# 2021 HR Trends Report FAQ

For more information, visit McLean & Company’s [website](https://hr.mcleanco.com) and book a call with one of our analysts or download our research [*2021 HR Trends Report*](https://hr.mcleanco.com/research/ss/2021-hr-trends-report)*.*

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| **Question** | **Answer** |
| Why do you think that talent acquisition is still the top priority given the events of the past year? | I think there are a couple of reasons for this. The most obvious is that some organizations and industries expanded rapidly during 2020 despite wider economic challenges, meaning recruiting continued or even expanded. But beyond that, economic and societal upheaval means that fewer people are willing to take a risk and change jobs, leading to fewer active candidates and even fewer passive candidates, translating to a lower number of applications and more challenging outreach to passive candidates. Furthermore, as pointed out by some viewers in the chat, an increased focus on improving diversity, equity, and inclusion in the workplace may also put greater pressure on the importance of talent acquisition. |
| What part of an organization’s broader strategy do you see HR being increasingly involved in? | Great question. As we saw after years of plateaued involvement in strategy, the upheaval of 2020 has thrust HR into its most strategic role ever, with 44% of respondents agreeing HR is a partner in the planning and execution of the organizational strategy.One way that HR is increasingly involved is their involvement in business continuity planning (BCP). Organizations are increasingly turning to BCP (which builds plans and processes to deal with potential threats to the organization) after the events of the past year. What the COVID-19 crisis showed many organizations is that it’s no longer enough to have the scope of BCP cover just physical systems and infrastructure – it needs to encompass threats to an organization’s biggest asset, its people.This is where we think that HR can play a bigger role. We found that 65% of respondents agreed that HR is playing a larger role in BCP than before. More importantly, where HR was effective at enabling BCP, organizational performance was better. Scenario planning, a key part of BCP, can also be applied in essentially any strategic conversations that the organization is having. It’s no longer enough to create a five-year strategic plan and follow through with it in a linear fashion. The world is volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous, and as we saw in 2020, things can change dramatically overnight. Scenario planning helps the organization plan for a variety of outcomes, and HR needs to be a part of those conversations. Use McLean & Company’s research to proactively [prepare the organization’s talent for the risks of tomorrow](https://hr.mcleanco.com/research/ss/prepare-for-external-risks) by following our scenario planning process for HR and uncovering HR initiatives to implement today. |
| Do you think employee engagement surveys can be modernized to something more innovative? | We see it as less of a question of “modernizing” employee engagement surveys and more about going beyond the survey by being planful and developing an engagement program strategy. Moving beyond a sole focus on the survey itself by using an engagement program strategy helps to gain traction and buy-in and ultimately drives organizational success. This involves determining your approach to engagement, communicating stakeholders’ roles and responsibilities (e.g. preparing leaders for leader-driven engagement), clearly communicating the engagement strategy, and planning next steps.Once survey results have been received, it is equally important that you ensure they are acted upon. Starting with qualitative analyses such as interviews and focus groups ensures you’re getting the full story behind the results. Next, identify initiatives aligned to the organizational strategy. Finally, prioritize delivering a few high-impact initiatives effectively rather than under delivering on many unfocused initiatives.As we touched on in the webinar, increasing the frequency of engagement measures is also a way to modernize employee engagement measures – annual measurements alone often aren’t enough to keep up with what’s happening in your organization and in the world.For more information, see McLean & Company’s blueprints [*Develop an Engagement Program Strategy*](https://hr.mcleanco.com/research/ss/develop-an-engagement-program-strategy) and [*Analyze and Act on Engagement Data*](https://hr.mcleanco.com/research/ss/analyze-and-act-on-engagement-data)*.* |
| Do you think this (lack of decision-making power) is related to HR holding onto the idea of being an advisory service and not taking on decision making? | I think there are a few potential reasons for this, one of which could certainly be what is alluded to in the question (HR considering itself an advisory/support function and not taking on decision-making power). Another potential reason is the fact that when organizations first start, they most often start small. Until an organization grows to a certain size and scale (often ~50 employees) there isn’t always a need for a dedicated HR function, so these types of decisions are made by executives like the CEO. As organizations scale up and add a dedicated HR function, they are still often led by senior executives like the COO or CFO. It’s often not until much later in the scaling process that a dedicated HR executive like a CHRO is added, which may be impacting the data we saw. Along the same lines, we saw that small organizations are almost twice as likely as larger organizations to not be included in organizational strategy. Finally, it should be said that HR should not necessarily always be the ones making day-to-day decisions about the workforce. These decisions are often made more efficiently by managers in organizations that value speed and decentralized decision making. This may also be playing a role in explaining some of the data we saw. |
| How can we influence senior leaders to place a higher priority on employee experience, including funding system upgrades and support staff? | The first answer, and the most obvious, is to use data. The data we presented in the *2021 HR Trends Report* is a good starting point. We found that a positive employee experience led to improved workforce productivity, organizational performance, ability to change quickly to capitalize on new opportunities, and innovation. These are outcomes that are sure to catch the attention of any senior leader, no matter how much of a skeptic they are.Actually defining the employee experience may also be helpful since it’s a term where the precise meaning isn’t immediately obvious, which may be offputting to non-HR senior leaders that aren’t as familiar with the term and what it entails. Use our [*Design the Employee Experience*](https://hr.mcleanco.com/research/ss/design-the-employee-experience)blueprint for more data, definitions, and insights to help make the case for investment in the employee experience. |
| Based on these trends, do you have suggestions on how HR should be structured or designed and what the appropriate number of HR resources is to be able to meet needs and sustain these changes? | As is often the case with HR, there is no one-size-fits-all answer for this question and no one structure that will work for everyone. Your HR department should have a structure that reflects the organizational context it operates within and its strategic objectives. Invest time in identifying how the HR function enables your unique organizational strategy. Optimize HR to ensure resources are allocated where they will have the biggest impact and create no conflict between subfunctions.Review our [*Redesign Your HR Structure*](https://hr.mcleanco.com/research/ss/redesign-your-hr-structure) blueprint for more advice on how to identify the right structure for your team or reach out to schedule a call with one of our analysts for an in-depth discussion |
| Do you have resources on…? | Most likely the answer is yes! Please be sure to check out the “What comes next” slides in the Appendix of the webinar deck for advice on next steps based on each trend along with associated McLean & Company resources that can help you.In addition to those resources, here are links to some of the most requested resources from the comments in the webinar:DEI strategy:* [Create a People-First Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Strategy](https://hr.mcleanco.com/research/ss/create-a-people-first-diversity-equity-inclusion-strategy)

Inclusive leadership:* [Embed Inclusion Into Your Culture](https://hr.mcleanco.com/research/ss/embed-inclusion-into-your-culture)
* [Adopt Inclusive Leadership Behaviors](https://hr.mcleanco.com/research/training-deck-equip-managers-to-adopt-inclusive-leadership-behaviors) (Training Deck)
* [Adopt Inclusive Leadership Behaviors](https://hr.mcleanco.com/research/lms-download-adopt-inclusive-leadership-behaviors) (LMS module)

Wellbeing supports:* [Provide Balanced Wellbeing Programs](https://hr.mcleanco.com/research/ss/provide-balanced-wellbeing-programs)
* [Develop a Resilient Workforce](https://hr.mcleanco.com/research/ss/develop-a-resilient-workforce)
* [Support Mental Wellbeing During COVID-19](https://hr.mcleanco.com/research/webinar-support-mental-wellbeing-during-covid-19) (webinar)
* [HR’s Guide to WFH Employee Wellbeing](https://hr.mcleanco.com/research/hr-s-guide-to-work-from-home-wfh-employee-wellbeing) (infographic)
* [Creating Connections](https://hr.mcleanco.com/research/creating-connections) (infographic)
* [Wellness and Working From Home](https://hr.mcleanco.com/research/wellness-and-working-from-home) (infographic)
* [Ten Ways to Connect With Your Employees During a Crisis](https://hr.mcleanco.com/research/ten-ways-to-connect-with-your-employees-during-a-crisis) (infographic)

Assessing and implementing remote work:* [Sustain Work-From-Home in the New Normal](https://hr.mcleanco.com/research/ss/sustain-work-from-home-in-the-new-normal)
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| How can HR manage or mitigate their stress? | HR is in a difficult position, as the role involves significant emotional labor and little support. HR is often so focused on supporting the rest of the organization that they forget to focus on themselves. While there are many factors that impact the stress HR is feeling, many that are out of their control, building resilience is a great way to ensure their response to workplace adversity is beneficial, rather than harmful, to both themselves and the organization. Small things like remembering that it’s okay to say no, leaning on your colleagues and other HR professionals for support, taking advantage of the EAP (if your organization has one), or reaching out for help from a professional therapist can all have a huge impact on one’s ability to cope with stress. Additionally, look at what other people-helping professions are doing to manage their stress and (such as nurses, social workers, and teachers) for ideas of other initiatives that can be implemented for HR. Beyond that, McLean and Company has identified three key behaviors to build to improve resilience: activate networks (leaning on others for support and collaboration), learn to learn (growing from mistakes and failures) and be flexible (adjust to changes and bounce back from adversity). For more information, see our [*Develop a Resilient Workforce*](https://hr.mcleanco.com/research/ss/develop-a-resilient-workforce) blueprint. We’re also currently writing research on building HR’s resilience so be sure to keep an eye out for that! |
| Why are these competencies the “competencies of the future”? | While this isn’t an exhaustive list of the competencies of the future, it is what McLean & Company research identified as the most sought-after competencies for the future: * Change Management
* Digital Literacy
* Resilience
* Inclusion
* Emotional Intelligence
* Agile Scrum Methodology
* Design Thinking

These competencies are what sets organizations apart for succeeding through digital transformation.Of course, these can be used as a starting point for what should be developed within your organization, however, this list and others like it haven’t been created with an organization-specific context in mind. HR will need to identify the skills of the future as it pertains to their organization. Effectively prepare for the changing business landscape by embedding an iterative process to identify the future skills needed and the gap with current skills in the workforce to execute organizational and talent strategies. |

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