"And then came along Brexit, COVID '19, and now Artificial intelligence (AI)." The role of AI in Talent Management in the Healthcare Industry in the UK: A lesson for the NHS in a post-turbulent era.

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The British flags that had been flown outside buildings of the European Union (EU) for more than 40 years were lowered three years ago, on January 31, 2020. ***"BREXIT got done,"*** according to the then-prime minister, Boris Johnson. He had consented to a departure agreement that protected EU nationals' rights in the UK, as we now know. Except he thought he did; the ***"COVID '19 Pandemic"*** struck shortly thereafter.

The COVID-19 pandemic had an unforeseen impact on the departure agreement between the UK and the EU. As the virus spread rapidly across the globe, the focus shifted from Brexit to managing the health crisis. Resources that were initially allocated to implementing the departure agreement had to be redirected to combating the pandemic. For example, the UK and EU had to postpone crucial negotiations and meetings related to the departure agreement due to travel restrictions and lockdown measures imposed during the pandemic. This delay not only disrupted the timeline for finalising and implementing the agreement but also created uncertainty and added complexities to an already challenging process.

Within months, weeks, and days, everything changed due to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. The pandemic caused even the most adaptable and well-prepared industries, including the health sector, to scurry in previously unthinkable ways. The first thing COVID-19 did was to highlight the physical aspects of employment. Our new normal, which is probably here to stay, is something we are all getting used to, from video chats with our doctors, physicians, and dentists to virtual learning.

The shift towards telemedicine and remote healthcare services became essential as social distancing measures were implemented to curb the spread of the virus. This forced healthcare providers to rapidly adopt digital platforms and technology to ensure the continuation of essential medical services. For example, many patients who previously relied on in-person doctor visits had to quickly adapt to virtual consultations. They now connect with their healthcare providers through video calls, sharing symptoms and discussing treatment options from the comfort of their own homes. Additionally, doctors and nurses have had to embrace remote monitoring devices, such as wearable technology, to remotely track vital signs and manage chronic conditions for patients who are unable or unwilling to visit hospitals or clinics.

It took a pandemic to completely accelerate this trend and transform the way the majority of people live their lives, leveraging these fundamental aspects of technology to drastically change, if not permanently, how we approach our careers and occupations. We were forced into isolation due to the pandemic, and artificial intelligence helped us choose what to watch on TV next. The pandemic united people in a manner that nothing else could, despite its devastation. Put simply, what brought individuals together, both physically and professionally, was the struggle for ***SURVIVAL***. Survival became the driving force behind numerous innovations and collaborations as individuals and

organisations came together to find solutions and support one another. Remote work became the norm, with virtual meetings and conferences replacing traditional in-person gatherings. Industries adapted and transformed, with more reliance on digital platforms and automation to ensure business continuity. The pandemic highlighted the importance of community resilience and the need to prioritise health and well-being, ultimately reshaping our priorities and the way we interact with the world around us.

It is old news that hiring and retaining top talent is HR's No. 1 challenge. However, the significant changes brought about by the pandemic's influence on distant working and many people rethinking their personal life choices, not to mention the "great resignation," have compounded these recurrent difficulties. It posed problems and uncertainties for HR practitioners in how companies worked and work relationships functioned. It caused business disruptions and pushed HR practitioners in healthcare, such as the NHS, to devise inventive ways to assure business continuity. Some of the inventive ways that HR practitioners in healthcare, such as the NHS, devised to assure company continuity during the pandemic included implementing remote working policies, introducing flexible scheduling options, and utilising technology for virtual meetings and training sessions. Additionally, HR professionals had to prioritise the mental health and well-being of employees, providing resources and support to help them navigate the challenges brought about by the pandemic. Despite the difficulties and uncertainties, HR practitioners in healthcare showed resilience and adaptability in ensuring that their organisations continued to thrive amidst the disruptions.

Long-standing issues with labour supply, waiting times, unfulfilled demands and needs, and staff wellbeing were made worse by Brexit and the COVID-19 pandemic's effects on the economy and the health sector. These issues require long-term planning to handle, such as the NHS Long-Term Workforce Plan implemented in 2023, and won't be resolved in a few months but rather in years. The plan takes into account the complexities and uncertainties of the current landscape, acknowledging that these issues cannot be resolved overnight but will require sustained efforts over a period of years.

Businesses are investing in artificial intelligence (AI) to save costs, expedite remote operations, and enhance the user and customer experience in response to the pandemic and Brexit. Concurrently, the pandemic has also fundamentally altered the way digital technology is used in healthcare, affecting not only the NHS but also its community. There has been a remarkable shift in the health care industry towards the digital delivery of information and care. Millions of GP appointments are now scheduled via phone and video calls, service users are receiving updates and information via text messages, and back office operations like HR, organisational development, and administration are moving to platforms like Microsoft Teams, Skype, and Zoom.

Decisions made today will affect how health and care systems, such as the NHS, use resources to adjust to changing demographics. It is crucial for HR professionals and people practitioners to support strategic thinking regarding the role and impact of digital technology and AI on talent management in health and care systems both now and in the future of work, as these technologies will play a bigger role in the NHS's daily care delivery in the future. In fact, with the rapid advancement of technology and the increasing need for digital transformation across industries, the demand for technical skills has reached an all-time high. The emergence of new technologies like artificial intelligence, blockchain, and cloud computing has created a need for specialised talent who can harness these tools to drive innovation and competitive advantage. Businesses that fail to recognise this and adapt their talent acquisition strategies accordingly risk falling behind their competitors and missing out on the potential benefits that cutting-edge technology can bring. The

war for talent is far from over, and those who understand its importance and invest in securing top talent will have a significant advantage in the ever-evolving job market.

"There is a wealth of talent out there ready to be snapped up to work," as the Financial Times emphasises. ***Although talent exists, can businesses draw it in?*** https://www.ft.com/content/28a22e7a-9ac7-4814-ad0f-aba5426fe388*.* With so few skilled professionals available, companies must find ways to stand out from the competition. It is difficult to attract the right kind of talent to the company. Technical expertise is still in great demand. To create a talent ecosystem, companies must first focus on building a strong employer brand. Businesses must go beyond simply posting job ads and hoping for the best. This involves showcasing the company's values, mission, and unique culture to potential candidates. Additionally, offering competitive compensation packages and benefits can help attract top talent. Talent has the freedom to be selective in the current environment. However, it is important to note that salary is not the only factor that candidates consider when choosing a job. They also look for opportunities for growth and development, work-life balance, and a supportive and inclusive work environment.

To attract and retain the best talent and continue to keep their skills leading the way, organisations need to invest in building capabilities long before employment. Leaders and management in the NHS who are concerned about top-talent employees quitting must grasp the variables that contribute to turnover, which go far beyond remuneration. Healthcare organisations must prioritise creating a positive and supportive work culture. This includes fostering strong leadership and management skills, providing a healthy and inclusive workplace environment, and offering opportunities for career advancement and work-life balance. By investing in these areas, organisations can attract and retain top talent, leading to improved patient outcomes and increased operational efficiency.

Businesses that derive maximum benefits from AI adhere to the 10-20-70 rule. In order to optimise people and processes, businesses—particularly those in the healthcare industry—need to consider the following: ***a) How can I draw in, nurture, and keep data and analytics talent to create long-lasting AI capabilities? b) How can I promote the rapid and widespread use of AI technologies and foster true business transformation? (c) How can I restructure the company to really take advantage of AI at scale?***For example, a healthcare company like the NHS looking to optimise its operations using AI could allocate 20% of its resources to developing advanced algorithms for analysing patient data and improving medical diagnoses. Additionally, they could invest 70% of their resources in training and supporting their employees to effectively use AI tools, such as automated appointment scheduling or electronic health records, thereby streamlining business procedures and enhancing patient care. To achieve these goals, the company would need to attract and retain talented data and analytics professionals, create a culture that encourages innovation and collaboration, and establish partnerships with technology companies for access to cutting-edge AI tools. By investing in employee training, they can ensure that their staff is equipped with the necessary skills to leverage AI tools effectively, resulting in faster and more accurate diagnoses. Ultimately, this approach would lead to improved patient outcomes and increased operational efficiency for the healthcare company.

In the AI era, there is a new paradigm for acquiring, developing, and retaining talent. To draw in and keep these highly sought-after hires, the healthcare sector, like the NHS, needs to present a distinctive and appealing value proposition. Key strategies for the NHS to create first-rate staff in the AI era include actively identifying the specific AI skills that will be in demand and adapting recruitment strategies accordingly. By focusing on attracting individuals who possess the desired skillset rather than simply filling positions, the NHS can build a workforce that is well-equipped for the future. Additionally, investing in opportunities for ongoing reskilling and development will ensure

that staff members can continually adapt and thrive amidst technological advancements. Lastly, prioritising talent engagement at all levels will foster a positive work environment that encourages employee retention and loyalty. In the post-turbulent era, the NHS in the UK can leverage AI in talent management within the healthcare industry. For example, AI-powered software can efficiently filter through large volumes of applications, identify top candidates, and match their skills with the specific requirements of different healthcare roles. Additionally, AI algorithms can assist in predicting future workforce needs and enable proactive recruitment strategies to ensure a well-equipped healthcare workforce.

Today's top concern for CEOs in the healthcare industry is a lack of talent. And leaders are concerned. For more than a year, the NHS has battled to retain talent. The healthcare sector is struggling to hire and retain talent, and AI tools have the potential to help. AI can alleviate issues for the sector in the areas of hiring, development, and retention. There are significant dangers and drawbacks that healthcare must consider if AI is to be integrated into their talent management processes and practices. It is not just a plug-and-play proposition.

The implementation of AI in talent management processes and practices within the healthcare sector must be approached with caution. One of the main concerns is the potential for bias in AI algorithms, which could inadvertently perpetuate existing inequalities and discrimination in the workforce. Additionally, the reliance on AI may lead to a decrease in the human touch and personalised approach that are crucial in healthcare. Therefore, a thoughtful and nuanced approach is required to ensure that AI integration enhances rather than hinders the well-equipped healthcare workforce.

To stay ahead in the talent war and keep up with the rapid advancements in AI, managers, executives, and the HRM department must be prepared to make significant changes. This includes not only adopting AI tools but also rethinking their approach to talent acquisition, retention, and engagement. Healthcare executives in the NHS need to prioritise AI as a key topic when creating their learning agenda for 2024 and beyond, as it will play a crucial role in shaping the future of the industry. Another way the NHS can leverage AI is by using it to streamline administrative tasks and improve operational efficiency. For example, AI-powered chatbots can be used to handle patient inquiries, appointment scheduling, and billing, freeing up staff to focus on more complex and critical tasks. Additionally, AI algorithms can analyse vast amounts of patient data to identify patterns and make predictions, enabling healthcare providers to deliver personalised and targeted care. By embracing AI in these ways, the NHS can not only improve patient outcomes but also reduce costs, enhance overall productivity, and gain a long-term competitive edge in a sector that is undergoing radical transformation.

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