



TD MAGAZINE

A New World of Employee Relationships

By **Alex Moore**

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The ways organizations interact with their employees are changing, and talent development needs to keep up.

The global economy is changing—and so are workers' relationships with organizations. According to *The Employee Relationship Economy*, a recent whitepaper from RiseSmart, "The future of work will continue to break the rules and stretch the current boundaries that define how and where work is done."

Competition for top talent will grow fiercer; lines will blur between full-time, contract, part-time, and temporary workers; employees will "boomerang," leaving organizations and eventually returning; and companies will have to restructure on the fly. In other words, as the report states, "Employers will see departing employees as their future brand ambassadors, customers, hiring references, and possible future employees. The employee relationship is no longer end to end, but beginning to beginning."

How can organizations respond? To find some answers, *TD* spoke to Lindsay Witcher, director of global practice strategy at RiseSmart. We discussed how talent development can

adjust to meet all employees' needs, cater to boomerang employees, support employees during workforce changes, and help their organizations adapt to a new workplace dynamic.

As the lines blur between different types of employees—full time, part time, contract, and temporary—how can learning departments adjust their approaches to ensure that everyone's needs are met?

It really comes down to flexibility and customization based on the employee type, so for talent development it will likely mean far less of what we consider traditional means of learning. Things such as multiday classroom trainings are not always the best fit for the workforce's changing demographics.

With part-time, contract, and temporary workers, you need to look at your different populations and develop a plan that works for each one. Consider methods such as microlearning and just-in-time training. These techniques aren't exactly breaking news, but you need to move away from long-format, in-depth resources and toward short, easy-to-digest content that suits all types of workers, not just full-time employees.

If a learning department is responsible for designing onboarding, should it have a different approach for boomerang employees than for first-time hires? If so, how should the approaches differ?

The approaches absolutely should differ. When you have people rejoining or even redeploying within the organization, it's important to treat them differently than someone who is brand new.



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It goes back to the theme of customization. When working with boomerang employees, it's important to demonstrate that you recognize they've been with the company before and tailor their experience. A good onboarding experience can help someone start (or in this case, restart) on the right foot, so you can cut out things these individuals don't need. For

example, someone who's returning after one year doesn't necessarily require the deep organizational history and some of the other information that a new employee or someone who's returning after 20 years may need.

When tailoring your approach, consider things that are most important to boomerang employees, such as helping them do the job you've brought them back to do and career development. You want to show that you value their time and are willing to invest in their success.

To ensure that departing employees remain a desirable option for future rehires, should organizations consider developing offboarding programs? If so, what should these programs include?

Spend as much time and effort on the process for how individuals leave your organization as you do when they join. Most organizations focus heavily on creating a positive onboarding experience.

They invest ample time and have new employees meet people and complete various onboarding tasks, but when employees leave, organizations don't invest any effort before their departure. That's an incredible missed opportunity for employers.

Whenever people leave, they still talk about the company—whether customers, depending on the nature of the business, or potential employees. It's critical to show employees respect on their way out, giving them access to resources and listening to their opinions at exit interviews. If it's a layoff scenario, make sure you're providing the individual with career transition services.

Even after someone offboards from your company, keep your alumni database warm by creating a network of people who have left. You have many channels to do this—LinkedIn may be the easiest—and this database can help you find valuable boomerang talent or stay up-to-date with conversations on your employer brand.



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The whitepaper notes that reductions in force are becoming more common, and one recommended response for companies is redeploying workers. What role should talent development play in this process?

Redeployment is an area where talent development can play a crucial role. If you look at your workforce and start planning for the future, you'll see a lot of changes coming in the next five, 10, or 15 years, including automation and globalization. These will affect organizations as much as they do workers, which means you can build a business case around developing and redeploying people.

Start by using research data to better understand how the workforce is changing and how that will affect your company. Then talk to leadership—whether that's just your manager or a broader group—and paint the picture of how investing in different types of employees can provide a return on investment for everyone.

From there, start with one step at a time. You can't boil the whole ocean, so to speak, so don't let the many challenges prevent you from doing anything at all. Start small—add one training or launch one program and then repeat. Those small things added together will eventually have a broad impact on the organization.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Alex Moore is a writer/editor for the Association for Talent Development. Prior to his current role, he served as the research coordinator for ATD, writing content for the research department, managing its Twitter account, and assisting with data collection and analysis. Alex graduated from Virginia Tech with a bachelor's degree in English.

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