**Making People Count: a workforce bulletin**

**August 2024**

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# Learning and Development

## Government launches Skills England

**Source:** Personnel Today

**In a nutshell**: Like a seven-year-old on Christmas morning, every so often the Government likes to pull out its quango kaleidoscope and give it a good twist watching bodies split up and reform and lots of glistening logos form pretty patterns on headed stationery and web sites. One of the latest to emerge after the change of government in July is Skills England “which will bring together central and local government, businesses, training providers and trade unions to meet the skills needs of the next decade across all regions, providing strategic oversight of the post-16 skills system aligned to the government’s industrial strategy.” Skills England, which will be established in phases over the next nine to 12 months, will identify the training for which the government’s new growth and skills levy – which replaces the apprenticeship levy – will be accessible, giving employers more flexibility to spend levy funds on training for the skills they need. The Skills England Bill, announced this week, will transfer functions from the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education to Skills England.

You can read the whole of this article at

<https://www.personneltoday.com/hr/skills-england-launched/>

## Are leaders equipped to go digital?

**Source:** Journal of Nursing Management

**In a nutshell:** In this study a team of researchers – led by Noora Laakkonen, from the University of Oulu in Finland – investigated digital competence among healthcare leaders. They analysed the research and found 19 articles which met their quality criteria. They found five main categories which described health leaders’ experiences with digital competencies:

* The need for developing leaders’ own, professionals’, and patients’ competence in the digitalization of healthcare
* The need for expertise in the health IT implementation process
* Positive perceptions about technology
* Negative perceptions about technology
* The ability to act as an advocate to implement technology in practice

Factors associated with the digital competence of healthcare leaders included their individual characteristics, career characteristics, and training.

You can read the abstract of this article at

<https://doi.org/10.1155/2024/8435248>

# People Management

## What do you think Colin? It’s about time we had a good laugh

**Source:** Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology

**In a nutshell:** In this study, led by Melvyn R.W. Hamstra from the IESEG School of Management in Lille, a team of researchers investigated the way managers used humour when turning down employees’ suggestions. They found that using humour made it feel safer for employees to suggest things but, at the same time, weakened how much impact they thought their suggestions would have.

You can read the abstract of this article at

<https://doi.org/10.1111/joop.12530>

## When the leading and the led line up

**Source:** Personnel Today

**In a nutshell:** Researchers at Durham University Business School have been looking into this issue and found that employees with similar goals to their managers are more likely to speak up at work, and that if employees feel well-aligned with their manager, they are, in turn, more likely to feel a connection to the organization and its identity. If employees had a high motivation to achieve and their manager did not (or *vice versa*) they were less likely to speak up. The researchers recommended pairing supervisors with staff who share similar goals (not husbanding their energy for their retirement, presumably), in order to create a collective voice. “Managers should be encouraged to share their goals from the outset … or build cohesion through other team-building activities.”

You can read the whole of this article at

<https://www.personneltoday.com/hr/managers-motivation/>

## When your job is not your calling

**Source:** Journal of Happiness Studies

**In a nutshell:** Some people feel a powerful sense of calling about their work, whilst others feel a powerful sense of calling about half an hour before home time as they contemplate a cuddle with various family members and a gin-and-tonic in the garden. It was the latter group which a team of researchers, led by Ju Young Lee from Western University in Canada, investigated in this study. They found that employees perceived their work as a *calling enabler* as it gave them financial resources, time flexibility, skills and social networks that allowed them to pursue their real calling. Perceived calling enablement facilitated work attitudes and behaviours such as job satisfaction, willingness to sacrifice, and job crafting.

You can read the abstract of this article at

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10902-024-00762-7>

## Is spotting strengths better than changing spots?

**Source:** Journal of Happiness Studies

**In a nutshell:** In this study a team of researchers, led by Valesca Y. Tobias, from Tilburg University in the Netherlands, took the opposite approach testing how identifying people’s strengths could help managers coach them. 255 managers took part in the study. They were divided into two groups. One group concentrated their coaching on the “signature,” strengths of the coached, and the other group concentrated on “lesser,” strengths. The researchers found that both interventions contributed equally to managerial coaching behaviour. They concluded that “online training in strength spotting is a useful tool that helps managers to develop their coaching behaviour.”

You can read the abstract of this article at

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10902-024-00756-5>

## Can British Bulldog boost your psychological safety?

**Source:** Journal of Organizational Behaviour

**In a nutshell:** “Sit quietly reading a book when you visit someone’s house at seven and everyone says what a good child you are. Do the same at 35 and people call you antisocial.” If there are any upsides to the office from the introvert’s point of view one of them should surely be that you’re not expected to lurch out from behind your monitor for a quick game of charades. Such is the evangelical zeal of extroverts though that even the office is not safe; many of them think that playing games at work can help “break down barriers,” and create “psychological safety.” Very much on this side of the argument were a team of researchers, led by Adaora Ubaka, from the University of Massachusetts in Boston. They studied the effect of “group-based play,” on 97 participants. They found that it disrupted “exclusionary dynamics among demographically diverse adults and permit them to shift their relational risk motivation from pursuing goals of individualized self-protection to pursuing goals of relationship promotion with one another.” The participants were more inclined to engage in “relational risk-taking,” with one another and to support each other in relational risk-taking. As the game went on the participants “co-created,” a climate of psychological safety,” in which they experienced “discrete events of relaxing and energizing into their differences.”

You can read the abstract of this article at

<https://doi.org/10.1002/job.2821>

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## How to channel the Olympic spirit at work

**Source:** Personnel Today

**In a nutshell:** For every Tom Pidcock or Alex Yee surging to victory in mountain-biking or triathlon there’s a shambling idiot cycling to the office without their work trousers (yours truly) or directing his running-club team car to the wrong leg of the cross-country relay (also yours truly). Hope springs eternal though and in this article former fighter pilot and current Insights Learning and Development Consultant Ian Brett outlines a few of the ways the Olympic spirit can be brought into the world of work.

**Accept:** Embrace the full spectrum of emotions. Accepting emotions as they arise creates space for them, allowing for higher performance. Encourage employees to recognise their feelings about an environment without being overwhelmed by them.

**Change perspective:** Stepping outside the situation and viewing it differently can help shift perspectives. Visualisation techniques can help individuals experience the desired perspective.

**Attend:** Focus attention intentionally to cultivate a resourceful emotional state. Practices like gratitude help maintain a positive focus, enhancing emotional state and performance.

**Amend:** Evaluate the effectiveness of techniques through feedback. If they’re not working, be willing to adjust and try new approaches.

**Practice:** Improvement comes with practice. Encourage individuals to step outside their comfort zones and embrace situations with uncertain outcomes.

You can read the whole of this article at

<https://www.personneltoday.com/hr/team-performance-olympics/>

## Can knowledge management make you feel better?

**Source:** Journal of Nursing Management

**In a nutshell:** Knowledge management can range from not looking up a taxi company in advance before you arrive at your destination (“there’ll be plenty, it’ll be fine”)\*, scrawling a few numbers on a scrap of paper which you then leave on a train, or actually programming them into your mobile phone like a fully-functioning grown-up. In this study Leila Rezaei, from Tehran University of Medical Sciences, led a team of researchers investigating the link between knowledge management and “social value” in a study of 228 nurses. The researchers found that among nurses who had a graduate qualification a higher score for knowledge management led to greater feelings of self-worth which, in turn, led to higher levels of customer satisfaction although there was no such relationship among nurses with a postgraduate qualification.

You can read the whole of this article at

<https://doi.org/10.1155/2024/9953915>

\*This does not work well on a cold February night in Church Stretton in the Shropshire hills

## Just what is it that you want to do?

**Source:** Human Resource Management

**In a nutshell:** In this study Nate Zettna, from the University of Sydney, led a team of researchers investigating “role clarity,” in a study of 270 social-care workers and 47 of their leaders. They found that “coworker instrumental support promotes role clarity, which, in turn, is associated with lower psychological distress and change fatigue, and higher job satisfaction. The positive relationship between coworker instrumental support and role clarity, and the subsequent relationships with wellbeing were stronger when employees had leaders who themselves had role clarity.”

You can read the abstract of this article at

<https://doi.org/10.1002/hrm.22245>

## When strong HR leads to a willing workforce

**Source:** The International Journal of Human Resource Management

**In a nutshell:** In this study Immaculada Beltrán-Martín and Juan Carlos Bou-Llusar, from James I University in Spain, studied 142 Spanish companies and 504 workers and found that the strength of an organization’s HR department had a positive and significant effect on employees’ affective commitment. However, when the relationship between leaders and their workers was good the effect of “HR system strength” on affective commitment was lower.

You can read the abstract of this article at

<https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2024.2382479>

## Has the generation(s) game had its day?

**Source:** Journal of Organizational Behaviour

**In a nutshell:** For academics, publishers, and journalists with a gaping hole to fill in the Saturday lifestyle section (top tip from a reader - just give us some blank paper for the bottom of the guinea pigs’ cage and save the ink) the concepts of Baby Boomers, Generations X, Y and Z and Millennials have been a bit of a God-send. Once the appropriate stereotypes for each generation have been inserted the copy virtually writes itself. But is there any truth to it all? Or are the supposed differences in generations more a function of people’s ages with today’s altruistic youngsters just as likely to become cynical middle-aged grumps and entitled pensioners as their predecessors? In this study Daniel M. Ravid, from the University of New Mexico led a team of researchers attempting to find out. They analysed the research on the different generations and found that there were “few systematic meaningful differences among generations on a variety of outcomes.” Further analysis of the articles showed that researchers “often discounted null or equivocal findings and seldom raised questions about the underlying concept of generations.” It’s lucky for the academics, publishers, and journalist though – they’ve still got gender to fall back on!

You can read the abstract of this article at

<https://doi.org/10.1002/job.2827>

## How does it feel to be on your own, like a complete unknown?

**Source:** The International Journal of Human Resource Management

**In a nutshell:** Rather like St Peter sorting the sheep from the goats at the Day of Judgement PE teachers often have cause to divide pupils between those who show some degree of sporting aptitude and others. The corporate equivalent of this is talent management in which certain employees are singled out for training and development. But how do those not chosen as talent feel about it? That was something a team of researchers, led by Stefan Jooss, from the University of Queensland in Australia, attempted to find out in this study. They found that “contrary to common assumptions, perceived non-talent designation may *not* universally cause negative responses.” While some people felt envy others felt inspiration\* - “depending “on the relevance of talent status to one’s identity, attainability of talent status in the future, and a multitude of micro-, meso-, and macro-level contextual factors.”

You can read the abstract of this article at

<https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2024.2385400>

\*It’s unclear whether indifference was one of the options available

## When culture trumps management

**Source:** The International Journal of Human Resource Management

**In a nutshell:** In this study a team of researchers, led by Diletta Gazzaroli from the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart in Milan examined the relationship between “organizational cultures of difference,” and diversity management. They found that organizational cultures of difference had a statistically-significant effect on organizational quality of life. Specifically a “diversity-driven,” organizational culture of difference had the most significant effect in promoting participation, innovation, commitment, and wellbeing. The researchers concluded that “when not adequately contextualized and supported by the organizational culture of difference, diversity management may exacerbate the idea of diversity as an organizational disadvantage.”

You can read the abstract of this article at

<https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2024.2386354>

# Recruitment

## Referring on the spectrum

**Source:** Human Resource Management

**In a nutshell:** In this study Daniela Lup, from ESCP Business School and Esther Canonico, from Imperial College Business School examined how autistic people fared when being referred (or not) for jobs. They found that “disclosure of an autism condition to potential referrers might pose some advantage, in that it increases the likelihood of being referred, but this advantage accrues only to male candidates. Furthermore, cues that hint at the social dimension of the “ideal worker,” commonly used in job recruitment materials, are the strongest deterrent for referrers.”

You can read the abstract of this article at

<https://doi.org/10.1002/hrm.22247>

## Minimum wage increase boosts average earnings

**Source:** Personnel Today

**In a nutshell:** Brightmine have found that the median basic pay award in the three months to the end of June was 4.9% - almost 3% above the rate of inflation. However, with inflation falling Brightmine now predicts that pay settlements will fall in line in 2025. The new government has pledged to remove the age limits on the minimum wage so that there is no longer a reduced rate for people under 21. Last week the government announced that annual growth in regular average earnings had slowed to 5.7% in the three months to the end of May, its slowest rate since August 2022.

You can read the whole of this article at

<https://www.personneltoday.com/hr/median-pay-award-july-2024-brightmine/>

## Job vacancies fall in June

**Source:** Personnel Today

**In a nutshell:** At the end of our street is a derelict house. Having – presumably – become embroiled in a latter-day equivalent of [Jarndyce vs Jarndyce](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jarndyce_and_Jarndyce) it now stands mouldering away, periodically propped up by the council, with everyone blaming the previous owners and nobody exhibiting the energy, organizational wherewithal, or financial resources to do much about it. All of which brings me on to the country’s economy. Jobs database Adzuna have been surveying the state of the employment market and found that vacancies fell by 19.49% year-on-year in June to 852,700 with jobseekers per role rising to the highest level since June 2021. The average advertised salary was £38,834. Whilst overall hiring was down roles in professional-services sectors such as law showed a monthly increase of 8.46%. PR, advertising, and marketing were up 3.78% and “creative and design,” rose by 3.46%. Thanks to the wet simmer hospitality and catering fell by 5.32% and roles in admin, and in healthcare and nursing both went down by 5.02% and 4.16% respectively. Trade and construction saw the biggest fall in vacancies – down by 50%. Cambridge was the best city to be looking for a job in with 0.35 jobseekers per available role. Bradford was at the other end of the spectrum with 8.2 people, on average, in the hunt for every job.

You can read the whole of this article at

<https://www.personneltoday.com/hr/uk-hiring-market-june-2024/>

## Why they’re winning in Winchester

**Source:** Personnel Today

**In a nutshell:** A recent family trip to the Isle of Man produced the usual relocation fantasies, shot down by a quick perusal of an estate agent’s window which revealed that we would inevitably end up with four of us crammed into a two-bedroom bungalow; one of us lying in front of the door to keep the draughts out, while the other stood with a bucket under the roof to catch the rain. HR software business Ciphr have been examining which parts of the world are the best for job opportunities. They concluded that Winchester was the pick of the pops with median salaries 16% higher than the UK median. Winchester has got nearly three times as many businesses per person as the UK average (179.1 per 10,000 adults vs 70.2) and unemployment there is 2.7%, well below the UK average of 3.7%. Other UK places in the top five were Warrington, St Albans, Chelmsford, and Sevenoaks. Salaries in St Albans were 36% above the UK average, even higher than London which was 20% above average. And Cambridge had the greatest number of job vacancies per adult, with 1,151 roles being advertised per 10,000 working-age adults.

You can read the whole of this article at

<https://www.personneltoday.com/hr/winchester-named-top-uk-city-for-job-opportunities/>

# Wellbeing

## When the kindest cut still hurts

**Source:** Journal of Happiness Studies

**In a nutshell:** In times of economic downturn employers often spare people the pain of job losses, and retain good workers, by cutting people’s hours instead of laying them off. In this study a team of researchers, led by Katharina Klug, from the University of Bremen, investigated the psychological consequences of this approach. 1,211 workers took part in the study, of whom 619 had been affected by being put on short-time working. The researchers found that short-time working led to higher levels of, and an immediate increase in, job insecurity which gradually decreased over time. Both increases in, and higher levels of, job insecurity were, in turn, associated with reduced wellbeing, changes which persisted for up to two years after the workers were placed on reduced hours. Interestingly, the researchers found no difference between those who had previously been laid off and those who had not in workers’ reactions to being given reduced hours.

You can read the abstract of this article at

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10902-024-00787-y>

## “I don’t want to talk about it”

**Source:** Current Psychology

**In a nutshell:** “[I don’t want to talk about it](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=esUHMBHJsn8),” declared Rod Stewart, before going on – as is customary after such declarations – to fill four minutes or so dissecting “how you broke my heart.” Psychologists call this distress disclosure and consider it to be a good thing. In this study Qianru Liu, from Huazhong University of Science and Technology, led a team of researchers investigating the links between alexithymia (the inability to name one’s emotions), resilience and distress disclosure. The study, which involved 828 nurses, found that alexithymia and resilience both influenced distress disclosure. Resilience was found to partially mediate the relationship between alexithymia and distress disclosure. The researchers concluded that “interventions that aim to reduce alexithymia and increase psychological resilience may be beneficial in promoting distress disclosure among nurses.”

You can read the abstract of this article at

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-024-06004-6>

## The benefits of mental-health training

**Source:** PLoS One

**In a nutshell:** Some organizations give “mental-health,” training to their managers, but does it do any good? In this study a team of researchers led by Juliet Hassard, from Queen’s University Belfast, attempted to find out. They surveyed firms in England and found that line managers’ training in mental health was significantly associated with improved staff recruitment and retention, better customer service, better business performance and lower long-term sickness absence due to mental-health problems.

You can read the whole of this article at

<https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0306065>

## You’ll find the psychiatrist between the stationery cupboard and the water cooler

**Source:** Employee Benefits

**In a nutshell:** Although things didn’t exactly go smoothly when a psychiatrist visited [Basil Fawlty in his workplace](https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x8bfl0j) many employees would welcome a little more help with their mental health. In June 2024 Peninsula Group found that there had been a 140% increase year-on-year in the number of employers seeing an effect from poor mental health across their workforce. A May 2024 study by Axa Health found that 72% of young UK workers felt that mental-health benefits were important when it came to deciding whether to stay with an employer or not. And in July Towergate Health and Protection found 57% of employers said that mental health and wellbeing was their greatest concern about their employees. “How employers offer mental health support today has changed, with interventions and services increasingly embedded in [health and wellbeing](https://employeebenefits.co.uk/healthcare-and-wellbeing/) programmes. Private medical insurance (PMI) scheme add-ons can include virtual GP services, physiotherapy and EAPs, while the latter can offer online support, counselling, and financial and legal advice.” Because mental-health services can now be provided digitally more people can access treatment in their own home at a convenient time using online resources or calls. “An alternative approach to mental health support could include regular opportunities for employees to review with their line managers what their pressure sources are and what changes might be possible to moderate this. This can improve engagement, provide data on improving emotional wellbeing, and enable managers to identify and experiment with new approaches.”

You can read the whole of this article at

<https://employeebenefits.co.uk/supporting-the-mental-health-needs-of-todays-workforce/>

## Are we still the sick man of Europe?

**Source:** Personnel Today

**In a nutshell:** Record numbers of us are not working due to illness, and a new analysis by the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) has found that the annual “hidden,” cost of employees’ sickness has risen by £30bn since 2018. Most of the hidden cost - £25bn – comes from lower productivity – with the remainder due to a rise in sick days. It estimates that employees now lose the equivalent of 44 days’ productivity on average due to working through sickness (up from 35 days in 2018) and lose a further 6.7 days taking sick leave, up from 3.7 days in 2018. Workers in the UK are the *least* likely to take sick days but are more likely to persevere at work through sickness which can also affect productivity. The IPPR’s new paper – [Healthy Industry, Prosperous Economy](https://www.ippr.org/articles/healthy-industry-prosperous-economy) – sets out three ways the government can tackle the situation:

1. Incentives. A new tax incentive for companies that commit to significant improvements in the health of their workforce
2. Regulation. A new “do no harm,” duty for employers, regulating them on health outcomes, not just safety inputs
3. Investment. New compulsory reporting on worker health – modelled on climate emissions reporting – to help private investors differentiate between health-orientated and health-harming businesses

You can read the whole of this article at

<https://www.personneltoday.com/hr/think-tank-urging-new-approach-to-rising-cost-of-work-ill-health/>

## Is it time you had an Employee Resource Group?

**Source:** Employee Benefits

**In a nutshell:** Many organizations have now set up Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) which aim to cater for different groups of staff among their employees. ERGs can help companies with a number of things including:

* Fostering diversity and inclusion
* Professional development
* Improving employee engagement
* Enhancing company culture

and they can help companies to attract top talent, boost productivity and innovation, enhance employee wellbeing, and strengthen community ties.

You can read the whole of this article at

<https://employeebenefits.co.uk/employee-resource-groups-what-are-ergs-and-why-do-they-matter/>