

HR Jobs of the Future with Jeanne Meister



Rob Parsons
Manager, Content and Brand
Paychex, Inc.



Jeanne Meister
Founding Partner, Future
Workplace

Full transcript

Rob Parsons:

Welcome to the Paychex HR Leadership Series. I'm your host, Rob Parsons. I lead the content team here at Paychex, and we write extensively on a variety of HR topics, covering everything from HCM technology, to team engagement, to compliance with state and federal regulations. In this podcast, we speak with leaders and thinkers in the industry to provide our audience with the latest HR insights and information, and hopefully more than a little inspiration. Joining me today is Jeanne Meister.

Rob Parsons:

Jeanne is founding partner of Future Workplace an HR advisory and research firm dedicated to assisting organizations in re-imagining and reinventing how they operate in the future workplace. She's the co-author of the Future Workplace Experience, 10 rules for mastering disruption in recruiting and engaging employees. Jeanne is also a keynote speaker on the Future of Work and the growing importance of employee experience in the workplace. And most recently she was one of the session speakers at our very own Paychex business conference. Jeanne, welcome to the podcast.

Jeanne Meister:

Thank you so much for having me Rob. It's a pleasure.

Rob Parsons:

So, it was great having you as an expert speaker at the business conference and your session was very well-received. I think what many attendees found especially interesting was the 21 HR Jobs of the Future report. Can you tell me just a little bit about the study and how you even landed on the 21 HR Jobs of the Future?

Jeanne Meister:

Yeah. Well, certainly. Well, it started with some research that we uncovered, which is pretty, not surprising, as we reflect back. But we're talking 2019 when it was a very different world and different workplace. At that

time, seven out of 10 workers stated in a survey we did with Cognizant that they depend on their employer for guidance in preparing them for the future of work. And I believe this is across organizations, large and small. There's so much uncertainty out there that they're really looking for their employer to guide them. So, we partnered at Future Workplace with Cognizant. And started with a design thinking session. Hosted in Santa Clara, California when we all had a 100 people in a room in November of 2019. And we talked about some of the big mega trends happening in terms of changing demographics and the use of artificial intelligence in the workplace, and the changing role nature of the office.

Jeanne Meister:

Although we had not — no way did we even think what we were headed into in 2020 — but at that point we identified first 60 potential jobs in HR that were either work streams or full-time jobs. And then we built, as you know, a two by two grid with the X axis being time from 2020 to 2030 and the Y axis being the level of technology centrality. Meaning all jobs have some amount of digital literacy. But depending on the job, you're either required to have a little more of it. And we launched this with an HBR article in August 2020. And as we look back and reflect, some of the jobs have definitely been accelerated because of COVID.

Rob Parsons:

Yeah. I wanted to touch on that, because it was... I love the two by two grid. But I bet you would redraw the grid differently now looking back and seeing what happened. What HR jobs of the future are, or should be happening, right now?

Jeanne Meister:

Yeah. Well, the first one is the director of well-being and that's either a job or a work stream. And we had it on our grid, believe it or not, happening in 2024. And right now we actually created an online course called 21 HR Jobs in the Future. And in the course is a director of well-being from PwC. But since then we've identified — and I have personally spoken with many, many heads of well-being. And these are individuals that work in the HR function, often reporting to a CHRO or maybe one level down. And they are the champions for having the organization develop a holistic view of employee well-being, which is not just physical well-being. Remember the days when companies would give people a Fitbit? And we found team challenges and say, okay, we're focused on well-being, right? Now what we have is organizations focusing, and the head of well-being focusing on physical well-being, importantly, emotional well-being, career well-being. What are my skills and what are the gaps, and how do I prepare for that next opportunity?

Jeanne Meister:

Financial well-being. We know that there are some really interesting new benefit offerings now. One, a new company, is launching a new benefit called the emergency savings account to help employees save for emergencies, because there's been a number of national surveys that say employees, by and large, workers, by and large, are not prepared for a big emergency, like a hurricane, where it does big damage to their property. Or they lose a job. Or there's an illness in their family. And so we're beginning to see that as a new benefit option. This is somebody that really sets the strategy, the strategic direction for holistic well-being, and that is happening now. In fact, and we're going to talk about this at the end of this session, Future Workplace did a survey on the 2021 Sentiment Survey, and we interviewed 200 heads of HR, CHROs, and employee well-being and mental health was the number one strategic priority for the next [inaudible 00:06:55].

Rob Parsons:

What's another job because well-being I get, and it's a challenge. And it's a topic we've talked about on the podcast, and I love your conception as well. And it seems to be accepted. It's holistic, and we've got to have this wide view. What else is happening right now that's interesting in the HR space and these work streams and what we should be thinking about?

Jeanne Meister:

Yeah. Well, the other one that I think everyone, literally every organization is dealing with right now, is what we termed in the report, the “work from home facilitator.” But there are jobs now called the “director of remote work.” And I just got off the phone today with someone whose job is the hybrid workplace leader. And so these organizations are responsible for the integration and the engagement of the remote workforce. In survey after survey, what we have seen is employees want workplace flexibility and they want to continue some type of remote work if their job allows. And so this is someone that — really think of this as someone having twin roles. One focused on technology: has the organization invested in the right technology so that remote workers can be productive in their jobs? For example, in design thinking sessions, you would often have a group together with sticky notes and work through a solution.

Jeanne Meister:

And now there are visual collaboration platforms called MURAL and Morrow, you can do that on Zoom or on WebEx. That’s one. The second is really the human side of remote work. And this individual, the head of either hybrid workplace or remote working is charged with creating employee work resource groups that are working with remote workers that bring remote workers together. Because the number one issue, if you’re working remote, is an inclusivity issue. Am I going to be able to take advantage of the same career opportunities, promotions, mentoring, coaching if I’m working remotely say three to four days a week? Will there be reference for those that go into the office? And companies are struggling with this. And I think when the vast majority of larger organizations go back, and even if you are back in your office right now, that’s an issue you have to deal with. This may be an important work stream that the CEO and the leadership team needs to understand — what are the principles of remote work and how much autonomy do teams have, do team leaders have to make sure that remote workers feel included.

Rob Parsons:

I think that’s such a huge deal. And there’s this layer of we’ve been working from home and we like the flexibility. But there’s also this great layer of, as a manager, if I’m hiring somebody, if I do remote work right, I can get talent from across the country, from across the world. But I don’t want to just get that talent and handle it poorly. I really want to manage that relationship in a much more positive way.

Jeanne Meister:

Yeah, absolutely. This is going to be a really important role, as you said, Rob, to ensure that an organization is able to create workplace flexibility that really works for the organization and for the individual. And this person also is responsible for doing a lot of employee surveys. Like what percentage of teams are in the same location? I mean, just think about your own team and what percent. Is that one of the criteria where, well if there’s a very small percent that are in the same location, they can just as easily work remotely?

Rob Parsons:

For sure. Another area, and I don’t know if it qualifies as hybrid work, but we’ve experienced it. And we’re in a very creative arena, my team. We have a group of freelancers who are part of the team, but not really. And we just try to manage that the best way we can. Is there something happening in that arena as well?

Jeanne Meister:

Yeah. One of the jobs we identified was the gig economy manager. And with COVID, we’ve seen a rise in companies who’ve had reorganizations and some of the work that’s been brought back has been freelance or contract work. But what we’re seeing differently is that the gig economy manager is really responsible for strategically managing all the gig workers. Because often it’s fragmented, [crosstalk 00:12:33] may hire a couple of freelancers in your department and somebody else’s. And there needs to be one individual that’s managing the gig economy platform for all of these workers. And creating some policies. Do the freelancers take — are they able to take advantage of the training and development that your organization has created for your full-time workers? I mean, there are lots of gray lines and questions here that you really need to have a solid policy for.

Rob Parsons:

And I love the idea of, company-wide, having a structure versus letting individual managers just catch-as-catch-can.

Jeanne Meister:

Right. That is key. And that's again, across all companies, regardless of size. They're going to — in fact, more so — with smaller companies. When they go back and business is picking up in their sector, they're probably going to be more likely to hire some contractors as they find their way with what's happening with their industry. But for this individual, it's both managing the external workers, but also more companies are trying to create a platform so that individuals can move throughout the company. It's called the "internal gig workers," or called "internal talent mobility." I move seamlessly and have some visibility into new roles in the organization or new projects that you might want to join as a way to expand your skillset. That's going to be a really important role as we continue to resume life and go back to the office. And notice, I'm not saying go back to work, because, Rob, I've been working harder than ever since March 2020.

Rob Parsons:

Yes. Yes. I think that's a common sentiment for sure. And I think that of the energy around the Future of Work around that hybrid workplace is that people have proved it can be done. They've proved they can do it, and that they can be trusted to do it.

Jeanne Meister:

And now that you mentioned the Future of Work, the other role that we have is just that, the Future of Work leader. So, we're beginning to see organizations step back and reflect on what are the future skills and capabilities we need to drive our growth strategies ahead. Are we prepared? Do we have the right people, or do people need to be re skilled into new roles? They're now looking adopting a leader that really works cross-functionally with business leaders, with IT, with HR, and with think tanks or with universities to take an external view of, where's the world of work going over the next decade? And then with the organization, how's the organization prepared for this?

Rob Parsons:

I love that. The past few years, the themes at SHRM have been around HR getting a seat at the table, HR being more strategic. That really lands right in that lap of looking ahead, forecasting and really constructing not just the employee base, but the workplace to really facilitate business success.

Jeanne Meister:

Yeah. And this person, the Future of Work leader, would really ask the tough questions that are at the heart of the hybrid workplace, which is, what's the role and purpose of the office anyway? And we're seeing the role and purpose to be all around being a destination. Because you can do a lot of your focused work outside of your office. And so then you have to ask, well, why am I going into the office? Am I going into the office? And if I'm on Zoom calls or Teams or WebEx, I can just as well be in my home office. I need to go there for a reason, a purpose. And I think the Future of Work leader will be working closely with real estate and facilities to look at if we adopt a flexible way of working, how does the office mirror that workplace flexibility.

Rob Parsons:

That's an excellent point, Jeanne. And one of the roles I wanted to ask you about was this workplace environment architect, because the work is a destination, it is changing, but also there's a lot. And you talked about it with well-being — there's a lot of energy about creating safer, healthier, more engaging workplaces for our employees.

Jeanne Meister:

Yeah. And we're seeing some really interesting experiments here. Actually in California, we're beginning to see innovation office parks, where smaller companies come together and share an office that's already been designed for well-being. And so just to give you a sense, here I am in my home office, but I'm looking at trees all day. For those of you, I happen to be in upstate New York about right outside of Albany, New York. But for many of us, if we go back to the office, we may not have a natural light. We may not have the natural light that we've

been accustomed to. And study after study shows that access to natural light reduces eyestrain and headaches and really increases productivity. So, I think we're beginning to see small and mid-sized companies coming together in an innovation office park built and devoted to employee well-being. And that's one of the reasons to go to the office now.

Rob Parsons:

That's fantastic. And I'm craving going back and having everybody back because of the collaboration, just because of the connection, there is something to be said for having a conversation that isn't just a half hour Zoom meeting. And I know a lot of our listeners have probably been at the office and haven't left. But there's just a lot of energy country-wide about this migration back. It's very interesting. So, one of the things I also wanted to ask you, a lot of our audience, they aren't working for fortune 500 companies, they aren't thousands of people. They don't have locations across the world. But I have to think some of this thinking would translate to a smaller environment. Can you shed a little light on that?

Jeanne Meister:

Yes. And I think the example I mentioned with the hybrid workplace leader, that actually is, it's a fairly big size company. I can disclose, it's Farmers Insurance, 20,000 employees. But the notion of how to work successfully in a hybrid fashion started as an employee resource group, no cost from the company. And it's just building together a group that wants to explore this concept because they want to work in a more flexible fashion. And that grew to building a resource center of resources to help one be more productive as a remote worker. And then that ultimately evolved into a full-time job for this individual. But employee resource groups, by and large, is a really perfect way to get going, regardless of your size. It's really listening to the voice of the employee and tapping into that. And then being responsive to what you hear.

Rob Parsons:

That's so very huge. And we just put together a benefits book, an e-book. And it was all about, "powered by your people." It was the idea of, "you've got to listen." I mean, you can't just talk to a broker and hear, "Oh, these are the things that you should do." It really helps to actually ask your audience what they want, right?

Jeanne Meister:

Right. Right. Yeah. So, while these have been identified as 21 HR Jobs of the Future, Rob, I think these are really 21 work streams for anyone thinking about the future of HR and the future of listening to your employees and taking action. That's where I think you will see some resonance with the forward-thinking companies that are small businesses and returning to the office.

Rob Parsons:

Yep. And as we continue to have challenges around talent and retention. I think the companies that listen and pay attention actually create a workplace that is healthy, and happy, and fulfilling are going to win. They're going to succeed. It's not just a feel good opportunity anymore. It's a business imperative.

Jeanne Meister:

Absolutely.

Rob Parsons:

I wanted to talk, and you mentioned it earlier, you've got some new research around HR and the hybrid workplace. Can you tell me just a little bit about that survey?

Jeanne Meister:

Yes. We were thrilled to partner with a network, a CHRO, Chief Human Resource Network out of Boston University Questrom School of Business and our member network. And we had an online survey was 200 CHROs. And we asked them, really focused, on what were their strategic priorities. The number one strategic priority for them was employee well-being. And that, we did that last year. And that changed, the number one was employee experience, and people analytics, and transforming your learning function. Those were the three in 2020 when we surveyed people in 2019. This year it's employee well-being, mental health, and DEI. And not

surprisingly, but what is interesting, is the progress that companies are making and the commitment to expand well-being from just the individual employee to the entire family. And that's what is the news for 2021, where we have companies like Starbucks and Walmart offering free counseling sessions.

Jeanne Meister:

We have a whole new realm of benefits for helping people with the stresses that they've had to go through and in the last year. And then we really have companies that have said, well, actually committing to employee well-being is the latest and most important leadership competency. And I think that's a really important takeaway, regardless of the size of your company, to really lead with empathy and lead with trust and respect. And with a recognition of a really hard time that many people have had, especially working women that have had to manage homeschooling, and working spouses — and men, it's not just women. People that have families that have had to deal with homeschooling in addition to more than full-time work, really. And so I was very encouraged by just the range of innovation for both apps, new apps and counseling sessions. But more importantly, embedding well-being into the culture of the organization and making a commitment that this is a new leadership competency.

Rob Parsons:

I love that. I love that, Jeanne. Thank you so much for joining the podcast today. That was so much great information.

Jeanne Meister:

Yes, you're absolutely welcome. And I would, of course, love everyone to see my session on Thrive, where I'm sure you will be able to have an easy link to it. And I'd like to thank Paychex as an important partner of ours here at Future Workplace. Thank you so much, Rob.

Rob Parsons:

Oh, fantastic. And thank you to our listeners for joining. As Jeanne mentioned, I encourage you all to visit paychex.com/thrive to see the recording of Jeanne's full session from the business conference and to download your own copy of the 21 HR Jobs of the Future report. We also have the Future Workplace 2021 HR Sentiment Survey, which we discussed, and we'll make that available in our show notes. And of course, I want you all to be on the lookout for upcoming research from Jeanne and Paychex. We have some great content planned for you, which will really help as you all strive to do your very best for your companies and your employees. And as always, I want you all to stay happy and healthy. Thank you very much.

Speaker 3:

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