OEHLERT, INNOVATION SUCCESS MANAGER, AMAZON

HOW WOULD YOU DEFINE YOUR ORGANIZATION’S ATTITUDE TO INNOVATION?	IMPACT OF AN EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE SOLUTION
We provide psychological safety for some mistakes to be made as we innovate and improve	X 1.8 more likely for project to succeed
We are continuously iterating what we do and how we do it in a bid to innovate and improve	X 1.9 more likely for project to succeed
We create robust feedback loops and ongoing evaluation to assess the impact of innovation	X 2 more likely for project to succeed
We work with our suppliers to create pilots that let us assess new technology before full roll-outs	X 2.1 more likely for project to succeed
We hold pre- and post-mortems to fully understand what’s worked - and what hasn’t	X 1.9 more likely for project to succeed
We work closely with our vendors to understand new releases and manage those cycles closely	X 1.9 more likely for project to succeed



Those organizations with a more robust approach to innovation are more likely to succeed, which we will explore in more detail in a later section. Pilots are incredibly important, and establishing a culture in which any technology project is an ongoing journey is essential. Feedback, continuous iteration, and pre- and post-mortems all help build understanding of what has worked and what hasn't. Blame culture particularly needs to be a thing of the past if your organization is going to truly change and innovate.

“We are a discovery and science organization which can cause tension at times as it often doesn't jive with the ‘get it right first time’ bias of science academia. This is in part why we are doing so much work around our learning culture. Involve your people, let them in to co-create the ideal experience/solution. Listen to them. Use design thinking. Pilot and test.”

BRIAN MURPHY, ASTRAZENECA

“HR projects need the same set up as any other project to succeed. Being able to manage the scope, hit objectives, manage resources, timescales and budget. These are stable success criteria that must be included from the get go.”

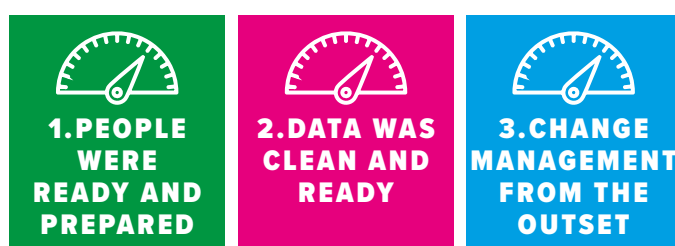
ALEXANDRA MINOR, NASA

It is interesting to consider these factors in the context of the skills that organizations believe HR teams need for their projects to succeed – both now and in the future. The most desirable are IT and technical skills, closely followed by project management and change management skills.



2.4 Preparation that Prevents Poor Performance

Laying the groundwork for the right cultural conditions, and ultimately for success, cannot be underestimated in the context of HR projects. Organizations believe the following are the top three factors for success, none of which are HR specific, but are fundamentals of IT projects more generally.



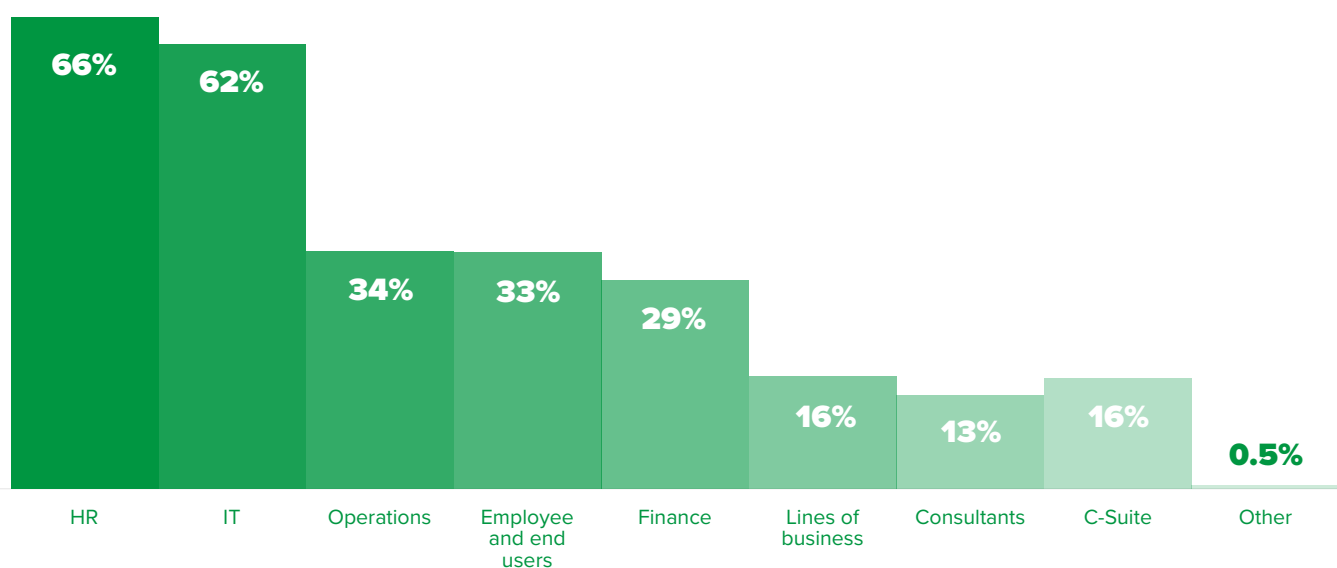
Partnering closely with IT is undoubtedly a strong contributing factor in successful HR technology projects. So, is the need for technical skills in HR overrated if that input can be sourced from elsewhere in the business? Arguably, the foundational project management skills to budget and keep things on track, coupled with the ability to manage the critical change components of what can be huge projects, are much more important.

Critically, 62% of organizations believe IT and HR/ business leaders need to be completely aligned throughout the process of identifying and selecting a new HR platform. Only 6% of HR technology projects are IT-led, and surprisingly, only 63% currently involve IT in assessing functional capability. If it is recognized that HR needs to improve its IT and technical skills, it seems an easy win to address that current skills gap with people from the IT function where that knowledge and skills should exist already.

“We are constantly thinking about our value chain for the future and scanning the market and talking to partners about their roadmaps. We are also working closely with Corporate Technology and IT. Increasingly, I don’t think we will see such a big divide between work and collaboration technology – and HR/learning technology. It will all come together which is a situation massively accelerated by COVID-19.”

BRIAN MURPHY, ASTRAZENECA

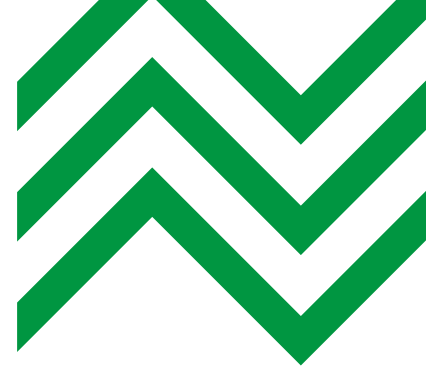
Who is involved in assessing the **functional capability** of new HR technology solutions?



Meanwhile, 72% work with an external systems integrator to implement their new platform. Partnering where HR – or even IT – doesn’t have the right skills or expertise in-house is sensible and straight out of the traditional playbook of HR technology. This is big business, with many of the large consultancies having dedicated practices to support HR technology projects. And the enterprise software providers in the HR market work closely with them as stakeholders to update, upskill and ensure the skills exist to be able to implement their solutions successfully.

“It is so important to have the right partners on board for a HR technology project. Not just in terms of the company’s credentials but also their values and working styles – it needs to be a good cultural fit to really succeed.”

ALLISON DETITTO, MOODY’S



What can HR do next?

Despite everything that HR is doing right, there is still work to be done. Here we examine the barriers to success that have emerged from the research – and what HR can do to overcome them.

3.1 Start with the End in Mind

Only 69% of organizations who took part in this research even try and track the adoption of their new HR technology. Why is this? What do they need to do in order to drive adoption?

“If your people aren’t ready to accept a new technology, they will cross a burning hot desert to give it back to you!”

MARK OEHLERT, AMAZON

It seems surprisingly shortsighted that 31% of organizations do not measure their digital adoption post-implementation. It can be a challenge to measure and time-consuming to establish, but just because something isn’t easy doesn’t mean it isn’t worth doing.

There are numerous routes an organization can take to drive adoption, with training emerging as the top route. Learning and development leaders will be well aware of the potential pitfalls of forgetting curves and the need for ongoing performance support materials post-launch. Digital adoption platforms are steadily increasing in popularity as an alternative or add-on to formal training provision.

One of our interviewees even referred to their activity with a digital adoption platform as “learning prevention” – meaning they are providing support and information at the point of need, without people even realizing they are “learning” as part of the process. That integration into the flow of work is something we can expect to see more of in the future.



The old saying “what gets measured gets done” is potentially a useful approach here, with usage of new systems and platforms being built into KPIs as they were at the LEGO Group.

“There’s a 3-step approach we took to digital adoption. First, lay the foundation for your new HR system. Just get it in and get it running. Second step, is about building the habit and getting people logging in. We were strict about it and set a measurable KPI. My team were accountable for that, checking usage every month. If it dropped, we’d carry out interventions like drop-in sessions. You have to accept it might feel a bit contrived at first but it is all about building that habit. Then over time, people use the system more and their confidence starts to go up...then you get to the third step which is maturity. And that is when the business benefits of your investment are truly realized.”

MELISSA KANTOR, VP OF PEOPLE ANALYTICS AND INSIGHTS AT THE LEGO GROUP



Which of the following is your principle method of driving adoption of a **new HR technology** in your organization?

- **42%** Training materials e.g. e-learning, lunch and learns, virtual classrooms, reference materials etc.
- **24%** Digital Adoption Platform e.g. AppLearn, Whatfix, WalkMe etc.
- **21%** Internal communication e.g. C-level communication, senior stakeholder messages cross-channel promotion internally etc.
- **12%** Integration with existing systems e.g. use existing systems as access points for an integrated user experience.
- **1%** Other

3.2 Build on cultural foundations to support change

Positive data on organizational culture notwithstanding, the research shows that scores are low for levels of confidence in change management approaches. Only 18% of employees rate their organizations' approach as highly successful.

Meanwhile, 30% of leaders believe their approach to change management is highly successful and that on average they'd dedicate 58% of a project's budget to change management and training. This feels generous, especially when compared with the employees' view.

As referenced in Section 2.3, the impact of culture on an organization's propensity and ability to innovate and change is huge. A change-ready culture must be baked in from the start. In fact, many of the HR leaders we spoke to in the qualitative interviews for this research referenced they had begun laying the groundwork of their change management initiatives up to a year in advance of any technology implementation.

The ADKAR change management model¹⁰ was referenced when discussing the need for collective individual change in order to deliver organizational change.

A	Awareness - Of the need for change
D	Desire - To participate and support the change
K	Knowledge - On how to change
A	Ability - To implement desired skills & behaviours
R	Reinforcement - To sustain the change

"The key to change management is activating people's desires so they become supportive of your project. And the key to that is in the wiring. Activation takes time and will cost you if you fail to get it right. Start early, right from the outset of the project, to ensure your people come on the journey with you."

QUENTIN SALAY, COMCAST

Breaking it down even further, one HR leader observed that "change isn't always hard, we have often just done a really bad job of it in the past." He concluded that "if a change is really worth it and people see the win, then it will happen!"

3.3 Close the Employee Experience Gap

While the general organizational (and technological) shift towards becoming more employee-centric are highlighted in this research as a net positive, the battle here is far from won:

- Employee experience is identified as the top reason an employee would leave an organization. Something leaders cannot afford to ignore against the backdrop of the "Great Resignation" and the battle for retention.
- Less than 20% of employees are fully involved in the selection or implementation of HR technology.
- There is a disconnect between what organizations say they are striving for, i.e. employee experience as their #1 consideration, versus the reality.
- This "Employee Experience Gap" is something organizations need to close if their HR projects are going to truly succeed in the future.
- It is critical to remember that we cannot talk about the employee experience without the context of the broader workplace. Whether that is in the office, at home, or both, hybrid working has surfaced new requirements and created new experiences for all of us.

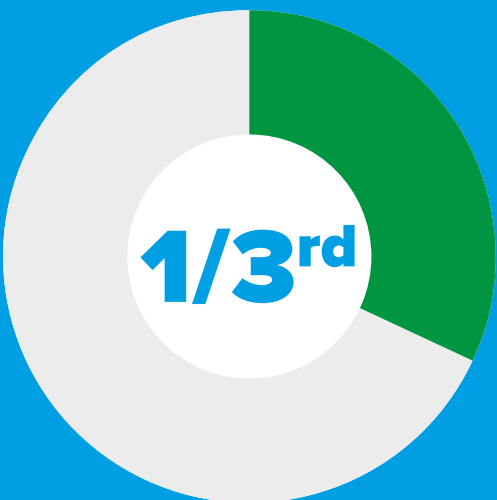
The Employee Experience Gap



is now the **#1** consideration when investing in new HR technology

There is a gap between what organizations are striving for and what they’re delivering when it comes to employee experience...

Only around **1/3rd** of HR leaders and employees alike are fully satisfied with the employee experience in their organization



Despite the emphasis placed on the employee experience, only around **1/3rd** of organizations believe they can take an employee-centric approach

83%

of employees believe that HR technology is important in their everyday experience at work

24%

But less than 1/4 of employees feel it is easy to find the right HR information or access the right HR system at the right time

33%

of HR leaders believe they involve employees in the implementation of new HR technology, but employees disagree with the number feeling involved is only...

14%

TOP FACTORS THAT IMPACT EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE	
HR LEADERS	EMPLOYEES
Organizational culture and values	Innovative technology
Training/Learning & Development	Meaningful work and purpose
Meaningful work and purpose	Organizational culture and values



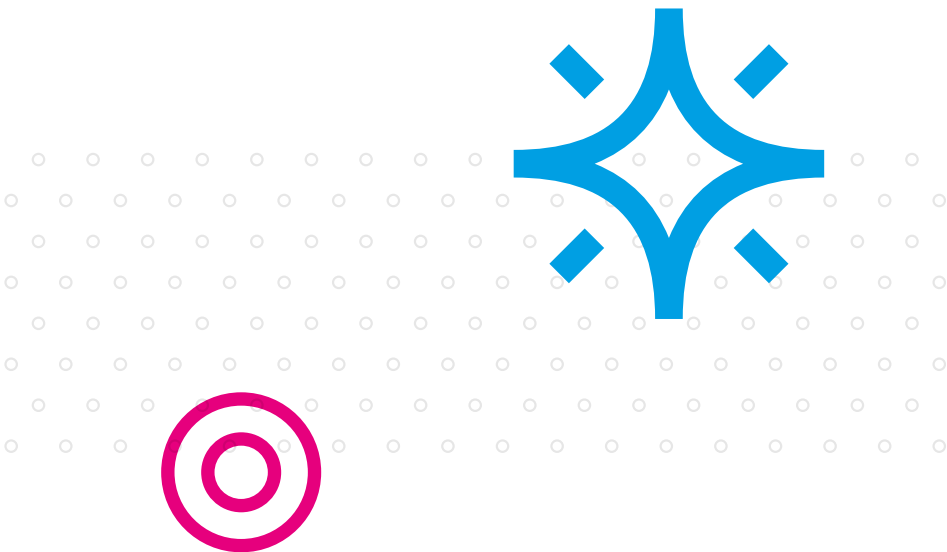
HR appears to largely be solving for **today's** problems rather than **tomorrow's**

3.4 Focus on future fit

The key considerations for leaders when selecting new HR technology show a lack of “Future Fit thinking.”



The fact that HR appears to largely be solving for today’s problems rather than tomorrow’s is understandable when so many organizations have been in crisis mode post-pandemic. But when the *average* HR technology project takes longer than 18-months from start to finish, HR teams must think ahead and leverage solutions that allow them to be more agile going forwards.



7 habits of highly successful HR organizations

With a view to helping more HR technology projects succeed in the future, we have distilled the key habits of highly successful HR organizations.

It is clear from this research that why HR projects succeed, is often as a direct result of having a clear “why” an organization is undertaking that project in the first place. Every HR, talent and learning leader we spoke to emphasized having the right motivation and a clear understanding of the business challenges the project is trying to address.



4.1 Start With Why

“The way you win is to step back and ask: What is the business problem we’re trying to solve with new HR technology.”

QUENTIN SALAY, COMCAST

Behavioral mindset is a huge part of successful digital transformation

4.2 Create the Right Culture

As we have seen throughout this report, culture matters. A lot. HR leaders should be working to help create an environment that champions change, fosters innovation, provides hybrid workplace options and involves its employees in decisions. This is not solely HR's responsibility of course, something that has become a huge talking point for the UNLEASH audience worldwide. It has expanded dramatically from being the responsibility of HR and IT, to the entire C-Suite needing to play a proactive role in providing an excellent employee experience for their people.

Nevertheless, HR has a critical role to play here.

The single biggest factor in the success of HR technology implementations is that people are engaged in and prepared for using a new system (43%). Before you even start thinking about which provider you should partner with or which technology you should invest in, put the wheels in motion to lay those cultural foundations that ensure you win people's hearts and minds.

4.3 Be Employee-centric

One third of highly successful organizations characterize their approach as employee-centric. More tellingly, **100%** of those employees who believe it is very easy to find the right HR information or support they need, or access the right HR system at the right time, have been involved in the selection and implementation of HR technology at some level.

For the purposes of the research, we didn't define what this involvement looks like. However, this is a powerful piece of data that unquestionably highlights the benefits of employee-centricity and taking your people on the journey throughout the transformation – not just expecting them to adopt a new system at the end. It all dovetails with an organizational culture-focus and the explosion in the importance of employee listening and analytics to both capture and interpret what people want and need.

“We refresh strategy based on business needs. This informs the tech enablement that is required. We look at emerging trends in the market but try not to be led by shiny new things. Instead, we always link back to what our people and the business need, to unlock potential. I try not to fall into the trap of looking for problems to match solutions but work the other way around.”

BRIAN MURPHY, ASTRAZENECA

“Whether there are 1,000 or 100,000 people in your organization, behavioral mindset is a huge part of successful digital transformation. The culture you create to drive and support your people's behaviors should always be your North Star before, during and after HR projects.”

NAZIM UNLU, PEOPLE & ORGANIZATION HEAD, NOVARTIS

4.4 Set Measures of Success

86% of highly successful organizations set measures of success from the outset of their project, versus 69% across the board. Understanding how and why you want to impact the business and people's performance is a real factor in the success of these projects.

Trace and track the critical measures. Make evidence-based and agile decisions and share both successes and failures along the way until you can prove the desired behaviors are changing.

"If everything goes right, where will you be two years from now? What will have changed? What will be better? At Amazon, we write draft press releases to visualize the state of play at the end of a project and describe how we've moved the needle. It's a mechanism that lifts stakeholders out of the day-to-day noise and helps set those all-important project priorities and measures of success."

MARK OEHLERT, AMAZON

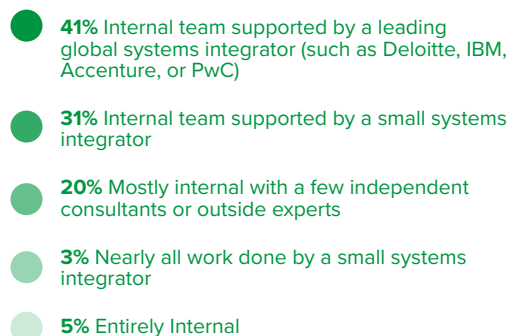
4.5 Partner Proactively

Over three quarters (77%) of highly successful organizations align closely with IT as part of their HR project. Even in decentralized organizations, this number is still high at 62%.

72% additionally work with an integration partner of their choosing, whether that's a large global expert or a smaller more boutique option. The message here is not to go it alone.

66% of highly successful organizations also rated their chosen vendor/provider as a good fit for their business and internal processes too. These aspects matter in addition to the technology, features and functions that a vendor can provide.

What's the **predominant model** your organization follows when it comes to implementing new HR systems?



4.6 Unify the Experience

The results of those organizations using a dedicated employee experience solution are compelling. They make a measurable difference across almost every measure of success. And of course, when it comes to the overall employee experience within the organization, they impact success by nearly **3 times**.

“We’re already seeing success, as our technology systems run in the background without any need for additional training or adoption initiatives and yielding clear and quantifiable results via employee time savings and productivity gains.”

JOSH NOVELLE, WARNER MUSIC

But caveat emptor; buyer beware. Not all employee experience solutions are created equal. Some affect just one part of your HR system or technology stack. If you are not already using one of these solutions and intend to explore your options, be sure to adopt some of the other habits of highly successful organizations e.g. working closely with vendors, creating robust feedback loops, continuously iterating, and definitely deploying pilots to assess new technology.

And ultimately, to improve the total experience for your people and your workplace, it is imperative to consider all the departments and systems your employees interact with. Fixing just one part will not deliver organization-wide results.

4.7 Keep it Human

“HR technology projects are about more than just the power of a particular system. Their success relies on as much on human factors as they do the technology – particularly, organizational culture, the skills and behaviors of the HR team, accurate data and the ability to implement and drive adoption.”

This was the original hypothesis behind “Why HR Projects Succeed”. Ultimately, multiple factors contribute to the success of HR technology projects. And as evidenced by the results of this research – from organizational culture, to employee-centricity, to attitudes to innovation, to the ability to partner proactively both internally and externally – the human factors are as important as the technology.

Taking steps in both areas to close the employee experience gap must be HR’s next step, and it is exciting to see the progress made since our original research in 2020.

As one of the surveyed HR leaders put it better than we ever could:

“In the end, success follows stakeholder buy-in. From executive level, to across the organization, win people’s hearts and minds and ensure they understand the mission. Then complete it together.”

KELLY ELLIOTT, NASA



Appendix: About this Research

How was this research conducted?

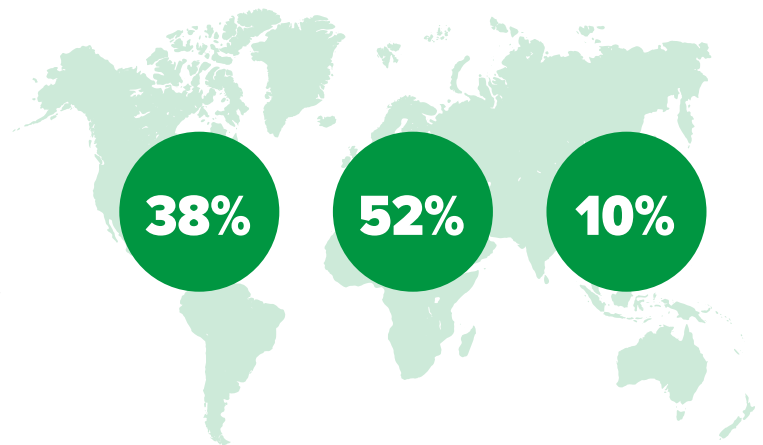
The research was conducted by UNLEASH Group between November 2020 and March 2021 using two surveys combined with in-depth, qualitative interviews with HR leaders worldwide.

About the respondents

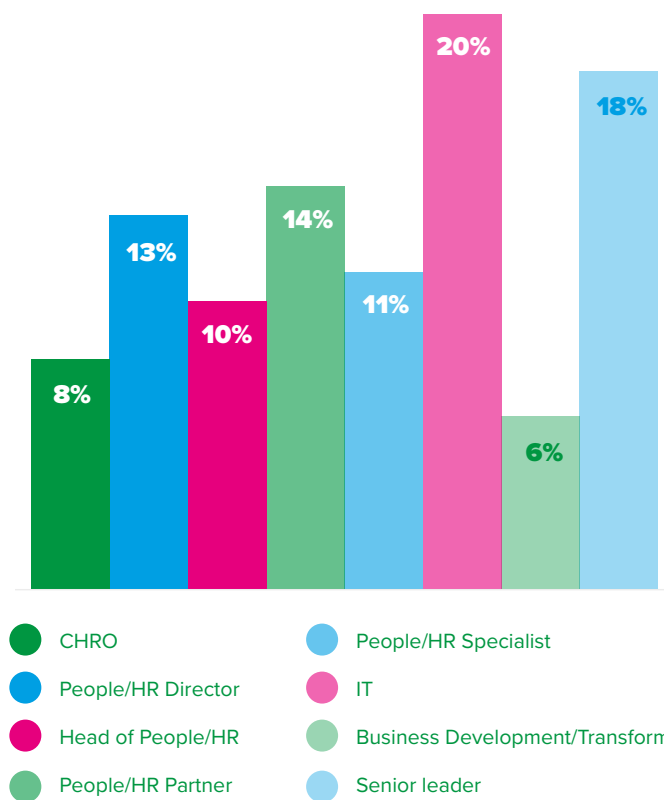
UNLEASH engaged with both a business leadership audience and employees for this research. 1,345 responses were collected from the leadership survey, composed primarily of HR, talent and learning leaders, with useful input from IT and broader business leaders.

Where are they?

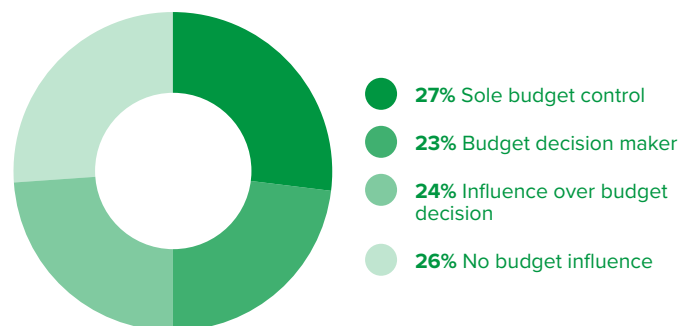
Location of respondents



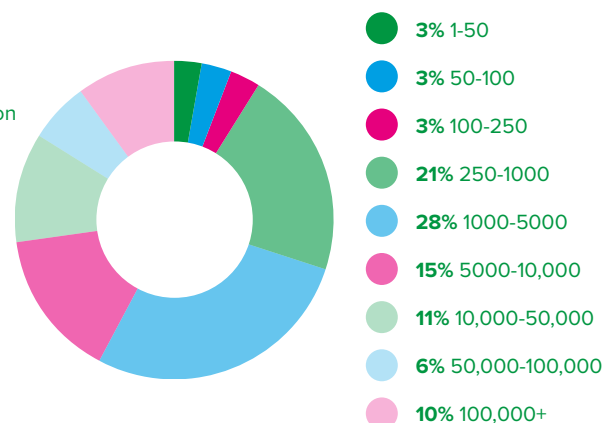
Respondent Roles



Which of the following best describes **your role** in HR technology decision making?



Organisation size



1,038 responses were generated by the employee survey across a range of roles, levels, industries and locations worldwide.

Organizations represented include:



Qualitative input

Our thanks go to the UNLEASH audience worldwide who took part in this research. In particular, we'd like to thank those senior HR leaders who gave up their time to talk to us in the qualitative aspect of the research. These conversations bring the data to life and add depth to the insight we can provide to the readers of this report. Their frontline insights and experience are invaluable as they continue to drive our profession forward worldwide.



**ALEXANDRA
MINOR**
NASA



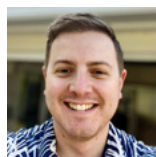
**KEITH
KRUT**
NASA



**QUENTIN
SALAY**
Comcast



**BRIAN
MURPHY**
AstraZeneca



**JOSH
NOVELLE**
Warner Music



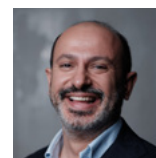
**ALLISON
DETITTO**
Moody's



**KELLY
ELLIOTT**
NASA



**MARK
OEHLERT**
Amazon



**NAZIM
UNLU**
Novartis

“Choosing the right HR technology for your unique context is of course, key. But assessing broader human factors like your organizational culture and approaches to change management are just as critical in ensuring your HR projects succeed.”

**MARC COLEMAN,
FOUNDER AND CEO, UNLEASH**

Accuracy of Information and Warranties

The analysis and recommendations made in this research are based on the information currently available to UNLEASH Group and its supporting partners and from sources believed to be reliable. UNLEASH and its partners disclaim all warranties as to the accuracy, completeness or adequacy of such information. UNLEASH and its partners will have no liability for errors, omissions or inadequacies in the information contained herein or for interpretations hereof. Opinions expressed herein are subject to change without notice. All content is copyright UNLEASH Group unless expressly identified. All rights reserved.