



MANAGING PEOPLE IN A 'BOUNDARY-LESS' TALENT ECOSYSTEM

Employers today face a more complex, changing talent-management landscape than ever before, but most may not yet know how they will meet their talent goals in the future.

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Dr. John Boudreau

This e-book reflects the observations and thoughts of Dr. John Boudreau, university professor, HR guru and author, who sees a future in which HR operates in a boundary-less landscape. Co-author of several HR-related books—including the latest, titled *Lead the Work*—Boudreau is a major proponent of the concept that this “boundary-less” talent ecosystem awaits HR leaders.

In part, that means that today’s talent pools, mainly stocked with full-time employees, will evolve toward more of a web of “workers and their work,” a web that increasingly augments today’s notion of employees and jobs within an organization.

SOLVING TALENT PROBLEMS REQUIRES NEW THINKING

The challenge for HR and business leaders is that, if they think leadership is limited to full-time employees, they may be overlooking a large proportion of the people actually doing the work of their organization.

In his research, Boudreau, professor and research director at the University of Southern California's Marshall School of Business and Center for Effective Organizations, explored several thoughts and observations about:

- How HR may be overlooking the chance to engage and lead a whole new ecosystem of potential workers who may emerge in many different ways and places.
- How solutions within the boundary-less ecosystem are going to span functions, such as procurement (see next page).
- How the “carrier wave” of today's new breed of HR systems will improve decision-making about talent and work in the organization.
- How evidence suggests that, in the right conditions, contingent workers can be motivated and engaged, sometimes more than the regular full-time employees with whom they work.

DEFINING THE 'BOUNDARY-LESS' ECOSYSTEM

Tomorrow's workplace will be more than just an array of employees and jobs; it is being transformed in an ecosystem – a “boundary-less” set of workers and work, not the typical jobs and employees within an organization today.

The challenge for leaders is this: It is not enough merely to be good leaders for their employees, because they may be missing a critical proportion of the people who are really doing the work. They have the chance to engage and lead a whole ecosystem of potential workers who may come to them in many different ways.



KEY CONSIDERATIONS

Solutions to the boundary-less talent ecosystem are going to span functions. The most obvious spanning of a function would involve something like procurement, which is frequently managing the work that is not done by regular full-time employees—contingent workers, contractors, temporary workers, etc.

- Those workers are often flowing through procurement under some sort of a procurement-based contract, such as a statement of work.
- HR, the function, and procurement, the function, will need to collaborate because they need a total view of the workforce that neither one can complete by itself. The idea is the entire organization accesses the same data, while simultaneously layering relevant information together and delivering insight.
- To truly optimize the value of these work arrangements for the organization, HR will want to be able to see the entire talent universe in order to communicate, access valuable skill sets, and engage all workers in organization culture and strategy.

HOW HR WILL BE AFFECTED

The function-spanning aspect of a boundary-less talent ecosystem goes to the fundamental idea about how HR approaches its work. The work will need to be more inclusive when it comes to other functions and disciplines. HR in the future will seek expertise and frameworks when they're helpful to getting the work done right.

This also has significant implications for the nature of analytics, because it suggests a future analytics system that represents talent planning and sourcing like a “supply chain,” with sources of talent from many more outlets.

When leaders encounter a future surplus of talent, people can be offered a “tour of duty” elsewhere with the expectation that talent will return in, say, two or three years.

A 'CARRIER WAVE' IS REQUIRED

The technology systems needed to manage this new boundary-less talent ecosystem might be called the “carrier wave.” Examples include comparing talent systems to the financial-analysis system or the financial-reporting system in an organization. Financial systems have long reflected concepts, such as return on investment, that quantify value.

Those outcomes are embedded in the financial system, and leaders really can't get their financial work done unless they use those ideas to analyze the value of an investment. In the same way, HR platforms and systems—such as those of Workday—may well become the “carrier wave” that HR uses to help leaders think more clearly about this talent ecosystem, while delivering value.

TAKING WORK BEYOND EMPLOYEE, JOB RAW DATA

Future “carrier-wave” systems will represent work in a way that goes beyond just the number of employees and jobs; they will represent all work and work options. Leaders would engage the system with work to be done, and the system—not just the technical system, but the blend of technology and people embedded within it—would respond and say, “Let’s analyze the work you’ve described, and let me offer you a set of options and some ideas about how to optimize it.”

Many of those options would not be limited to regular full-time employment, as it’s defined today.

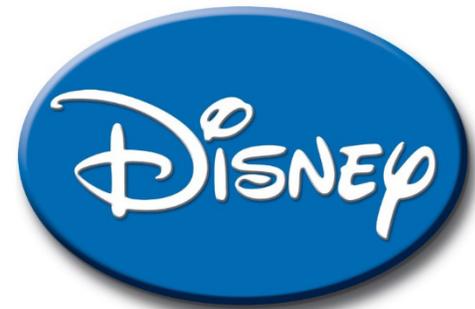


DISNEY, SIEMENS: PARTNERS IN INNOVATION

Siemens USA and The Walt Disney Co. have a decade-long history of working together on prior projects, including the monorail and animatronics. Disney works with Siemens because the latter brings state-of-the-art ideas and a commitment to quality and innovation, which is also a Disney focus.

Siemens, for example, rebranded the Spaceship Earth exhibit inside the geodesic dome at Disney's Epcot park, among other collaborations.

SIEMENS



A PROTOTYPE OF THE BOUNDARY- LESS ECOSYSTEM

In a prime example of a boundary-less ecosystem, Siemens built a hearing aid for children but needed to market it. Siemens wanted to use the best people it could find to tell a great story about its hearing aid so children and their parents would be captivated by the idea of a hearing aid made just for kids.

Siemens could have used the typical employment model by turning to its own marketing department, but while excellent, Siemens' marketers might not be the very best talent to tell a compelling story to children and families about the hearing aid.

Siemens also could try to recruit new employees to join its marketing group, but the best candidates might choose offers from Disney, rather than Siemens. In the end, Siemens conceived a novel solution and reached out to its collaborative partner, Disney, to “borrow” Disney's creative-marketing talent to tell the story of its hearing aid.

THE PROJECT FLOURISHED WITHIN THE BOUNDARY-LESS MODEL

Siemens and Disney came to an agreement and Disney created a special story, along with a Disney-themed hearing aid box/case and comic book. To tell the story, a rabbit is counseled by Disney characters about why hearing differently isn't necessarily bad, and how this new hearing aid can help. The display in doctors' offices also focused on the Disney-themed hearing aid.

Siemens “deconstructed” the job of marketing the hearing aid. Rather than forcing it into the job description of a Siemens marketer, the company was smart enough to pull apart that job description, with the one pivotal element being the ability to tell stories to children. The company realized that such a pivotal element could best be done by “borrowing” Disney storytellers.



The Disney Kit

The Disney Kit for younger children includes a cuddly Mickey Mouse® and storybook. Reading and playing with Mickey helps younger kids gain confidence in their hearing aids. And to keep their hearing aids in peak condition, the kit also provides all the maintenance essentials parents need, like a battery tester, drying set, listening stethoset and a cleaning tool.

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FLEXIBILITY COMES WHEN BOUNDARIES GO

On one side of the work continuum would be a very rigid organization boundary: If you're in, you're in and if you're out, you're out. Work and workers don't typically flow across that boundary, but leaders could allow it to be more "permeable."

They also could decide how they might link with outside organizations or collaborate with them. In its case, Siemens had to "put a pipe" through its organization's boundary and needed to have that pipe connect Disney. The pipe needed to be secure enough to let a few Disney employees and Siemens employees move between each organization—in a middle ground with strong protections about intellectual property, for example.

THE REWARDS ARE NOT JUST MONETARY

Apart from traditional pay, benefits and incentives, there are rewards that have little to do with money ... such as reputation, glory and sense of purpose. Siemens and Disney leaders realized that Disney employees might not get many opportunities to help children hear better, so the chance to help Siemens tell its hearing-aid story might provide that sense of purpose.

Much like opening a combination lock, this type of journey is about fine-tuning a few dials to the right spots to find the best way to get it done with the best possible outcome. Example questions are: “How much should we deconstruct the work?” “How permeable should we make the organization boundary?” and “How creatively should we imagine the rewards?”

CONTINGENT WORKERS NEED TO BE ENGAGED TOO

When more of the work is being done by contingent workers, it makes sense to consider whether HR and organization leaders are engaging those workers. Evidence suggests that contingent workers can sometimes actually be more motivated and more engaged than regular, full-time employees. Having psychological and social connections, and a sense of continuity, contributes to higher engagement for contingent workers.

HR should consider how the combination of trends such as the boundary-less talent ecosystem, emerging new ways of working, plus the power of HR systems and analytics as a carrier-wave can help leaders think differently and make better decisions about talent.

HR also should consider measuring its contingent-workforce engagement with the same rigor and transparency for leaders as it does with the engagement of its regular workforce. For example, HR processes such as onboarding and learning can help spread the organizational culture to contingent workers. Further, offering these workers ways to contribute content can help make them feel more a part of the team.

DECONSTRUCTING WORK CAN LEAD TO SUCCESS

Much like the Disney-Siemens example, in an ideal world, if a business leader has a problem finding workers but is not sure about why, a smart HR system could take the work apart; i.e., deconstruct it. Then the HR system could answer questions such as how many people are needed to solve it and how those people should best be rewarded. Also, how they create job profiles could help build the foundation for the ability to deconstruct work. Further, the ability to easily identify skills/competencies of individuals gives them the power to insert the right talent into a specific job.

A frequent question: Can the company release its hold on the intellectual property enough for a partner-based or other contingent work solution? In many cases, organization leaders and their talent systems presume that only full-time employment can protect IP, but there are an increasing number of situations in which the best answer is to not use regular full-time employment and enter the boundary-less talent ecosystem instead. The general counsels of such organizations are crafting innovative ways to protect IP that do not require full-time employment agreements.

FORCES OF CHANGE REQUIRE RETHINKING WORK

Democratization of work—A more highly democratized future is characterized by these new “employment” relationships, which will be shorter in duration and more balanced in terms of company and individual. This will feature a shift toward a more agile and responsive view of work, which will deliver results by activating “purpose-built” networks.

Technological empowerment—This will come from areas such as machine learning, mobile applications, wearables and algorithmic analytics (from those carrier-wave systems).



WORK IN THE FUTURE

Finally, while full-time employment certainly will not disappear any time soon, the expanding boundary-less ecosystem for talent will be characterized by user-empowered work, which will include employment via platforms, projects, gigs, freelancing, contests, contracts and “tours of duty” with partner organizations. Delivery will come from emerging technologies such as the cloud, on-demand artificial intelligence, extreme personalization and personal devices.

It is vital to envision HR systems and measurements as the “carrier wave,” to help leaders understand their options and help them navigate each scenario. For example, HR systems traditionally view talent sourcing as finding and attracting people to join the organization as employees, but future HR leaders will see sourcing as finding the optimum balance of full-time workers, contingent workers ... or even talent from within a business partner’s workforce. These efforts, of course, would include upskilling employees, contingent or otherwise, where needed.

For more information via a webinar on this topic, [click here](#).

