

# The Blended Workforce

A New Approach to Doing Work and Getting Work Done



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The blended workforce has been on the rise over the course of the last decade. However, as the need to become more agile in order to meet customer expectations is increasing, so too must organisations become more strategic about their blended workforce. The result is a rise in demand for highly skilled contingent workers to supplement permanent talent.

A blended workforce is one that combines different types of workers ranging from permanent full-time and part-time staff, through to contractors, consultants, freelancers and more. Employees can also be dispersed between locations and time zones. Typically, a workforce is considered to be blended, when at least one quarter of the employee population meets these criteria.



# The advantages of a blended workforce



By incorporating different worker types into the workforce, organisations become better equipped to develop scalability and become more agile. Agility is essential for modern businesses as it allows them to adapt quickly and respond to changing customer needs.

Embracing change should be the bedrock of any agile business as it empowers people to foster adaptability and flexibility and stay abreast of fluctuating market conditions. Different worker types also bring different viewpoints into the organisation, adding diversity to existing teams.

A diverse organisation is able to draw on the differing expertise of its employees, enabling higher levels of engagement and innovation, fostering new solutions to challenges.

While a blended workforce brings many advantages to the organisation, drivers for seeking out flexible talent are often more practical and in response to immediate business requirements.

Allegis Group recently surveyed senior decision makers from organisations well versed in recruiting for and managing blended workforces.

We found that the key drivers (see *Figure 1*) for organisations looking to make flexible hires include skills shortages (62%), headcount restrictions (54%) and urgency to hire (69%), followed by forecasting or business strategy (50%), labour market trends (50%), and external economic conditions (50%).

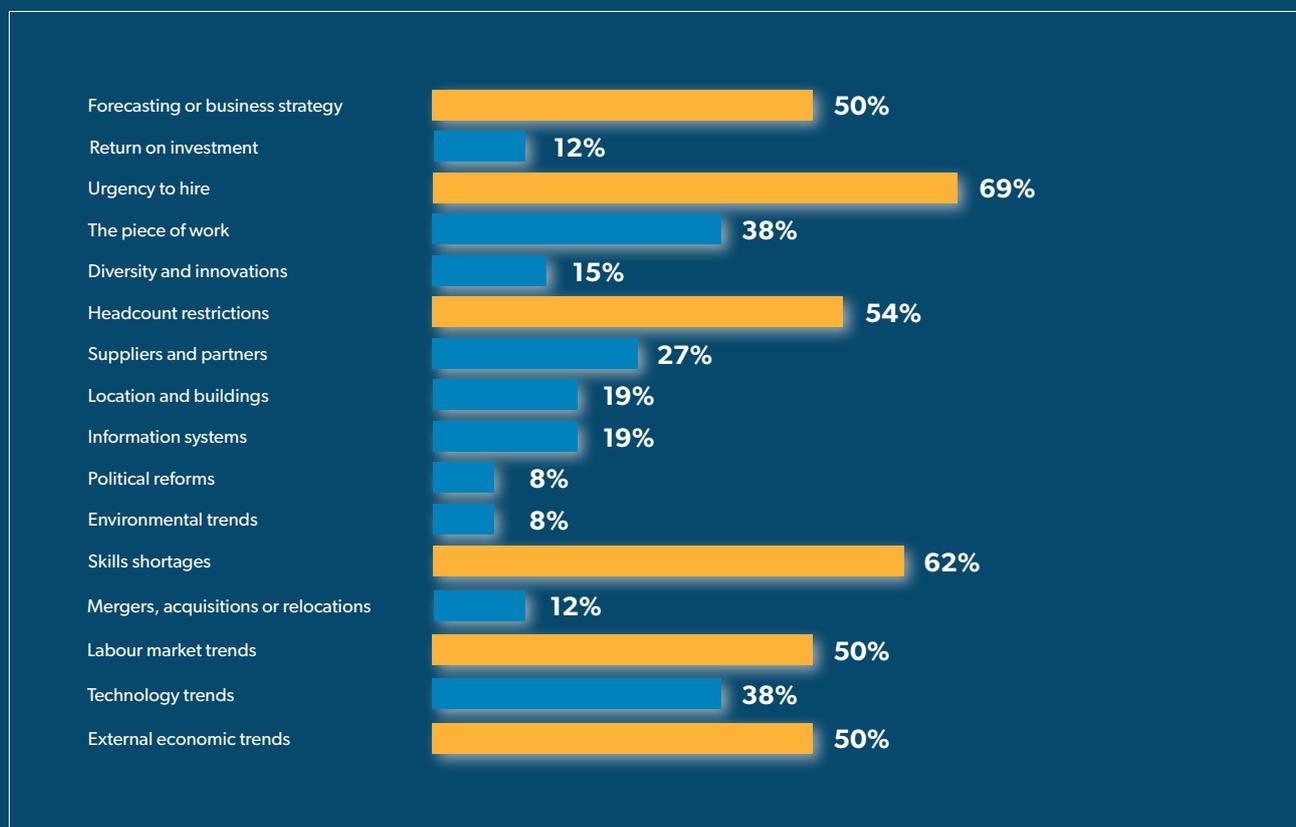
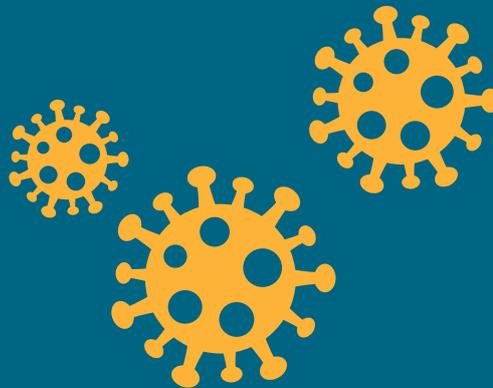


Figure 1: What factors influence how your organisation chooses between making permanent and flexible hires?

# The impact of the global pandemic



When work can be done away from a physical team and physical office, actions can be completed virtually and work can happen regardless of time zone, the work is considered appropriate to be done remotely.

Right up to the end of 2019, proponents of remote working continued to face objections. Despite the advances that have been made in enterprise technology and collaboration tools, leaders have been reluctant to face the massive shift in culture required to successfully implement a remote working policy. Barriers to remote working include biases and attitudes against 'location-independent' work, concerns around lack of communication, loss of control over worker productivity, challenges around delegation and task management and finally the loss of creativity and problem-solving inspired by face-to-face conversations.

Coronavirus forced the matter. The COVID-19 pandemic caused global disruption to the labour market in 2020 and forced millions who were able to continue to work, to do so from home.

As the world has adjusted to the 'new normal', the possibility of long-term remote working has endured, even as the threat of the virus begins to lift. While challenges of remote working are abundant – from mental fitness to collaboration – working from home has been resoundingly welcomed across the UK and Europe. Recent research by Financial Services firm Morgan Stanley found that half of office-based staff in the five European nations surveyed (UK, France, Germany, Spain and Italy) said they hoped to work from home for about two days a week in future.

Being forced to work from home has allowed workers to appreciate the benefits that remote working provides, including less commuting time, more autonomy, greater flexibility, and improved work-life balance. These in turn reflect positively on worker performance – higher productivity, increased motivation, reduced staff turnover, and reduced need for office space.

Overall, the virus has broken through the cultural barriers that were preventing remote working in the past and has set in motion a shift in how and where work gets done.

It is looking increasingly likely that a hybrid model of work will be adopted as lockdown restrictions are eased. A model which will allow for some time spent working in the office and the rest of the time spent working at home – or just about anywhere else. And this adds another layer of complexity to managing a blended workforce – the remote worker.

As Governments and organisations continue to work on their roadmaps 'out of the virus', it is unclear exactly what the 'next new normal' for work will look like. While some traditional leaders have rejected remote working entirely, others have announced policy variations. In May 2020, CEO Jack Dorsey announced that Twitter will allow its employees to "work from home forever". Google, on the other hand, has recently stated that they will be bringing their return to office timetable forward and have included a strict policy for remote working in the future. In direct contrast, BP has announced a hybrid-working model – which will consist of 40% time spent working remotely.



# The need for a blended workforce strategy

For an organisation to be agile and flexible in a rapidly evolving marketplace, so too must their workforce strategy be agile and flexible.

As more organisations opt into the contingent workforce and competition to attract top talent increases, they will need to leverage permanent, temporary or contract, and consulting services partners to stay ahead of the curve.

Poor workforce planning can result in business goals not being achieved when talent cannot be accessed. With a strategy in place, organisations are less likely to slip into reactive hiring, which often results in mis-hiring, unfilled critical roles, and – ultimately – missed deadlines and potentially lost revenue.

#### Benefits of a blended workforce strategy include:

- Reduced time to hire
- Fewer unfilled positions
- Improved employee morale

Organisations looking to adopt an agile workforce strategy must size up their existing workforce and predict immediate and future long terms needs – and then work with partners with access to the best talent. This will ensure that the organisation is able to engage the right workers at the right time.

Our research found that hiring multiple workforce types means that organisations often have to engage multiple workforce solutions partners (87% agree). Furthermore, those respondents who are most satisfied with their blended workforce strategy are able to track and monitor compensation between worker types differently (50% agree), and they are confident that their HR and Procurement departments do not work independently of each other and are therefore not restricted in their ability to effectively hire, manage, and utilise a blended workforce (46% agree).

This is key. Top talent means business success. Which puts growing pressure on all talent acquisition functions to better align within the organisation and continually deliver.

A blended workforce strategy which involves the whole organisation leads to consistent hiring of new worker types, evolving best practice and reimagined brand positioning.

In *The Shape of Talent Across Europe* our sister company, Allegis Global Solutions (a provider of workforce solutions), explains that today's talent acquisition function is operating in the perfect storm with recruitment being the most urgent business issue: "Low unemployment, alternate ways to engage talent, increased demand for new skills, and an apparent scarcity of highly-sought-after professional skills are all big challenges talent acquisition practitioners must face."

For all the challenges faced internally by any department responsible for recruiting into the business, the respondents to our survey are satisfied with the support they receive from their workforce solutions partners (see *Figure 2*).

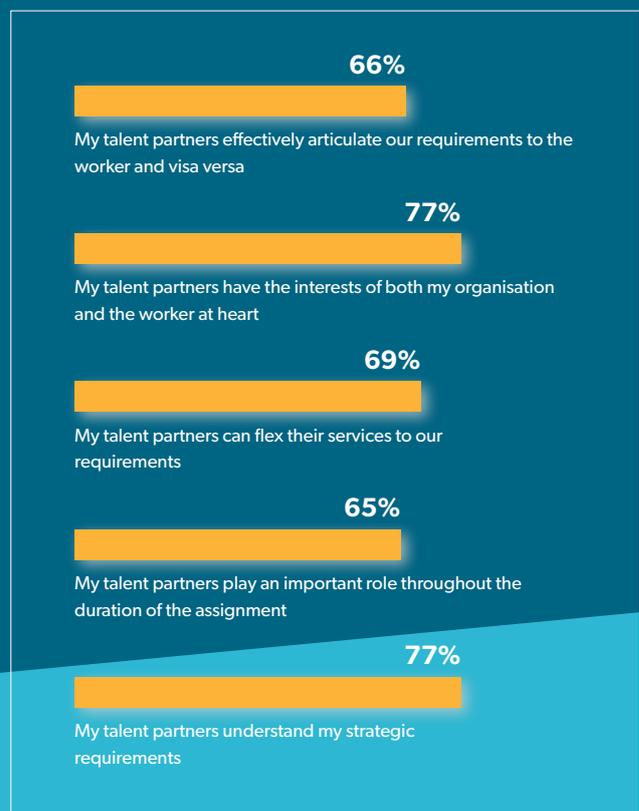


Figure 2: Per cent of respondents who agree with the following statements

# Attracting blended talent into the workforce

It has long been accepted that the employee value proposition (EVP) is paramount to attracting top permanent talent into an organisation. But gone are the days when an EVP only satisfies the needs of a permanent workforce.

With the war for talent being such that it is, having a proposition suited to different worker types will help secure top talent and bolster the employer brand.

17% of our respondents told us that they don't have an EVP for some workforce types and 22% told us that their EVP remains the same, regardless of the employment type they are hiring. However, almost 40% of respondents tailor their EVP to reflect the needs of the employment type.

This latter figure reflects a maturity in internal hiring attitudes. Workers' reasons vary for preferring flexible work contracts over permanent ones. They will assess an EVP to understand how it can be tailored to suit their personal needs – from employee benefits, to attitudes towards diversity and social responsibility, to effective remote working processes and access to internal learning and development – the EVP could be the deciding factor for one role over another.

When nurturing different talent profiles, the employer brand is central to the process. Showcasing top performance awards, training and development opportunities, commitment to social responsibility and fostering an inclusive and diverse workforce allows talent to experience the culture of the business.



# A blended approach to workforce management

As the modern workforce continues to evolve towards a more blended approach, once familiar management strategies are evolving too.

Businesses of all sizes are finding themselves immersed in a talent culture that's made up of multiple worker types. A blended workforce means that many departments and stakeholders will each have their own objectives and strategic vision for the organisation.

The complexity of a blended workforce deeply impacts the traditional management styles of one primarily accustomed to managing permanent employees. There is no one-size-fits-all leadership style that can suitably address the multifaceted requirements of different worker types.

Different worker types need different communication channels. They have different learning and development needs; they are motivated by different reward schemes and engage with their organisations in different ways. Conventional management styles can no longer accommodate the elaborate network that occurs between technologies, stakeholders and worker types within the blended workforce. Not surprisingly, just as a blended approach to attracting and engaging top talent is needed, so too is a blended management style.

For organisations well-versed in the recruiting, onboarding and management of different worker types these challenges are not new. 70% of respondents to our survey are very or extremely confident in their organisation's ability to effectively manage a blended workforce (see Figure 3).



Figure 3: Per cent of respondents who agree with the following statements



# Blended learning, communication, and engagement

A blended approach to learning, communication and engagement will be required for the blended workforce.

When pockets of the workforce no longer sit within the traditional constraints of the 9-5, bricks and mortar construct, innovative tactics will help to ensure that transient worker types are receiving necessary training and information and are being successfully engaged.

Using blended learning, which involves a combination of traditional classroom sessions, virtual sessions and learning platforms, allows the worker to self-serve on their own initiative and the learning journey becomes personalised and fulfilling. While the organisation should continue to present workers with opportunities to learn and develop, the onus is on the worker to have a proactive approach to their own development.

69% of our respondents have a training and development strategy that involves all workers within the organisation (see Figure 4).

Communicating with a blended workforce can be challenging. When an organisation's workforce is made up of different worker types, there will be time zone considerations, non-traditional schedules and often 'out-of-sight, out-of-mind' emotions to contend with.

While 46% of our respondents are confident in their organisation's ability to effectively communicate with their entire workforce, of those respondents who have reservations, they cited their top three collaboration challenges to be:

- creating a positive culture between permanent and contingent workers (50%),
- inclusion and engagement (57%), and
- knowledge sharing (71%).

Further, deciding whom to communicate what to can prove challenging in and of itself. If the strategic goal is to maintain a blended workforce for the long term, engaging flexible workers is essential to ensuring they will return for future work. Our research found that while our

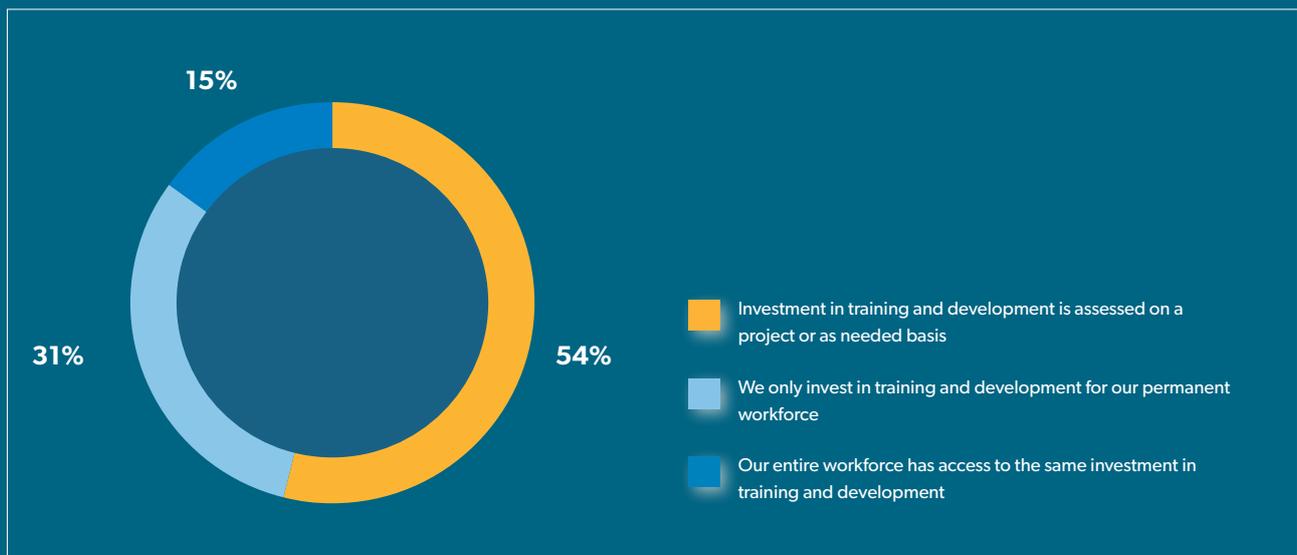


Figure 4: How does your organisation invest in training and development?

respondents' organisations take different approaches to communication, only a minority (11%) withhold corporate communications from non-permanent worker types (see Figure 5).

Considering how to communicate and with which channels will ensure that the whole workforce is engaged from grassroots level, where collaboration is essential, through to corporate level.

Email continues to be the go-to tool for corporate messaging, but team chat platforms have proven to be vital for quick updates, questions and conversation between teammates and their line managers. Agile approaches to project management with the use of virtual tools such as Kanban boards and scrum style practices can support in maintaining momentum to get work done. Video-on conferencing has been immensely popular as a stand in for face-to-face conversations.



Figure 5: Which statement best describes your organisation's approach to communicating with its blended workforce?



# Growing and retaining the blended workforce

Ultimately, if the organisational workforce strategy is to maintain a blended one for the long term, having access to a bench of flexible talent familiar with the culture, purpose and operations of the organisation will be beneficial.

Nurturing flexible workers during the recruitment and onboarding processes as well as throughout the duration of their contract will ensure repeat contracts on future projects. On-demand talent requirements should be identified and sourced from the assessment and skills gap analysis outlined in the workforce strategy build. Being able to measure the performance of different worker types in terms of project delivery and meeting wider business will help to secure future investment in the blended workforce. Our respondents were, on a whole, satisfied with their organisation's ability to measure the success of different worker types – with the majority rating their organisation as either good or excellent at measuring success at an individual level and organisational level as well as the success of project outcomes. However, with only a little over half rating their organisation's ability to measure the financial impact of the blended workforce, this is perhaps an area that requires further development (see Figure 6).

By rethinking workforce strategy, partnering with the right workforce solutions providers, and implementing a blended management style internally, organisations will set themselves up for the blended workforce of the future.

## Six steps to strategically implementing a blended workforce

- 1 Rethink the workforce strategy
- 2 Partner with workforce solutions providers who understand your business objectives, culture, and talent requirements
- 3 Ensure visibility between all departments responsible for talent acquisition within the organisation
- 4 Evaluate your employee value proposition and ensure it's suitable for the talent communities you are trying to attract
- 5 Implement blended learning, communication, and engagement solutions
- 6 Measure, appraise, improve

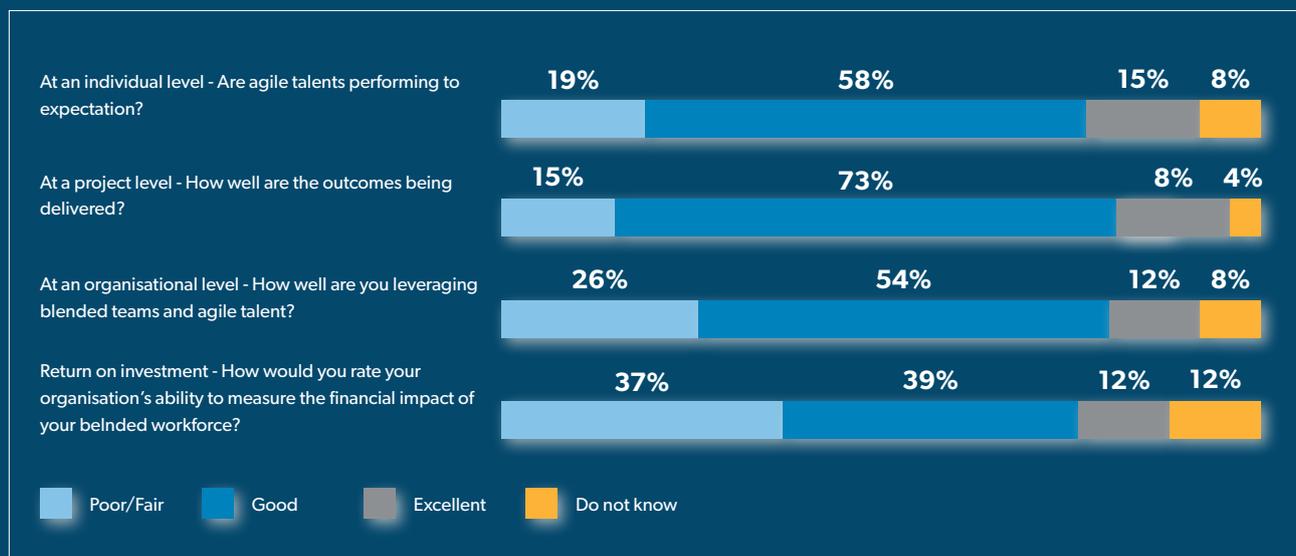


Figure 6: How effective is your organisation at measuring the success of your blended workforce?

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