

What Keeps Talent Leaders Up at Night? It Isn't Job-Killing Robots. It's the Death of Culture.

Will robots take over the world? Will everyone become a gig worker? We recently met with talent leaders to discuss these issues, the future of work and staying innovative while growing.

If you want to know how technology companies are harnessing their people to change the way we work and live, look no further than the key takeaways from Hanson Wade's LEAP Tech Talent conference in San Francisco last month, where Radford introduced our new [talent consulting practice](#). Among the more than 100 talent leaders from iconic Silicon Valley firms in attendance, there was widespread agreement on the following issues:

- Machines will work with, not replace, people
- Culture is not inherently in conflict with growth, but it is at risk
- Evolving performance management practices make it possible for organizations to speed up innovation
- More money is being invested in diversity and inclusion programs, which is a step in the right direction, but more work needs to be done to make them effective

While there was consensus that these are among the top issues technology talent leaders face today, much of the discussion centered on how to embrace these realities as opposed to "avoiding" them. Below, we discuss each topic in more detail.

Technology Automation

Despite widespread [fear among the public](#) that machines will eventually replace most human-led work, conference attendees agreed they see promise in a world where people and machines work together to innovate for the future.

The rapid rise in automation requires us to think differently about how work is structured and what skills and capabilities organizations need for future jobs. The biggest challenge companies face around automation is identifying and leveraging the synergies that can exist when people and machines work in tandem in this new work environment.

There is an immediate upside to automation for talent leaders. Along with the rise in automation comes a fresh perspective on the skills and capabilities that are in the greatest demand. These aren't necessarily the trained

technical skills one might think of with technology; they are skills that transcend job titles but are equally valued across an organization, such as problem solving, creativity and collaboration.

Culture Beats Strategy, But What About Growth?

You've heard it before, *culture eats strategy for breakfast*. That infamous phrase, which is attributed to business management guru Peter Drucker (though there is some debate about the origin), guides the way [we think about culture](#) at Radford. Our new research on high-performing organizations, which we call turbocharged technology companies, finds that a common core trait is the presence of a strong culture. Turbocharged companies are also more likely to consider their employees to be the most important driver of culture.

There was consensus among conference participants that cultivating a unique culture in lockstep with your organization's values is the surest way to set yourself apart from the competition and create a powerful employee value proposition. And many technology companies have led the way, relative to other industries, in creating a distinct and valued culture. Their challenge now is preserving those cultures in the face of rapid growth.

How can management teams preserve a culture that was cultivated alongside a founder's mission for the business when the size of the workforce is doubling each year? This is the type of question more of our technology clients are asking themselves. There is no easy answer, but by asking the question business leaders are placing a value on culture that is critical in keeping employees engaged.

Evolving Development, Performance Management and Engagement Strategies

The need for speed and agility is leading organizations to rethink their learning and development strategies. There is a shift away from traditional learning approaches toward more bite-sized, customized learning options, which are easier for employees to digest and can scale and grow with the business.

One attendee from a Fortune 500 company said their leadership program was completely overhauled in the past two years to place more emphasis on "providing assessment, coaching, and interactive virtual university communities at each of their four career levels."

Companies are still extremely focused on performance management. However, the conversation is shifting away from whether or not companies have performance ratings (many still do) and toward how managers can ensure more frequent performance discussions. Our research finds the majority of employees today want more frequent feedback than the annual performance cycle alone allows. Companies themselves are looking to deliver more frequent feedback as well, implementing continuous listening strategies to glean accurate and timely employee engagement data they can act on right away.

Sustaining Diversity and Inclusion Programs that Work

From diversity hiring programs to gender pay equality, organizations are investing more in their diversity and inclusion programs than ever before. One attendee noted their company has a goal of getting to 50% of their

technical staff positions being filled by women. Another company representative noted their employer has adopted equal policies for paternal and maternity leave.

While these are examples of valiant efforts being made, there was general agreement among conference attendees that the significant investments being made into these types of initiatives aren't yielding the expected results. For example, diversity is still lagging among technology companies and gender pay equality is decades from being achieved if progress continues at the current pace.

That doesn't mean companies will scale back their investment on these issues. On the contrary, many companies are doubling down on their efforts to get these programs right. At the conference, we heard an expression of commitment to new and innovative ways to move the needle on diversity and inclusion, including conversations around more gender inclusive recruitment practices that involve minimizing unconscious bias in hiring practices.

There is a lot more work to be done in this area, but technology companies recognize the multi-generational, diverse workforce of today demands employers put resources into developing effective diversity and inclusion programs.

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To learn more about Radford's talent capabilities, or speak to one of our practice leaders, please write to consulting@radford.com.

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