

What the Talent Lifecycle Looks Like in a World "Beyond Employment"

by John Boudreau

Appeared on cornerstoneondemand.com, April 2015

Have you heard phrases like “non-employment work arrangements,” “[freelance talent platforms](#)” and “labor market intermediaries”? They reflect an emerging trend in which work and workers exist “beyond employment.” Increasingly, these new approaches to work are fundamentally changing how you achieve your organization's mission—and leaders who overlook them risk making the same mistake that taxi services made when they dismissed the emergence of ride-sharing services.

"Beyond employment" designates a world where the concept of a job may be irrelevant or inadequate for describing how work can be deconstructed and dispersed. It's a world where reward systems must reflect that [rewards are often non-monetary](#). It's a world where workers can move seamlessly back and forth over an organization's boundary, or never even join an organization, making concepts like “employee turnover” and “employee careers” too confining to capture the reality of the options available to companies and workers.

It can be difficult for HR professionals to understand how to approach this undefined, non-traditional new world of work. The best place to start is with the familiar: The standard talent lifecycle of 1) workforce planning, 2) sourcing talent, 3) selecting talent, 4) developing talent, 5) rewarding work and, eventually, 6) ending the company-worker relationship. By exploring the talent lifecycle through the lens of a "beyond employment" world, it's easy to build a bridge from where HR is now to where we could be.

Step 1: Workforce Planning

In a world beyond employment, planning is transformed from employee supply and demand to worker optimization. The focus becomes the work, not employee headcounts or FTEs. Organizations have permeable boundaries where fundamental concepts such as headcount, worker availability, movement between jobs, and worker separation must take on very different meanings. The key planning issue may be where to allow your boundary to open and where to keep it closed.

Step 2: Attracting and Sourcing Talent

Today, HR typically looks for candidates who want to work for the organization as [regular, full-time employees](#). The new world of work requires a process of seamlessly engaging multiple systems (procurement, contracting, partnering, recruiting) to attract workers for engagements that may not be full-time. No company could afford to have a “job” exclusively devoted to developing YouTube advertisements during the Super Bowl, but when you deconstruct that project, you can source it with crowdsourcing or freelance platforms.

Step 3: Selecting Talent

Today's selection systems focus on assessing skills and cultural fit to make sure the employee has potential for a career beyond his or her first job. But today, companies are selecting talent based on short-term benefits (for both sides). For example, when Siemens created an innovative hearing aid for children, it didn't hire employees to devise its marketing campaign—instead, it borrowed employees at the Walt Disney Company through an alliance, and they came up with packaging that included a comic book and a children's story about coping with hearing loss.

Step 4: Developing Talent

Today, employee development systems focus on experiences gained by moving through jobs and hierarchical levels. But a [“career” today is not necessarily a progression](#) through positions—instead, it's often an accumulation of projects and task credits. What does it mean to get “promoted” in such a fluid system? Should we take mentoring to the cloud? A company called [Everwise](#) does just that. The mentorship platform has amassed a data base of 60,000 relationships, pairing experienced professionals with protégés across organizations.

Step 5: Rewarding Great Work

When work and workers can move across organizational boundaries, it's a recipe for extreme employment-at-will with little long-run exchange. But if organizations make permeability a central part of their reward structure, they can actually create rewards that entice workers to move out and in. For example, organizations can offer a big bonus if a worker returns after an outside stint where they acquired valuable skills. There is already talk of “tours of duty” across organizations, more portable rewards and flexible systems that track skills and achievements.

Through the lens of these alternative reward systems, crowdsourcing platforms like [Topcoder](#) and [MTurk](#) are basically virtualized versions of traditional piecework systems that have been around for hundreds of years.

Step 6: Separating from Workers

Employee “turnover” is the end of the employment relationship and perhaps the most frequently measured HR outcome. In a new world beyond employment, the whole notion of [employee “separation”](#) could be obsolete. The end of a project by a contractor or freelancer is hardly a separation, when that worker could easily be available in the future. This makes employee separation less of “the end” of a talent lifecycle, and more of an integral element in an ongoing series of engagements between work and workers.

To meet the future demands of leaders and live up to the vast potential contribution of work “beyond employment,” HR leaders need to rethink the very foundations that support today's HR systems. However, with a little creativity, it's possible to see a bridge from here to there.