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# THE FUTURE OF WORK EXCHANGE REPORT FOR 2021

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August 2021

**THE FUTURE OF WORK  
EXCHANGE** 

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# The Future of Work Exchange Report for 2021

*When Ardent Partners began this annual research study in 2013, it used the title, “The State of Contingent Workforce Management.” Eight years later that title no longer reflects the convergence of talent and innovation that we have seen in the market. That title also fails to capture the full impact that the extended workforce has on business operations and bottom-line performance. Launching in tandem with Ardent Partners’ new [Future of Work Exchange](#) website, the firm’s research in this industry will now be classified under the Future of Work label.*

*The “state” of talent and work in 2021 is very different than it was a mere 18 months ago. It is entirely different than it was a decade ago. Far beyond the recent impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, major societal changes, the evolution of the worker’s mindset, the realm of innovative technology, and the shifts in talent acquisition have created a new future – “The Future of Work” – one that impacts all workers and all employers. And that future will be based in agility, flexibility, and the transformation of the modern business.*

*In the coming months and years, businesses will require a deeper understanding of the tools, strategies, and approaches that will ultimately drive the optimization of how work is done from talent, technology, and business transformation perspectives. Ardent Partners’ approach to the shifting principles of work is to offer 1) research that encapsulates the critical reimaginings within the world of talent and work, 2) an outlet for news, insights, and commentary on how work is changing, and 3) multimedia that connects HR, talent acquisition, procurement, and other practitioners with the actionable guidance and intelligence that will aid them in thriving in these progressive times. The Future of Work Starts Here!*

**Andrew Bartolini, Founder and Chief Research Officer, Ardent Partners**

**Christopher J. Dwyer, Senior VP of Research at Ardent Partners and Managing Director of the Future of Work Exchange**

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# Chapter One: The State of the Extended Workforce

“Your workforce is your most valuable asset. The knowledge and skills they have represent the fuel that drives the engine of the business - and you can leverage that knowledge.”

– Harvey Mackay, bestselling author, businessman, and syndicated columnist

The last edition of this annual research study was published in May 2020. Analyzing the impact of the agile workforce during the earliest and toughest months of the COVID-19 pandemic presented a real-time view into how the natural evolution of the contingent workforce would collide with the greatest public health crisis of our lifetime. While those first months now seem like a blur, today, business executives around the world have the time and perspective to review their responses to the pandemic and incorporate the key learnings from the past 18 months into a more comprehensive vision of how work will get done going forward.

Unlike recent disruptions, the COVID-19 pandemic was a multifaceted and broad-reaching crisis with a global impact, disrupting far more than the global supply chain. Businesses in some industries experienced unprecedented growth while many others faced immediate and ongoing uncertainty around dramatic drops in sales, revenue, and overall cash flow. Executives were forced to respond quickly to ensure business continuity including making dramatic shifts in strategy, reconfiguring all or parts of the supply chain, and quickly scaling the workforce up or down

based upon market and business needs. Workers too, were forced to deal with a range of work and home issues, including new pandemic-related anxiety, lack of employment stability, a shift to a fully-remote work environment, and, a lack of childcare due to safety concerns and virtual school.

The context of the business’s “Next Normal” is neither a new nor static theory. But rather, it is an evolving set of guidelines and strategies that dictate how enterprises can reacclimate and thrive in the aftermath of a severe event or period. The suggested range of processes and strategies for adapting to a new world of work that will continue to morph and evolve until the long-term view is clear. In 2021, the new normal refers to a post-pandemic world. Unfortunately, the long-term ramifications of COVID-19 are still unclear, even after more than sixteen month sof crisis. That is because while vaccine campaigns have been (andcontinue to be) successful in many regions across the globe, the COVID-19 battle rages on in other areas experiencing third and fourth waves of infections, hospitalizations, and death.



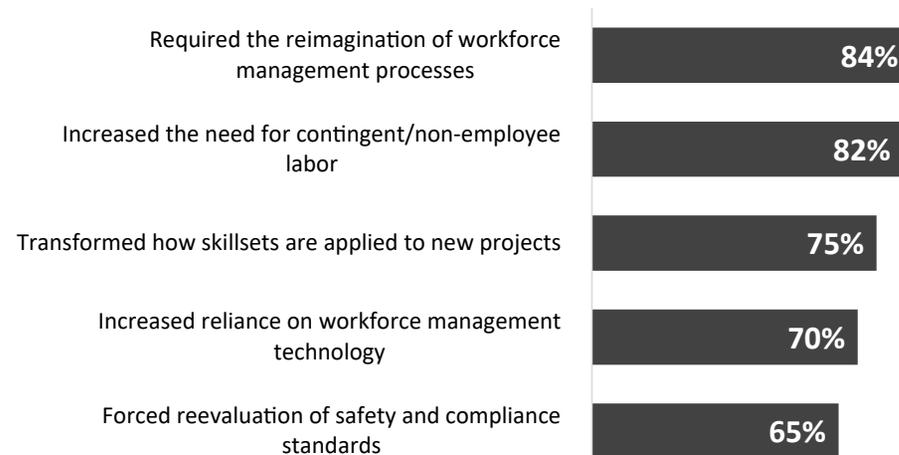
Caught in the midst of this chaos is the foundation upon which every organization is based: *its workforce*.

## The Transformation of the Workforce

Although those darker times are clearly in the past for most regions around the world due to post-infection immunity and the strength of mRNA vaccine campaigns, the COVID-19 pandemic left an indelible mark on the world of talent and work. While there are numerous issues that plagued the average enterprise in 2020 and 2021, several key challenges arose that promised to transform the Future of Work movement in such a way that the idea of “work optimization” will be changed forever.

As highlighted in Figure 1 to the right, the pandemic’s main effects on enterprise talent were squarely focused on a series of interconnected attributes related to the workforce, especially in regard to the type of worker required to meet fast-changing needs and requirements of the business and the means in which to manage it effectively.

**Figure 1: The Impact of COVID-19 on the Workforce**



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Above all else, two major ramifications came to light directly as a result of 2020’s challenging times: the “reimagining” of workforce management (84%) and the increased need for contingent labor (82%). Social distancing, citywide curfews, and global lockdowns have all had a profound effect on how businesses found, engaged, and managed their workforce. In-person interviewing, scheduled meetings with recruiters, collaboration between HR and hiring managers and other taken-for-granted procedures were suddenly impossible in light of new coronavirus restrictions. With the vast majority of workers and leaders alike forced to work remotely, traditional workforce management required new approaches to assure ongoing operations. If digital transformation was not on the radar for procurement, HR, and other functional leaders before the



pandemic hit, the pandemic made it patently obvious that manual processes were no longer acceptable and must be stricken from the workplace. Automation for traditionally in-person activities was needed for the sake of business continuity. This factor is the primary reason why 70% of business leaders reported an increased reliance on workforce management technology, such as Human Resources Information Systems (HRIS), Vendor Management Systems (VMS), extended workforce platforms, etc.

Last year, Ardent Partners predicted that the global business landscape would experience a sharp uptick in the utilization of non-employee labor as a direct result of the pandemic's sweeping impact on business and human interaction. Going into 2020, 43.5% of the average organization's total workforce was considered "contingent." In 2021, that number sits at 46.5%, and there are strong indications that this percentage will grow as the transformation of talent and work continues forward.

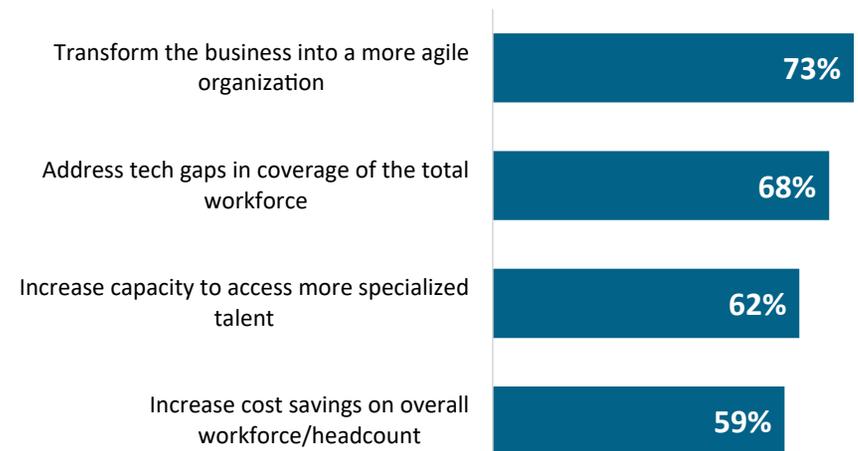
Additionally, 82% of all businesses state that the challenging times of 2020 created a bigger need for extended and non-employee talent. The past 12 months have clearly revealed that workforce scalability is an essential link to economic survival in the now-chaotic, hyper-competitive world of global business. Operationalizing that scalability is the very root of workforce agility, from which businesses can tap into talent pools, marketplaces, clouds, and communities to enhance the work done by the trusted FTE workers, and a range of services and other recruitment streams to build, in real time, a

dynamic response to a crucial enterprise initiative. The contingent workforce has become the foundation of workforce scalability, and rightfully so: businesses that survived 2020 and look forward to thriving in the second half of 2021 are actively harnessing the dynamic power of the agile workforce to get work done.

### The Path Ahead: Agility, Innovation, and Flexibility

Ardent Partners defines agility as the ability to address real-time enterprise pressures and challenges (both internal and external) with a dynamic response. Within the world of talent and work, the concept of "agility" is easily shifted into the "agile workforce." It is no wonder, then, that the top priority for 2021 after a challenging year is to become more agile (see *Figure 2 below*).

**Figure 2: Top Workforce Management Priorities for 2021**



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The focus on being more agile in 2021 is not just a response to the difficulties faced by businesses over the past 18 months, but rather a representation of a much longer arc of corporate transformation; quite simply, businesses want to be able to respond to market shifts, economic shocks, industry-specific changes, and internal challenges in a fluid, dynamic, and on-demand manner. Federal labor statistics show that, despite a vast improvement in unemployment figures since the spring of 2020, there are nearly 10 million job vacancies across the United States in various industries. Other countries show similar statistics. Light industrial, hospitality, retail, and similar sectors are all struggling to lure workers back into the fold, proving that agility-based strategies would have helped solve these current challenges by providing hiring managers with on-demand talent to fill key roles and positions.

As the world begins to return to some level of normalcy, the agile workforce will not just be an invaluable lever for white-collar and similar roles, but rather all industries and sectors that rely on their talent to get work done. The continued focus on workforce agility proves that businesses, regardless of type, desire to address their work- and talent-based requirements in a more dynamic manner.

Nearly 70% of businesses, as well, perceive technology gaps as a major priority for the months ahead. With nearly 47% of the average workforce comprised of non-employee talent, siloed systems will not be as effective in managing an evolving realm of talent that is actively contributing to mission critical projects and initiatives.

Enterprises require interconnected solutions and an ecosystem of technology partners that can spark enhanced talent acquisition, connect hiring managers with deeper skillsets and expertise, help leaders manage a changing workplace environment, and contribute to overall workforce agility.

This falls right in line with another priority: increasing the capacity to access more specialized skillsets and expertise (62%). In a dynamic marketplace that continues to evolve, it is critical for hiring managers and other key stakeholders to have the proper talent engagement tools to find better-aligned workers and candidates. Projects are progressing at different intervals due to the prevalence of remote and hybrid, opening the business to think “beyond the backyard” when it comes to finding deeper talent and expertise.

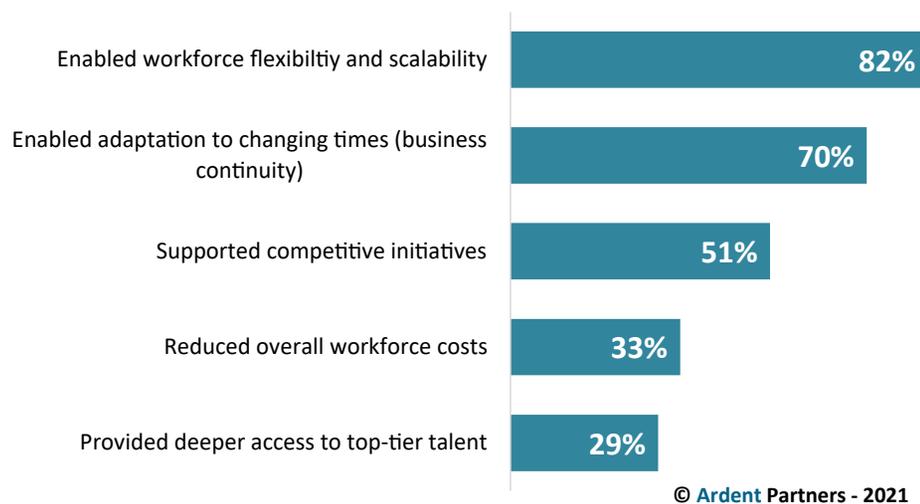
*Nearly 70% of businesses want to address key technological gaps in the greater coverage of the total workforce. This includes having full visibility into total talent, a state Ardent refers to as “total talent intelligence,” which enables organizations with the ability to make real-time hiring decisions as new needs and projects arise.*



## The Value of an Agile Workforce

In 2020, businesses were consistently searching for lifelines that would ensure some level of survival in a world of disruption and upheaval. Enter the agile workforce. For years, contingent labor was a cost-effective means of augmenting the total workforce offering shorter-term worker engagements with no healthcare (or other benefits) costs. The decade-long transformation of the contingent workforce, even before the pandemic, was a source of incredible value. Today, it is the primary source of workforce scalability, business continuity, and competitive agility (see *Figure 3 below*).

**Figure 3: The Benefits of an Agile Workforce in 2021**



Workforce scalability has been a valuable competitive advantage in modern business, soon it will be table stakes. Being able to plug-and-play talent as the market dictates is a powerful competency that can empower enterprises of all sizes with an ability to engage with many of the best and brightest minds in an on-demand manner. Throughout the toughest days of 2020 when uncertainty reigned, companies were constantly reshuffling their workforce strategies. As 82% of businesses stated in this research study, an agile workforce enabled flexibility and scalability at a time when it was most needed. As markets recovered, enterprises had the ability (via talent marketplaces, talent pools and communities, as well as traditional staffing suppliers, etc.) to ramp up hiring to meet growing demand. Short-term, contingent-based projects were the ideal setup for businesses that were living through global change in real-time.

Business continuity (70%) is also a constant, with the agile workforce serving as an anchor during tough times. With many internal functions in some level of disarray due to a newly distributed workforce brought on by work-from-home mandates and social distancing/lockdown orders, work still needed to get done and businesses had to move forward regardless of their workforce locations. Contingent labor helped organizations adapt to changing times by providing a ready-to-engage channel of talent that could be sourced on-demand and without the worry of traditional recruitment processes (particularly in-person



interviewing). If roles needed to be filled to ensure the business could address both tactical and strategic tasks, there were talented individuals ready to perform. Hiring managers were enabled with real-time engagement and sourcing, and could deploy talent when and where it was needed.

By the end of 2020, it was clear to a majority of executives that the contingent workforce had become more than an augmentative force; it was a keystone to agility and the way to ensure that work got done in periods of uncertainty.

## The Extended Workforce is a Piece of the Total Talent Puzzle

For years, the very topic of “total talent management” (“TTM”) was an eye-raising and polarizing discussion, given the fact that the very underlying concepts around TTM involved several distinct sets of processes and capabilities (i.e., procurement, spend management, contingent workforce, HR, etc.) that did not historically mesh given their focuses on commodities versus talent. However, as the contingent workforce continued to grow within the total workforce, plans to have standardized, centralized, and aligned strategies and competencies for managing all types of talent, no matter the source, became ever more critical. And, with contingent workforce utilization continuing to grow and approaching nearly half of the average enterprise’s total workforce, it is incumbent on procurement leaders, HR executives, and contingent workforce management program heads to maintain

clear visibility into the entire collection of organizational talent to execute better-informed and more intelligent decisions regarding the future use of labor.

As highlighted in Figure 3 on the previous page, nearly 70% of businesses want to address key technological gaps in the greater coverage of the total workforce. This includes having full visibility into total talent, a state Ardent refers to as “total talent intelligence,” which enables organizations with the ability to make real-time hiring decisions as new needs and projects arise. Based on available talent and their skillsets and expertise, be it FTEs, staffing suppliers, or known/vetted candidates in talent pools, hiring managers can harness the power of total talent intelligence to make real-time talent judgments. This attribute is perhaps one of the strongest links to true business and workforce agility.

With the contingent workforce evolving over the past several years to encompass additional channels of non-employee talent, the language best used to describe it has also changed. This natural progression has led to another term: “the extended workforce” (see Figure 4, next page).



Figure 4: The Extended Workforce, Defined

## What is the Extended Workforce?

The "extended workforce" is defined as the natural evolution of the contingent workforce and reflects the agility driven by contractors, freelancers, gig workers, talent pool candidates, professional services, and other forms of non-employee talent. The extended workforce is enabled by advancements in talent acquisition, such as direct sourcing, talent pools, digital and on-demand staffing, and talent marketplaces.

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Shakespeare's famous line, "What's in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet," is apt and appropriate here – no matter what we call the evolving contingent workforce, its underlying impact is still that of a powerful, market-shifting force that drives competitive value and supports overall business agility. As the contingent workforce, size, scope, and strategic impact has expanded, new terminology that captures this evolution makes sense. "Extended" is yet another natural progression for this industry; contingent workers are sometimes thought of as mere line-items or "faceless" workers across the

greater organization. Calling this spectrum of non-employee talent the "extended workforce" reflects the symbiotic link between an enterprise and *all* of its workers and how that relationship enhances the very idea of how work gets done.

As businesses navigate the "Next Normal" ahead, they will require strategies, solutions, and technology that can effectively manage the full facet of its extended workforce in order to maximize the inherent skillsets and expertise offered by non-employee talent.



## Chapter Two: The Future of Work

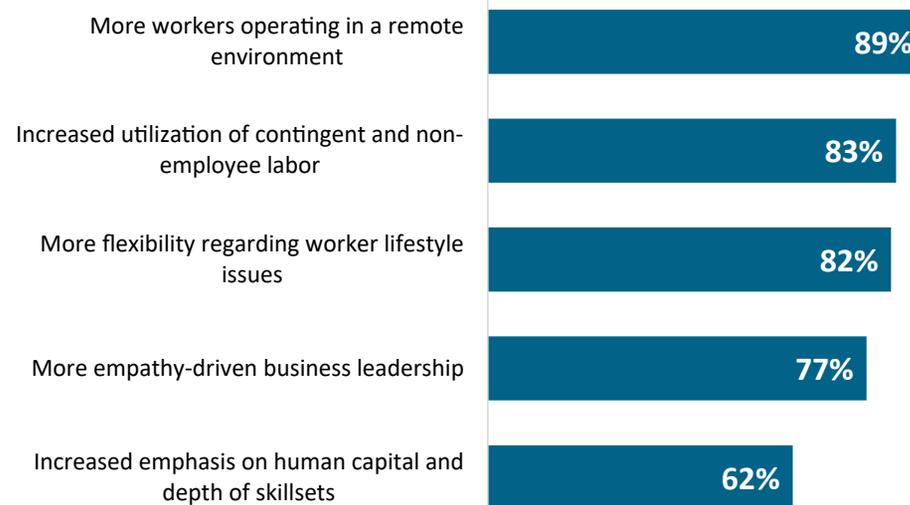
“I want to be able to think about the future and feel good about that — that we’re doing what we can to have the future be as good as possible, to be inspired by what is likely to happen, and to look forward to the next day.”

– Elon Musk, entrepreneur and business magnate

The world of talent and work has been changing at a rapid clip with the advent of new talent acquisition strategies, shifts in how enterprises optimize how work gets done, and the overall transformation of global business. The focus on the *Future of Work in 2021* is about rethinking and reimagining the baseline of talent and work and how businesses adapt to new standards and social realities that are ever-present today.

Ardent Partners defines the Future of Work movement as the strategic optimization of how work gets done through 1) the evolution of talent engagement, 2) the advent of new technology and innovative tools, and 3) the transformation of business standards. Businesses across the globe believe that many significant Future of Work shifts will force them to reevaluate their current work standards, policies, and general practices (see *Figure 5 to the right*).

**Figure 5: Expected Shifts in How Work Gets Done (Next 18 Months)**



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Over time, all businesses will experience some level of change within their operations that are driven by either internal pressures or external market factors, forcing them to pivot to new strategies, adopt new technologies and tools, and adapt to changing work



standards. The Future of Work movement in 2021 is marked by the most radical shifts in business, talent, and workplace management in nearly a century, all sparked by the accelerating speed of business, intense global competition, societal changes related to cultural- and diversity-related issues, a global health crisis and its long-term ramifications, and the consistent advances of new and innovative technology.

### Future of Work Shift #1: The Remote Work Theory

The “biggest remote work experiment in history” will have permanent effects; already, 89% of businesses expect that more of their workers and teams will operate in a remote or virtual setting over the next 18 months. The concept of distributed teams is not a new concept, however, the immediate effects of the COVID-19 pandemic dictated that businesses reduce in-person operations out of necessity. The by-products, though, have been numerous and impactful, ranging from improved productivity, better work-life balance, and a degree of flexibility that many (if not most) workers have desired for years.

In mid-2020, there was an incredible shift in the “remote work theory,” in that workers were not just setting up a home office situation for some interim period but rather, they were developing a plan and mindset that working from home *could* become the so-called “Next Normal” in their professional lives. Sixteen months later, the theory was proven true: businesses and their workers could not only survive but generally, *thrive*, in this distributed

and mostly-virtual environment. While some workers are starting to return to their conventional office setups (generally not full time), the Future of Work implication is crystal clear: whether it is a fully-remote or hybrid setup, this shift is permanent. Ardent’s research has discovered that there is a nearly two-fold increase in the number of workers telecommuting in 2021 than last year; in early 2020, 21% of workers were set up in hybrid or fully-remote environments. In 2021 and beyond, businesses expect 39% of their workforce to work remotely.

### Future of Work Shift #2: The Permanence of the Extended Workforce

Since the late aughts, there are several truths regarding global business: cash is king, innovate or perish, and the contingent (or extended) workforce will be larger and more important tomorrow. In 2020, 43.5% of the average organization’s total workforce was considered non-employee; **today, that number is nearly 47%**, thanks in large part to a shift in how talent is engaged and the flexibility of workforce fundamentals. 83% of businesses expect to increase the utilization of extended talent in the year ahead (see Figure 5, previous page), a factor that reinforces the power of the contingent workforce to reshape enterprise agility.

Furthermore, 94% of business leaders that participated in the *State of Contingent Workforce Management 2021* research study stated that their agile or extended workforce is a critical and strategic facet of their organization. By the end of 2022, nearly half



of the global workforce will be considered contingent/extended, according to Ardent Partners' industry forecast.

Before 2020, the contingent workforce was already a vital piece of the enterprise puzzle. Over the past sixteen months, this workforce was a strategic enabler of business continuity, allowing organizations the scalability, continuity, and flexibility necessary to survive fluctuating market and economic conditions. Today, nearly 47% of the total global workforce is extended in nature, proving that businesses today are reliant on contingent talent, skillsets, and expertise to effectively get work done in evolving times.

### Future of Work Shift #3: A Foundation of Flexibility

The very foundation of the Gig Economy is and always will be *flexibility*. The vast majority of "gig workers" and independent professionals travel this path due to the lifestyle benefits the Gig Economy offers, particularly the ability to better balance home and professional life, greater emphasis on remote work, and the overall flexibility of working when and where they want to (especially those that identify as "digital nomads"). Also, traditional workers often supplemented their full-time income with gig work because it allowed them to showcase additional skillsets in more flexible settings that suited their schedules, enabled them with more career-oriented opportunities, and increased compensation.

The past sixteen months have shown a bright light on just how crucial flexibility is to the modern worker, as these traditional, FTE

individuals were able to experience some of what the Gig Economy has long offered to the spectrum of freelancers, independent contractors, and other contingent workers. This experience, which encompassed newfound flexibility to deal with then-required daycare and homeschooling issues (as well as business mandates for social distancing), allowed workers to see and understand just how productive they could be in a different setting while avoiding frustrating commutes and reducing the seemingly-endless string of daily in-person meetings.

In essence, the impact of workplace culture evolution in 2020 and 2021 means that more workers, having experienced more individual control and responsibility over their work days, would like to retain some level of control over when and how they get work done – from the hours that they work to how they physically address their workspaces. As businesses push deeper into the realm of digital transformation, the remote work-specific facets of worker and workplace flexibility are not only better-enabled (via enhanced collaboration tools and unified communications), but also more realistic pieces of the Future of Work movement, and, most importantly, a central asset to overall work optimization.

### Future of Work Shift #4: Empathy-Driven Business Leadership

Many of the Future of Work movement's principles, including remote work, digital transformation, and non-technological strategies, were accelerated during these recent, unprecedented



times. In looking at the less obvious drivers, however, there is one that has taken on greater meaning and impact in the face of the myriad changes the business world has collectively experienced: the rise of empathy as a management approach by business leaders.

The trauma left in the pandemic's wake affected nearly every individual in some profound manner, a joint sense of struggle that opened pathways for business leaders and managers to employ different modes of leadership. For example, working parents faced with a sudden lack of daycare or school needed both the actual and emotional support of their leaders to contend with a series of new challenges, while the dramatic shift to remote work ruptured the once-delicate work/life balance and required those same leaders to be more flexible in how they managed their staff.

*The Future of Work movement in 2021 is marked by the most radical shifts in business, talent, and workplace management in nearly a century, all sparked by the accelerating speed of business, intense global competition, societal changes related to cultural- and diversity-related issues, a global health crisis and its long-term ramifications, and the consistent advances of new and innovative technology.*

While businesses have long eschewed the realm of emotive attributes in how work gets done, the truth is that we are no longer living in a world where the “traditional” ways of work are acceptable. The “talent experience,” which blends elements of employee engagement with employee experience and applies them to the total workforce, reinforces the need for all forms of talent to have positive encounters across the spectrum of their jobs and roles.

77% of businesses expect more empathy-driven leadership moving forward within their organizations, proving that “cold” and archaic modes of leadership, particularly instilling a culture of fear and rigidity, are detrimental to the overall enterprise. In order to retain talent and reengage key workers when needed, business leaders must create, foster, and deliver on the best possible workplace culture. By reinforcing expectations, practicing transparency, promoting positivity, and leveraging accountability (for both workers and managers), business leaders will ensure that empathetic efforts will help their organizations improve the talent experience for its total workforce.

### **Future of Work Shift #5: The Age of True Human Capital and Talent Sustainability**

One of the key facets of the Future of Work movement in 2021 is the enterprise's renewed focus on its human capital and overall depth of skillsets across the greater organization (as 62% of organizations are prioritizing in 2021 and beyond). So many major workforce shifts



in 2020 and 2021, including the overall desire for real business and workforce agility, mean that enterprises must reimagine how roles, jobs, and projects are executed over the short- and long-term, given the natural progression of market, economic, and corporate factors (not to mention the ongoing uncertainty regarding a true end of the pandemic in the United States and across the world).

One of the (many) consequences of a challenging 2020 is the concept of “talent sustainability,” in which businesses develop and maintain a self-sustaining ecosystem of evolving skillsets and expertise via 1) centralized total talent intelligence to gauge skills gaps, 2) access to on-demand talent communities and talent pools for projects that require expertise that is not available internally, and 3) artificial intelligence-led architecture that augment and transfer the mobility of talent to where it is needed most.

Talent sustainability is equal parts strategic thinking, tactical programming, and deep automation. However, the foundational elements of this progressive, Future of Work-era attribute revolve around businesses placing a major emphasis on the depth of their skillsets, expertise, and human capital. Aspects such as upskilling and reskilling opportunities, which help create a “culture of learning and development,” help the organization hedge against future skill gaps...especially considering the global business world’s focus on digital transformation and digitization. Businesses do not want to be caught off-guard when they have a critical need for specific skills. The Future of Work is many things, and, talent sustainability is becoming one if not its most crucial elements.

## The Future of Work in 2021...and Beyond

New and evolved work models form the foundation of the Future of Work movement. This all-encapsulating concept brings together new innovations and key learnings over the past year, and the approach is multi-pronged:

- 1) Understand which modes of talent engagement are best for the business based on the levels of skillsets required,
- 2) Determine whether positions, roles, and entire divisions should be distributed/remote,
- 3) Innovate around how productivity will be measured (with an edge towards outcomes rather than hours worked),
- 4) Implement all required safety and health precautions (which, yes, includes whether or not COVID-19 vaccinations are mandatory),
- 5) Foster and cultivate a workplace environment of flexibility and empathy, and, finally,
- 6) Determine the best possible alignment between digitization and human-led processes.



The world of work has never looked the same, taking into account critical shifts in how talent is engaged, how workers contribute to key projects and initiatives, and how business leaders layer flexibility into their guidance and oversight. The convergence of evolution and acceleration all form the baseline of the Future of Work movement; the businesses that hope to thrive in this new era of radical change must adapt to the crucial, transformative cross-section of “work” and “talent” whilst embracing fundamental shifts in the value of the burgeoning extended workforce.



# THE FUTURE OF WORK EXCHANGE

**The Future of Work Exchange** (powered by [Ardent Partners](#)) is the premier destination for those HR, talent acquisition, procurement, IT, and finance executives focused on the convergence of talent and innovation and the impact that the extended workforce has on business operations and bottom line performance.

Ardent Partners defines the Future of Work as the strategic optimization of how work gets done through 1) the evolution of talent engagement, 2) the advent of new technology and innovative tools, and 3) the transformation of business standards. Simply, the “Exchange” was built to provide innovative ideas, tools, and strategies to help business leaders reimagine their approach to workforce management and optimize how work gets done now and in the future.

Led by longtime industry analysts and Future of Work evangelists [Christopher J. Dwyer](#) and [Andrew Bartolini](#), the Future of Work Exchange is an exciting new venture designed to engage HR and procurement professionals and create an open forum for innovative dialogue and the “exchange” of ideas, strategies, and practices that business executives can use to transform both their talent and their talent management operations.



# Chapter Three: The Best-in-Class Path Towards the Future of Work

“No organization ever created an innovation. People innovate, not companies.”  
– Seth Godin, author and speaker

The contingent workforce represents something entirely different than it did just several years ago. Today's non-employee talent is a core element to organizational success, enabling businesses with the level of workforce agility required to become more dynamic in response to customer, competitor, and market actions. With nearly half of the total workforce considered contingent in some sense, it is incumbent upon businesses to drive maximum value from their extended workforce. Ignoring this area of talent is essentially ignoring almost half of the people running the enterprise – executives that ignore the extended workforce in 2021 are guilty of human capital management malpractice.

There are several nuances to contingent workforce management in 2021, some of which are progressive concepts that reinforce the shifting links between talent and the way work is addressed and done. Other distinctions inherent in today's extended workforce are direct ramifications of a challenging 2020 and reflect the major shifts in 1) how enterprises now perceive their skillsets and expertise, 2) how these workers support mission-critical projects

and initiatives, and 3) how the impact of crucial changes (societal changes, progression of technology, etc.) in the talent acquisition arena will continue to transform how work is done.

## The 2021 Future of Work Metrics

In 2021, the average business is actively addressing critical organizational endeavors with a variety of non-employee skillsets and talent, choosing to converge their traditional full-time workers with the unique expertise inherent in the extended talent pool. The *Future of Work Exchange* research study finds that the typical business, however, must leverage a series of tool, solutions, and strategies to derive the true value of this workforce; as shown in Table 1 (on the next page), crucial aspects such as visibility are mediocre at best.

**Table 1: The 2021 Future of Work Exchange Performance Metrics**

Metrics	Market Average
Non-employee workforce that is captured in corporate budgeting	<b>41%</b>
Non-employee talent that would be rehired for future initiatives	<b>53%</b>
Total compliance rate (independent contractor, federal, etc.)	<b>74%</b>
Year-over-year cost savings	<b>7.8%</b>

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The typical organization maintains below-average visibility into its total extended talent pool, as only 41% of the non-employee workforce is accounted for in corporate planning, budgeting, and forecasting; this means that *nearly 60%* of this workforce is unaccounted for. This is a critical hindrance in how businesses accurately build scenarios and effectively plan for future skills and knowledge gaps.

Furthermore, only slightly more than half (53%) of a company's non-employee talent network would be rehired for future projects and initiatives, a statistic that points to an inability to leverage the proper approaches for engaging, screening, and curating extended workers. With direct sourcing such a critical endeavor in today's fast-paced world of talent and work, this signals the fact that

there is more work to be done to effectively spark top-tier talent from not only direct sourcing programs, but other facets of talent acquisition and recruitment. It does need to be said, however, that a specific percentage of this workforce was never intended to be rehired or reengaged, especially in a volatile 2020.

Year-over-year cost savings tumbled nearly 15% from its peak in early 2020, proving that businesses that were critically disrupted by the events of that year ineffectively managed their talent supply base. While a 7.8% rate of cost savings is indeed a strong mark (especially for contingent workforce programs that manage tens of millions of dollars of spend annually), the fact that so many businesses immediately turned to cost-cutting in the early months of the pandemic should, in theory, lead to a higher savings output. The harsh reality is that the talent market was so volatile in 2020 that it may have been impossible for businesses to achieve higher cost savings targets, as last year was truly an unprecedented time in business history and sometimes incomparable to past times.

### Best-in-Class Work Optimization: Performance Insights

For years, Ardent Partners has utilized the Best-in-Class Framework (see Table 2, next page) so contingent workforce program managers can effectively gauge their group's performance, understand how they can improve, and model both their operations and technology utilization to reach a Best-in-Class level of work optimization success. Ardent's analysis in this report determined Best-in-Class



work optimization performance by identifying the top 20% of performers in “visibility” and “talent quality” metrics. The figures in Table 2 highlight the distinct performance advantages Best-in-Class companies have when compared to the rest of the market.

**Table 2: Best-in-Class vs. All Others**

Metrics	Best-in-Class	All Others
Non-employee workforce that is captured in corporate budgeting	<b>88%</b>	<b>46%</b>
Non-employee talent that would be rehired for future initiatives	<b>87%</b>	<b>42%</b>
Total compliance rate (independent contractor, federal, etc.)	<b>84%</b>	<b>69%</b>
Year-over-year cost savings	<b>12.4%</b>	<b>7.4%</b>

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Best-in-Class enterprises have achieved a variety of performance benefits over their peers, including:

- A 107% higher percentage of non-employee talent that would be rehired for future projects or initiatives, a reflection of the Best-in-Class dedication to evolving talent acquisition and staffing tools.
- A nearly 91% higher rate of overall contingent workforce visibility than all others, owed to their stark capability, technology, and operational advantages.

- A nearly 70% higher rate of year-over-year cost savings, which represents the Best-in-Class reliance on core procurement and sourcing principles, and;
- A nearly 22% higher rate of total compliance than all other businesses, which reflects their understanding of core misclassification risks.

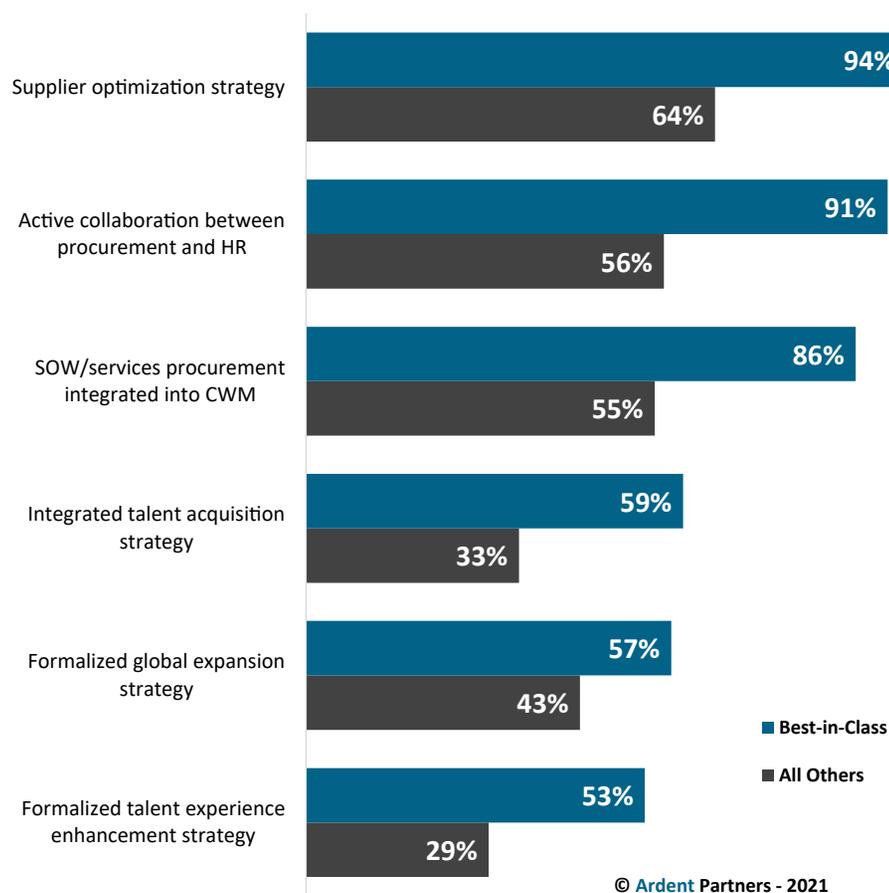
### Best-in-Class Work Optimization, Part I: The Core Competencies

Contingent workforce management practices have long followed a robust blend of technology, process, and strategy orientation that is marked by efficiencies across the end-to-end spectrum of talent and work. Best-in-Class programs are built on core capabilities that drive consistent talent acquisition approaches, proper optimization of talent channels and sources, and cross-functional coordination between key internal stakeholders.

*There are several nuances to contingent workforce management in 2021, some of which are progressive concepts that reinforce the shifting links between talent and the way work is addressed and done.*



Figure 6: Core Capabilities, Best-in-Class vs. All Others



As shown in Figure 6 to the left, supplier optimization (94%) is the hallmark of a Best-in-Class contingent workforce program; these top-performers are able to shift and scale how they use their talent suppliers to maintain alignment with the market, economic conditions, and fluctuating demand for specific skillsets. This is also a key factor in how the Best-in-Class nearly double their cost savings when compared to all others; they are actively optimizing the best mix of staffing suppliers, professional services, and other outlets of talent from both cost and quality perspectives.

“Total talent management” is a polarizing topic within the Future of Work movement. Some executives believe that the strategy, which involves all types of talent acquired and managed under the same umbrella of processes and systems, is mired in theory; others are ecstatic about its potential to revolutionize how businesses scale their workforce based on internal needs and available talent (whether it is a current employee or a candidate in a company talent pool/community). Over the past two years, Ardent Partners has pointed to a more accessible goal in relation to total talent: *total talent intelligence*. Total talent intelligence is a precondition to invest in making workforce data (pulled from HRIS, VMS, extended workforce, digital staffing, and other workforce management platforms) useable and then leveraging it to drive decision-making. This intelligence can be leveraged to make real-time and educated decisions regarding which worker type (and which specific candidate) should be engaged for a new project and initiative. Procurement and HR collaboration, in place



in 91% of Best-in-Class businesses, is at the core of driving total talent intelligence. Also, filed under “progress towards total talent management” is the Best-in-Class’ reliance on an integrated talent acquisition strategy (59%), which is a step towards harnessing a consistent and standardized set of processes for engaging and sourcing both FTEs and non-employees.

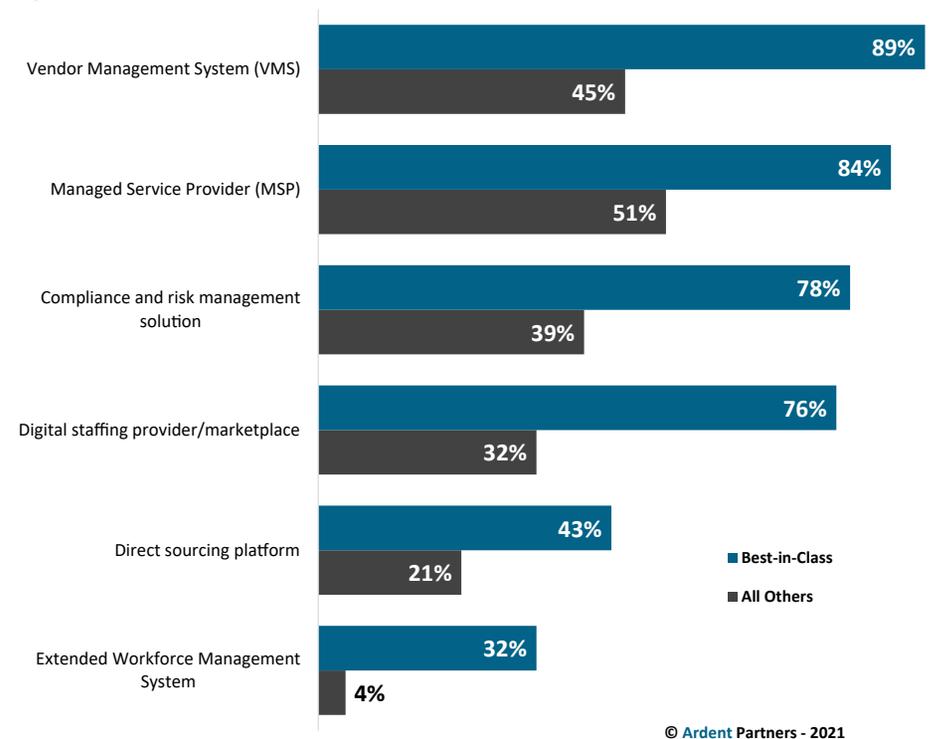
Best-in-Class programs are also over twice as likely as all others to incorporate diversity, equity, and inclusion (“DE&I”) into their hiring initiatives. This competency has become increasingly important in today’s talent-driven world of work, where candidates from all backgrounds, cultures, and genders are considered for key positions and roles (both FTE and non-employee). As stated often in Ardent’s research, including the [Contingent Workforce Weekly](#) podcast, “a diverse talent pool is the deepest talent pool.” Without boundaries or limitations on who is engaged/hired, businesses can bring truly innovative and diverse voices into their organization to spark new ideas and growth.

## Best-in-Class Work Optimization, Part II: The Technology Advantage

Technology and innovation are central to the Future of Work movement. As businesses transform the way they engage and leverage talent, and as they undergo major shifts in work optimization, automation will be the ultimate linchpin for these strategies. As shown in Figure 7 to the right, Best-in-Class organizations are actively relying on several key technology platforms to better

engage talent, enhance workforce management, and drive flexibility and agility.

**Figure 7: Solution Utilization, Best-in-Class vs. All Others**



The solution continuum in use within Best-in-Class workforce management programs represents these organizations’ reliance upon the automation of key tactical elements and innovation within the spectrum of talent engagement, work optimization, and digital staffing:



- Best-in-Class businesses are 96% more likely than all others to utilize Vendor Management System (VMS) technology, which reflects the reliance on self-service automation that can facilitate end-to-end contingent workforce management, from talent engagement and sourcing to services procurement and financial management (such as invoicing, payment, etc.). VMS technology has long been the powerhouse in the CWM solutions toolbox. With today's main solutions evolving alongside the greater industry (i.e., offering direct sourcing automation, augmenting shift management and time and attendance, supporting DE&I objectives, etc.), the Vendor Management System model will continue pay dividends in the years ahead.
- Managed Service Providers (MSPs) have long been a trusted solution in the operational and strategic management of extended talent. For decades, many businesses have outsourced the day-to-day management of contingent labor to MSPs, who, in turn, facilitate talent acquisition, services procurement (and SOW management), staffing supplier optimization, etc. MSPs, much like their VMS brethren, are also crucial offerings in regard to direct sourcing and talent pools, which can be incredibly effective in driving access to top-tier talent and supporting talent redeployment efforts via "known" and trusted candidates. Best-in-Class enterprises are 66% more likely to leverage MSPs than all other businesses.
- Best-in-Class organizations are 32% more likely to tap into digital staffing outlets for talent acquisition needs. These solutions, which typically include talent marketplaces and talent communities/clouds, offer vetted and high-quality talent for either general positions or specific verticals (such as light industrial, engineering, graphic design, coding, etc.). These offerings are often considered enterprise-grade solutions that facilitate real-time and on-demand talent engagement with independent, freelance, or contract workers via a web-based network or portal. Talent marketplaces typically offer "white-glove" or high-touch talent management services (akin to Managed Service Providers) to help their clients source the best-fit talent for their project requirements as well as the automation of core workforce management processes (such as requisition management, talent pool development, and back-end financial operations). The utilization of talent marketplaces and digital staffing outlets has increased by over 700% over the past six years.
- Best-in-Class businesses are also eight-times more likely to utilize extended workforce management technology than all other organizations. Extended workforce management platforms are the next natural progression of talent-based technology (such as VMS or applicant tracking) and facilitate deeper insights into the total talent pool of a user. Extended workforce management platforms drive "total talent



intelligence” by integrating with core HR technology and offer real-time guidance, support, and augmentation of key contingent workforce management processes (including requisition management, SOW management, and direct sourcing). These solutions are also tailored to effectively manage the evolving attributes of the Future of Work by automating aspects such as DE&I, freelancer management, etc.

- In addition to the above platforms in use by Best-in-Class organizations, these leaders also harness the power of direct sourcing technology (twice as likely to utilize than all others). Direct sourcing, as explained in the next section, is a key contributor to the overall success of contingent workforce management, especially in the face of the monumental change that has occurred in the world of talent and work over the past year. The impact of direct sourcing automation adds an additional layer of impact to the average direct sourcing initiative; these platforms assist companies in targeting the right candidates, ensuring that enterprise requirements are aligned with targeted skillsets, and, most importantly, supporting the overall adoption of direct sourcing processes and strategies across all functional realms. Too, referral management is a powerful weapon for businesses that desire to push additional candidates into the funnel. Some direct sourcing solutions today offer robust candidate referral functionality, which

is also enabled and optimized within mobile applications, that can drive additional talent engagement without the organization spending more of its time or resources.

### Best-in-Class Work Optimization, Part III: The Differentiators

Technology utilization and core competencies are the backbone of the Best-in-Class contingent workforce program. However, there are other next-level differentiators that are driving innovation within these organizations and positioning them to become more agile and dynamic as the world of talent and work around them continues to shift and change.

- Eighty-two percent (82%) of Best-in-Class enterprises have integrated SOW management and services procurement into their core CWM programs, a fact that reinforces the need for businesses to effectively track, monitor, and manage all elements of their extended workforce (not just the contingent laborers). Often augmented by VMS or extended workforce solutions, Best-in-Class businesses have integrated capabilities into their programs that include resource-tracking, milestone and delivery date visibility, full sourcing and bidding processes, and other processes required to manage what is often considered the largest chunk of non-employee workforce spend.



- Nearly seventy-five percent (75%) of Best-in-Class businesses have a direct sourcing program in place today. Direct sourcing has become synonymous with the continued evolution of talent; businesses that desire true organizational and workforce agility are actively harnessing the power of talent pools (and injecting those candidates into enterprise recruitment streams) as a viable means of reducing talent acquisition costs, ensuring top-tier skillsets and expertise, and structuring a truly dynamic workforce. Direct sourcing allows a business to leverage its culture and brand to attract top-tier candidates that are easily engaged for future projects and initiatives. In a world that has become more digitized (especially in the HR and talent arenas), direct sourcing is becoming a differentiator for the Best-in-Class businesses that actively pursue workforce agility.
- Seventy percent (70%) of Best-in-Class organizations are currently leveraging a “hybrid” talent acquisition model that utilizes equal parts digital and RPA-led processes (such as artificial intelligence and bots) and traditional human-led strategies and support. This hybrid approach ensures that aspects like repeatability, speed, and efficiency are top-of-mind in talent engagement efforts, while the human elements can deter unconscious bias in any digital talent acquisition initiatives. This differentiator is also a major reason why Best-in-Class businesses have thrived in

challenging times; next-level digitization on the front end enables agility, while the human touch on the back end ensures that core cultural objectives are met.

- Nearly sixty percent (60%) of Best-in-Class businesses currently have the ability to drive total talent intelligence within their programs. As explained earlier in this chapter, total talent intelligence is an incredible differentiator, as it helps businesses determine which candidates and which types of talent are the best fit for a new role, position, or project based on deep total talent data. More Best-in-Class programs are enabled with the required capabilities to execute informed and intelligence-led talent decisions in a real-time and dynamic manner...which, in essence, is the core of true business agility.

In looking at Best-in-Class organizations, the key to success is multifaceted and wide-spanning: embrace the evolution of talent, tap into both traditional and progressive platforms, and leverage next-generation strategies to best align the workplace environment with the best-fit talent and skillsets. Top-performing organizations are leading the next era of work optimization because they are actively adapting to the major shifts in the talent and work arena while also cultivating a culture of agility and flexibility.



## Chapter Four: The Next Era of Work Optimization

“Life is a balanced system of learning and evolution. Whether pleasure or pain; every situation in your life serves a purpose. It is up to us to recognize what that purpose could be.”

– Steve Maraboli, speaker, bestselling author, and behavioral scientist

The agile workforce has, for several years, represented the natural advancement of contingent labor and its greater impact on critical enterprise objectives. Coupled with a sharply shifting business landscape, changing market dynamics, and the reimagining of how work gets done, today's organizations must harness the influence of the symbiotic relationship between talent, technology, and business leadership to usher in a new era of work.

One of the major themes in business today is the “change” that is happening across all facets of how work gets done. Culture, people, tools, solutions, strategies, environment, leadership, and other key aspects of business operations are impacted by the Future of Work, be it via digitization or optimization with the end goals of productivity, talent retention, and powerful business outcomes. Executive leaders must lead with a creative eye in how they structure the hierarchy of key business processes, strategies, and tools, converging an adaptive mindset from recent experiences with a playbook that captures the essence of an ideal workplace environment and culture.

As they proceed further into the 2020s, business leaders must rely on *flexibility* as the underlying principle of the Future of Work that will be needed to thrive in the midst of consistently changing market conditions. The following recommendations, organized by the three key legs of the Future of Work (talent, technology, and business transformation), will help businesses spark a new era of work optimization.

### Talent Management Recommendations

- **Embrace the agile workforce as a means of tapping into top-tier talent and fostering enterprise flexibility.** The past eighteen months have shown that adaptability is a key weapon in changing times. There is a major reason why 82% of businesses expect an increase in the utilization of non-employee labor in the next 12 months. The agile workforce enables organizations to better access top-shelf skillsets, deep expertise, and a dynamic relationship that is founded on flexibility. Short-term engagements and mission critical projects supported by agile talent is specifically what empowered business during the pandemic...and that will not change in the months and years ahead.



- **Prioritize dynamic channels of talent, such as talent marketplaces, to fuel critical business endeavors.** Real workforce agility is developed through dynamic outlets of talent that can be engaged in a real-time and on-demand way. Talent marketplaces and other digital staffing channels offer simple “search and select” functionality within their deep networks of expertise that allow organizations to build remote teams of appropriate and well-aligned skillsets for crucial corporate initiatives.
- **Develop a strategy to boost the impact of direct sourcing and talent pools.** Direct sourcing emerged as a viable talent acquisition strategy within the United States several years ago (after more than a decade of massive adoption in Europe) allowing businesses to act as their own recruitment firms, saving time and money on talent engagement. In a post-pandemic world, direct sourcing can help businesses bypass traditional talent acquisition processes (which are often slower and more manual in nature than direct sourcing initiatives), nurture candidates in a meaningful way, and tap into top-tier skillsets as specific needs arise. Direct sourcing can also empower the enterprise brand and culture to attract candidates, a differentiating factor that can be an incredibly effective way to attract top talent in competitive markets.
- **Continue to lean on the extended workforce to support business continuity and market competition.** The summer of 2021 brings a wealth of optimism to the world of work due to declining COVID-19 caseloads and vaccination distribution in many regions. However, the global market continues to face considerable risk as emerging coronavirus variants continue to raise concern. If the fall and winter bring new surges, businesses will be able to replay the strategies of 2020 and adopt a flexible mindset towards its workforce; the agility inherent in the extended workforce will support (once again) business continuity and allow enterprises to remain competitive.
- **Rethink the application of core skillsets and expertise towards enterprise roles and projects.** When markets shift, businesses must frequently pivot to new work models to get work done, survive challenging scenarios, and/or keep up with the demand for products and services. “Work models,” in this instance, are not limited to where work is performed (i.e., remote work or distributed teams), but also include the strategies that apply core employee and non-employee skillsets in a way that promotes flexible alignment between open roles/projects and available talent. In addition, the executive team should invest in upskilling and reskilling opportunities for its workforce to keep up in an age when digitization is a crux to relevancy.



## Technology and Innovation Recommendations

- **Welcome the transformation of the digital enterprise.**

As consumer-focused software dovetails into the world of enterprise technology, more and more executives are finding that the modern business requires a flexible blend of workforce solutions to support operations, facilitate new work models, and aid competitive endeavors. Too, the realm of digital transformation now involves the convergence of human-led processes and digitized tools to optimize the best alignment between people and technology for the best possible business outcomes. The conversation surrounding what needs to be automated and what needs to be led by humans is an outdated discussion, now replaced by conversations around what is the best mix of technology and live skillsets for specific projects and roles.

- **Harness the power of artificial intelligence (“AI”) to aid in digital recruitment, work optimization, and contingent workforce management.** AI has been touted for several years now as both a savior for businesses and as a destructor of tactical jobs. The reality is that AI can be a powerful augmentative tool for identifying enterprise skills gaps, designing repeatable talent outreach and talent nurture communication, fostering talent rediscovery and redeployment strategies, and removing bias in talent acquisition and recruitment capabilities. AI can also be applied to CWM to better manage core staffing suppliers,

optimize the alignment between talent pools and available positions, and provide insights into the total workforce.

- **Optimize the utilization of MSP solutions and VMS technology.** There is a reason why MSP and VMS solutions are the veteran leaders of the contingent workforce technology market. These firms were built to handle the key operational pieces of the CWM puzzle. As the market shifted away from commoditization to talent-led programs, these solutions have evolved in step. MSPs now prioritize offerings such as direct sourcing and DE&I, while VMS technology can enable talent pool development, deeper SOW management, and total workforce management. Optimizing these solutions to drive deeper value is the path of the Best-in-Class CWM program.
- **Begin to develop plans for the “next wave” of technology that will impact how work is done.** Blockchain, non-fungible tokens (NFTs), digital wallets and passports, quantum computing...there are a plethora of new and exciting technologies that will reshape the business landscape in the years ahead. Although the vast, vast majority of traditional enterprise solutions (such as ERP, VMS, HRIS, etc. platforms) are what is driving value these days, there is no doubt that a progressive technology (like blockchain) could revolutionize all facets of talent engagement and work optimization. Business leaders must



start thinking now about the future impact of these offerings and how they may transform core business processes and operations.

- **Blend the concepts of digital centrality and the intelligent enterprise.** Nobody truly valued data science until the last few years, when the next great era of Big Data enabled business leaders to tap into on-demand insights regarding financial health, spend management, and economic indicators. As businesses become more digital-centric (and buy into the art of digital transformation), they must prioritize how data and intelligence sit within their technological ecosystems of solutions. Workforce management systems, particularly VMS, ATS, digital staffing, HRIS, and extended workforce platforms, must not only provide an innovative and flexible user experience to the modern business, but also push the utilization of predictive analytics, artificial intelligence-led insights, and workforce scenario-building.

### Business Leadership Recommendations

- **Empathy must become a core tenet to business leadership.** As the competition for talent remains tight, business leaders should develop an inclusive workplace culture that encourages and prioritizes the human connections between leaders and their staff (such as scheduling more video conferences, checking in with workers more frequently, and developing “safe spaces” for

workers to speak their minds and offer critical enterprise feedback). With so much of the Future of Work revolving around productivity and business outcomes, enterprise leaders must ensure that they are designing flexible work environments that allow an “elastic” means of getting work done.

- **Diversity, equity, and inclusion should be the “beating heart” of all talent- and work-led initiatives.** DE&I is not just a response to corporate social responsibility, or a checked box in regard to the major societal issues happening within the world at-large, but rather an all-encompassing theory of change that involves the breakdown of barriers across the traditional workplace environment. Businesses must formulate work- and talent-based strategies around becoming an inclusive enterprise while developing a diverse culture that is open to new and innovative voices and candidates.
- **Prioritize the value of employee wellness.** Mental health, as well as employee wellness must be melded into core workforce strategies, similar to how new technology and new talent acquisition approaches have become key pieces of the Future of Work puzzle. The very essence of the Future of Work is to optimize how work is done and enhance the productivity of both talent and technology. Mental health is a critical factor in just how productive, creative, and



innovative the workforce can be in how work is addressed and ultimately optimized. Executive leaders must cultivate an environment in which all workers, regardless of position, feel “physiologically safe,” as well as restructure paid time off (PTO) policies to ensure that workers can take the time they need to maintain a healthy work/life balance.

- **Develop the ideal “worker-to-workplace environment” over the next six months.** In the summer of 2021, there is still very much a need, and, more importantly, a desire, for remote and hybrid work models. However, as vaccines blunt the worst of the pandemic and businesses begin (or continue to) welcome workers back to the office, there will be initial confusion and resistance over what really works and what is truly productive for both leadership and its talent. Barring another severe coronavirus wave due to the Delta variant, the second half of 2021 is an ideal period for executive leaders to experiment with various work models and develop the best “worker-to-workplace environment” that is conducive to flexibility *and* strong business outcomes. Business leaders should continue to experiment over the next several months and track what is working, what is helpful for productivity, and how the workforce responds to these new environments. It will be especially critical to allow workers to have a voice and influence on the work models of the future.
- **Cultivate an ecosystem of “talent sustainability” that contributes to overall workforce agility.** Beyond talent acquisition initiatives, leaders must take a long, hard look at the most prevalent skill gaps within their businesses and understand how current and future changes in the market will affect the talent that is needed to successfully lead product development, sales and revenue, and overall enterprise operations. A deeper analysis of total available skillsets (both FTEs and non-employee) and resources available via private networks, talent clouds, talent communities, and talent pools will provide the necessary intelligence to determine which elements must comprise a sustainable ecosystem of talent. Which workers are engaged in an “agile talent” model that is repeatable? Which professional services are utilized on a regular basis? How will shifts in economic modeling alter how the overall business address how work is done? These are the questions to ask and then answer to build true talent sustainability.



## The Future of Work is Here (and Now)

The very fabric of work life has been forever transformed. The past 18 months have forced businesses across the world to reimagine core mechanics and operations, rethink and enhance how talent is engaged and acquired, transform the way leadership interacts with the workforce, and reinforced the need for new and innovative solutions.

The Future of Work is equal parts elastic and evolution, built on enlightened concepts that spark new ways to measure productivity, enforce better business outcomes, and push the boundaries of how talent can drive corporate value. The next era of work optimization is one that involves and enables diverse talent pools, inclusive workplace environments, and a culture of progressive thinking. The Future of Work revolves around worker prosperity, purpose, and potential.

The Future of Work is here and now.



# Appendix

## About the Author



**Christopher J. Dwyer is the Senior Vice President of Research at Ardent Partners and the Managing Director of the Future of Work Exchange.** For the past 15 years, Christopher J. Dwyer has been the industry's preeminent contingent workforce management (CWM) analyst and an early Future of Work evangelist.

His research focuses on the application of innovative workforce and technology strategies that help businesses around the world optimize how work is done. Dwyer is the author of hundreds of research studies and briefs related to CWM, talent acquisition, human resources, and supply management, and the underlying technologies that enterprises can utilize to improve how talent is engaged and managed. This research has enabled thousands of organizations make smarter technology investment decisions related to their talent and workforce needs.

As the Senior Vice President of Research at Ardent Partners, Dwyer oversees all research programs related to talent and workforce management. His research and consulting in the digital and on-demand staffing space have helped revolutionize how businesses source talent and labor. Dwyer is also the architect behind the new [Future of Work Exchange](#) site, which has quickly

become a groundbreaking destination for HR, talent acquisition, procurement, and other key business executives as they seek the best strategies, solutions, and innovative tools for managing the arena of work and talent.

Dwyer is the voice behind *Contingent Workforce Weekly*, the industry's first podcast dedicated to the contingent workforce industry. Now in its sixth season, the podcast is one of the top Future of Work-oriented shows across all major podcast platforms.

Dwyer has been quoted/featured in *USA Today*, *Staffing.com*, *The Christian Science Monitor*, *Forbes*, *CNBC*, *The Recruitment Innovation Exchange*, and other major business publications. He has been honored multiple times by *HRO Today* (2013, 2014, 2015, and 2016) as an "Analyst and Advisor Superstar" and was twice recognized as a "Pro to Know" by *Supply and Demand Chain Executive Magazine* (in 2014 and 2019). And, in 2018, he was named as a "Top 100 Future of Recruitment Influencer" by *Analytica*. He welcomes your comments at [cdwyer@ardentpartners.com](mailto:cdwyer@ardentpartners.com). Connect with Dwyer on [LinkedIn](#) and follow him on Twitter ([@CJD\\_Ardent](#)).



## About Ardent Partners

**Ardent Partners** is a Boston-based research and advisory firm focused on defining and advancing the supply management strategies, processes, and technologies that drive business value and accelerate organizational transformation within the enterprise. Ardent also publishes the CPO Rising and Payables Place websites. Register for exclusive access to Ardent Partners research at [ardentpartners.com/newsletter-registration/](https://ardentpartners.com/newsletter-registration/).

## Research Methodology

Ardent Partners follows a rigorous research process developed over years spent researching the contingent workforce and staffing markets. The research in this report represents the web-based survey responses of nearly 325 procurement, human resources, talent acquisition, and other business leaders captured from January 2021 to April 2021. These participants shared their strategies and intentions, as well as their operational and performance results to help us define Best-in-Class contingent workforce management (CWM) performance, work optimization goals and capabilities, Future of Work intentions, and understand what levers the leading groups pull to obtain their advantage.

This primary research effort was also informed by the experience and analysis of the report author and the entire Ardent Partners research team. Complete respondent demographics are included to the right.

## Report Demographics

The research in this report is drawn from nearly 325 respondents representing the following demographics:

**Job Function:** 51% human resources (HR); 30% procurement, 17% talent acquisition, 2% other

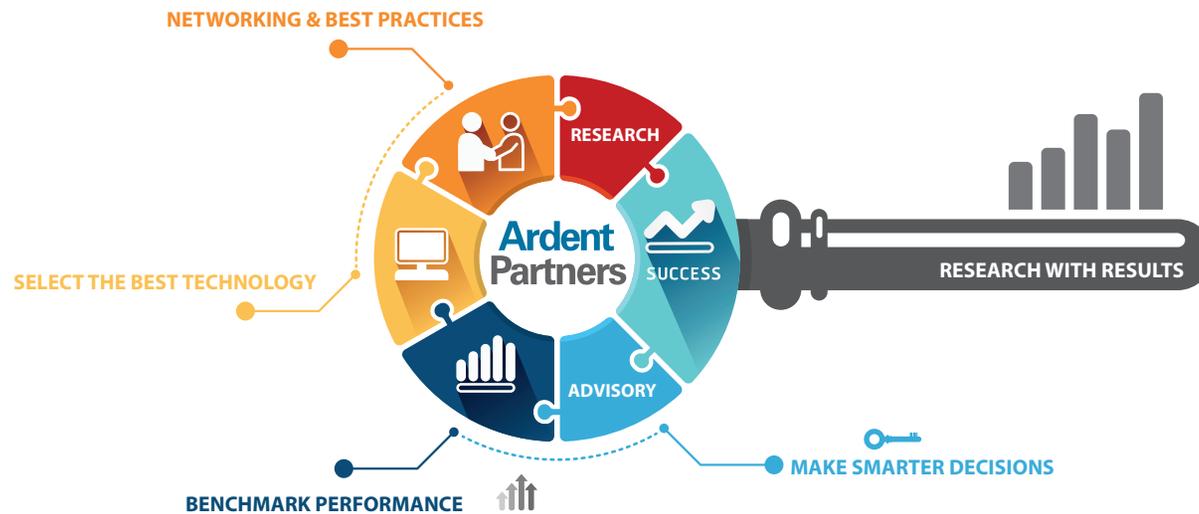
**Job Role:** 58% VP-level or higher; 34% director-level; 6% manager level; 2% staff-level

**Company Revenue:** 44% Large (revenue > \$1 billion); 38% Mid-Market (revenue between \$250 million and \$1 billion); 18% Small (revenue < \$250 million)

**Region:** 52% North America; 26% EMEA, 22% Asia-Pacific

# Ardent Partners

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**Ardent Partners** is a research and advisory firm focused on defining, and advancing the supply management strategies, processes, and technologies that drive business value and accelerate organizational transformation within the enterprise. Ardent Partners was founded by Andrew Bartolini.

**Ardent Partners** actively covers the supply management marketplace and produces research to help business decision-makers understand (1) industry best practices and how to improve performance & (2) the technology landscape and how to identify the best-fit solution(s) for their specific budget and requirements.

Contact [research@ardentpartners.com](mailto:research@ardentpartners.com) if you have any questions about this report or our research in general.

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Market ▲ 0.5 ▼ 0.12

Oil ▲ 2.45 ▼ 0.96

Forex ▲ 3.6 ▼ 1.65

Gold ▲ 0.02 ▼ 0.25

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