



HOW HR TECHNOLOGY CAN EMPOWER

blue-collar employees
to define the next normal

A man in an orange safety vest is looking upwards in a warehouse setting. The background shows industrial shelving and equipment.

Introduction

Within the last two years, the world of work has significantly changed. Employers need to focus on transforming employee experiences whilst making sure they are aligned to their business objectives.

Many organisations have discovered that the 'one size fits all' employee engagement strategy simply doesn't work for them or their employees. Different employee groups have diverse needs and expectations from their employers. For example, those employees who are office based in professional roles will need access to tools, information, reporting, and data different to those blue-collar employees who are in field roles away from office's.

During Covid - 19 we have seen many organisations create and implement improved employee experiences for their white collar workers, but what about those blue-collar field-based employees?

How can organisations design and create an employee experience which meets all employee expectations?

What can organisations do to bridge the blue-collar employee experience gap?

How can they make a welcoming work culture and strive for positive engagement, especially with these off-site employees?

At Wipro we believe the answer to creating and implementing the right employee engagement strategy for different groups of employees starts with understanding each employee group needs/requirements from their employer. Then, it progresses to investigating and using the right HR technology to make their employee engagement strategy inclusive and effective.

55%

of blue-collar employees⁽¹⁾ shared that their employer just doesn't understand their daily financial or personal challenges.

40%

of blue-collar workers⁽²⁾ reported that desk employees are given more respect than hourly workers.

1. Simplify and digitize attendance management of blue-collar employees

One of the major reasons for attendance tracking issues of blue-collar employees is the use of archaic and paper-driven approaches to manage their login/log out times. With a distributed workforce, across different global territories, businesses need a digital and sophisticated Attendance Management System (AMS).

- With the right digital attendance tracking via a HCM application, supervisors or team leaders can save themselves significant amounts of time and effort in terms of reporting and ensuring the right staff have been present at work. Digital attendance management systems which can be easily accessible via an app can allow employees to apply their in/out time or leave online. With multilingual tech support, they can simply follow the guidelines on an app and enter their details accurately, safely, and securely. As soon as the blue-collar employee applies their attendance, the AMS can send the digital record to their reporting manager immediately. Plugged in with features like "raise a ticket," employees can seek

clarification or help against incorrect entries or check approval status easily in their own language. Automated notifications can be sent to the supervisor to take immediate action to resolve employee queries.

- Advanced capabilities like geo-fencing and facial recognition can even help customise the digital attendance management solution with respect to different company policies and labour laws. This not only saves from additional client costs but also acts as a strategic measure against unproductive working practices and absenteeism in blue-collar employees.
- The right AMS must also be easy to integrate with the company payroll. Accurate attendance logs and prompt leave sanctions can help blue-collar workers get paid timely and accurately.

2. Choose an 'all-digital' onboarding ecosystem

Hiring blue-collar employees has its own set of challenges. Nearly half (49%) of UK employers are struggling to recruit these workers and retain them for a significant period of time. (3) To help alleviate the recruitment/retention challenge around field based workers, organisations need to review their 'hire to retire' methodology, processes and systems. They should be aiming for the creation of an inclusive and digital onboarding ecosystem for blue-collar employees.

- HR leaders can begin by choosing hybrid models of hiring with high-performing HR management systems (or HRMS); these HRMS's provide a comprehensive view of job postings on mobiles and ensure that applying for relevant job openings remains easy and digital.
- An ideal HRMS helps the employer to save intensive cost and effort from traditional recruitment methods such as involving paper-based approaches, field recruiters, or even third party agencies, but it also provides more visibility on sourcing the talent locally.
- Special onboarding plans should be considered where self-service mobile apps can help the recruiter to create and post a job in a few clicks. Similarly, the candidate can apply, reject or ask a query in real time. Having a platform-agnostic solution with a large database can help HR executives from shortlisting woes and help tackle skillset mismatch, location or experience-related challenges. Recruiters can customise their hiring criteria on the user-friendly platform and screen resumes that get already shortlisted by AI bots.



3. Pay attention to their physical and mental wellbeing

Field based work forces usually have to deal with challenging working conditions, frequent financial constraints (zero hour contracts for example), and lifestyle habits developed in specific working environments. As a result, blue-collar employees are likely to exhibit higher stress levels and have health ailments. Technology has been used over many years to provide digital healthcare. However the pandemic augmented the use of new user-friendly digital concepts to monitor health and wellbeing, which businesses should now be adopting as standard to show they have the right mental and physical healthcare measures in place for their employees.

- Businesses are now expected to incorporate a benefits administration platform that enables these workers with benefits such as wellness products/advice, doctor appointments, discounted medicines, easy and question-less hospitalization, digital claim settlement, etc.

On average, [an employee spends 75% of his waking time working](#).⁽⁴⁾ This is why leaders must invest in wellness technology and prioritise it for employees.

- HR leaders should pick up simplified & AI-enabled wellness platforms that let employees and employers participate in virtual walkathons or help customise sleeping or exercise schedules with third-party apps.
- There should be an optimal focus on leveraging telehealth to provide healthcare programs virtually while expanding employee access to care and reducing their exposure to potential diseases / health risks.
- Features like an activity tracker can be great for HR leaders to access employee engagement data in fitness classes, professional therapy sessions, or gym

practices and customize different wellness initiatives accordingly.

- New-age tech like cognitive AI and predictive analytics can help introduce wearable technology into the world of employee healthcare. Wearable devices like smartwatches or fit bands can help track their physical progress or remind them to take frequent breaks in order to combat mental fatigue and irritation.

4. Make a simple transition from “role” to “skill”

In the UK it is estimated [that 10% of the workforce is employed in low skilled blue-collar job roles](#).⁽⁵⁾ With machines and processes becoming more and more digital, companies are fixated on automating many blue-collar jobs. Manual blue-collar/field-based jobs are a necessity for a high-functioning economy and in many cases opportunities exist for blue-collar employees to up/cross skill and move to more value creating programmes of work.

As next steps, businesses must invest in providing skill-building opportunities to blue-collar workers. Learning Experience Platforms (LXPs) can be used to provide instructional, free vocational trainings virtually. These trainings are often bite-sized, interactive, and available on the go. Trainers can leverage smart, gamified content in the form of quizzes and tests to help blue-collar workers have fun while learning.

Pro tip: Some blue-collar employees are not fluent in English or have limited knowledge of it. Employers must choose an LXP that provides content in multiple languages or even local dialects, which will help learners access the content in whichever language they like.

An important aspect of blue-collar employee training involves boosting their digital literacy and interpersonal skills. Learning & Development professionals can design the course curriculum to support these workers with basic digital knowledge needs—how to log in an incident, how to report a theft, how to apply for a job, how to log their attendance every day—as they might not be highly educated or digitally aware. Their learning programs must include conducting timely sessions on interpersonal communication skills, conflict resolution exercises, and team-building workshops to ensure enhanced collaboration at work.

5. Reward them rightly

Businesses understand that rewards and recognition can certainly boost employee morale and result in lower staff turnover. It is no different for blue-collar workers.

- Their experiential rewards can range from being invited to the company's annual party or having a long lunch with the CEO. Active career progressions where they're promoted to more decision-making roles should be effectively rewarding for them.
- Performance-based bonuses, personalized rewards, or wellness baskets are other great options to appreciate blue-collar employees' efforts.

Many field based employees can feel disconnected from the organisation they are working for as they are not physically present on a company site. Having the right reward and recognition programme in place and making employees aware of it can go a long way to alleviating their fears and make them feel part of the organisation they are working for.






6. Invest in smarter, relevant performance management systems (PMS)

[The Voice of the Blue-Collar Worker survey](#) (6) outlined that 87% of American blue-collar employees are likely to quit their job over inconsistent or no pay hikes.

It translates into one point. HR and Business leaders have to reassess their existing performance measurement metrics with regards to blue-collar workforce. They must try to eliminate manual elements of performance where possible. Attempts need to be made to integrate an advanced performance management system into their current operation to evaluate and appraise blue-collar employees work with agility and accuracy.

- An ideal PMS allows team leaders, floor supervisors, etc., to identify and use sharper KPIs like Customer Satisfaction Ratings, Net Promoter Scores, supply chain efficiencies, etc., which resonate with their job roles and responsibilities.
- High-end performance systems can help bring 100% transparency around individual goals by replacing manual processing altogether. Real-time feedback and data-driven insights enable employees to perform and ask for support to accelerate overall improvement.
- Digital performance management supports automated record creation, management and maintenance. These records of the evolution of a process in a single place can save HR and business leaders' time and efforts in terms of business reporting, making sure employees are paid on time, understanding potential risks for their employees, and ensuring clients are billed correctly for the work undertaken.

A man with dark, curly hair and a beard, wearing a light blue work shirt, is shown in profile, looking down at his work in a factory or industrial setting. The background is slightly blurred, showing industrial equipment and structures.

Secure, engage, and nourish the blue-collar talent

A survey on job satisfaction outlined that **only 13% of employees have reported having a good experience with their firms.** (7)

In today's competitive labour market, it is crucial to make genuine efforts to secure, engage, and nourish the talent a company has. Just like white-collar employees, blue-collar employees also want positive engagement from leaders in their organisation. By asking for their inputs and listening to their feedback, senior management teams can make them feel seen, valued, and appreciated. This can be a great step to winning blue-collar loyalty and building an inclusive culture.

Research reveals that the cost of losing one American blue-collar employee who earns just \$14/hour is \$4,569. (8) Attrition hurts.

Organisations have to invest in advanced technologies like hyperautomation, cognitive AI, deep learning to create a digital and high-performing culture that encourages them to stay. Taking cues from smart analytics, HR and business leaders must design competitive wage packages and make ways for their continual learning and skill development. Having simplified hiring processes and digital payroll practices, HR technologists can help organisations empower their blue-collar employees. By using self-service apps, these onsite workers can enjoy benefits, from easy, frictionless hiring to flexible claim processing, quick leave sanctions to desired upskilling and career advancement opportunities.



Sources

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