

CAHRS Virtual Working  
Group:  
Engaging and Retaining  
Key Talent  
March 22, 2023

### **Engaging and Retaining Key Talent Virtual Working Group March 22, 2023**

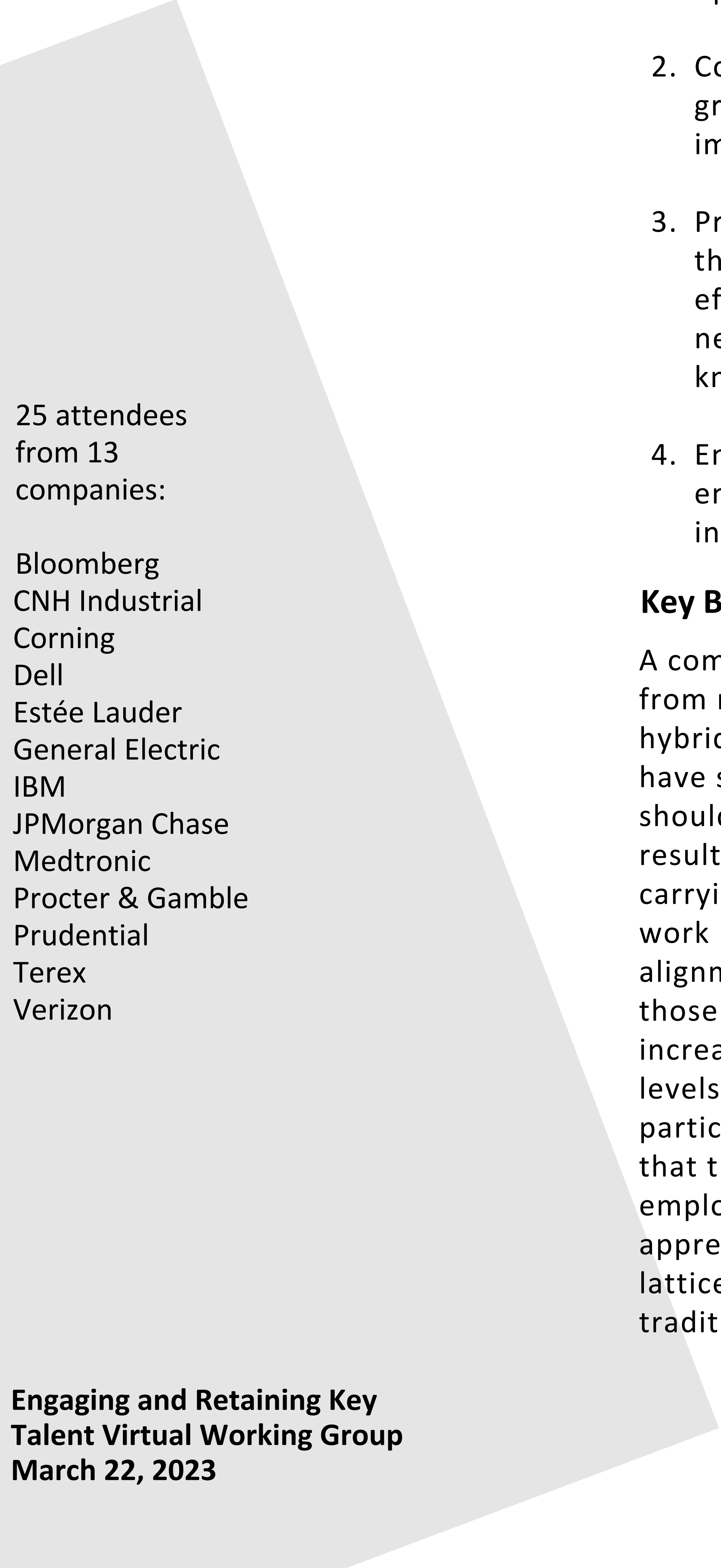
During this session participants discussed the various challenges their companies are facing regarding employee engagement and retention, as well as new strategies they have implemented to manage these issues. More specifically, the group discussion focused on the use of career pathing, skill development, and purpose-driven management to improve engagement and retention. Members pointed to return-to-office transitions, new talent competition, and employees' continued desire for purpose in their work and organizational membership as key challenges.

#### **Key Takeaways:**

1. Time spent in the office should be purposeful and should emphasize opportunities for engagement that cannot occur remotely.
2. Combining skill mapping with career pathing offers employees greater control of their growth and development, offering a path to improvement of both employee engagement and retention.
3. Providing forums for employees to demonstrate and teach what they have learned through development opportunities can be an effective way both to encourage employee proactivity in gaining new skills and to support employees' retention of newly developed knowledge.
4. Encouraging and supporting passion projects can help get employees more engaged with the organization while also tapping into their purpose.

#### **Key Barriers to Employee Engagement and Retention**

A common challenge faced by CAHRS companies has been the move from remote to in-person work. Several participants reported the use of hybrid work arrangements in their companies, but shared that managers have struggled to provide employees a satisfying rationale for why they should return to the office even for part of the week. This has also resulted in stress and burnout among managers who are tasked with carrying out organizational return-to-office policies. Continued remote work has made communicating organizational purpose and creating alignment around organizational culture particularly challenging. Among those companies unable to offer hybrid options, many have noticed increased attrition to employers providing greater flexibility and higher levels of burnout as business picks up amid staffing shortages. A few participants in companies with flatter organizational structures noted that their companies have also struggled with retention among employees who are seeking advancement and who do not understand or appreciate the less traditional forms of growth emphasized within the lattice model relative to opportunities for upward mobility in more traditional hierarchical structures.




25 attendees  
from 13  
companies:

Bloomberg  
CNH Industrial  
Corning  
Dell  
Estée Lauder  
General Electric  
IBM  
JPMorgan Chase  
Medtronic  
Procter & Gamble  
Prudential  
Terex  
Verizon

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### **New Strategies to Improve Engagement and Retention**

Participants shared a number of innovative solutions aimed at improving employee engagement and retention in the face of these challenges. As the novelty of virtual happy hours popular in the early days of the pandemic has faded, some CAHRS companies have moved to less frequent – but larger – in-person social events. They have found that planning these events during work hours has bolstered attendance and that overall, these events have helped teams to build trust and to ensure that members know where they can seek support. In some cases, companies have paired these events with learning and onboarding experiences. In these instances, new hires are matched with employees that are more senior in order to pair networking and learning opportunities in the onboarding context.

Companies offering hybrid work arrangements have found that it is vital to align schedules to ensure that employees are not commuting to work to spend the day in an empty office or in virtual meetings. Participants also highlighted the need to expand the meaning of flexibility to align with the requirements of different roles. For example, flexibility for office workers may involve remote work options, whereas flexibility for manufacturing workers – who are required to be in person to perform their jobs – may mean more choice in shift times. Lastly, several participants discussed their companies' increased investment in skill mapping and career pathing to enable employees to more easily see where they have room for growth while also allowing for freedom of choice to pick training opportunities that align with their career goals.

### **Changes to Supporting Employee Skill Development, Career Pathing, & Internal Mobility**

Several participants noted that their companies had found considerable success through career pathing and in encouraging internal mobility more generally. For example, one participant noted that in some work locations with few opportunities for upward mobility, career pathing modules aimed at internal lateral moves resulted in a 50% increase in internal mobility. In addition to building skill and career paths, CAHRS employers have also created spaces for employees to practice and highlight their newly developed skills. An understandable desire shared by working group participants is that organizations' training offerings are fully leveraged by their employees. In other words, they hope that not only will employees take advantage of available trainings, but also that the knowledge they acquire will “stick” and will help them become better at their jobs. In order to facilitate this, some participants shared that their companies have created forums in which employees can apply and practice newly developed skills, as well as share these skills with other employees. As a result, knowledge is both exchanged and solidified. In a similar vein, some companies have also created forums to highlight employee innovations, offering a platform for workers to be recognized for their new ideas and to share them with others.

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### Leveraging Purpose

Several participants noted that their companies have found success leveraging purpose by offering employees greater control over the type of work they are doing – and the work they will be qualified to do in the future. By giving employees access to skills training and information about what skills are needed for different jobs, companies have empowered employees to choose and navigate their own career paths. Some organizations also encourage and support employee passion projects, emphasizing to employees that their efforts are not constrained to the work they are formally assigned. At a more global level, in efforts to center both organizational and individual purpose in the employment relationship, some companies have also set up funds to support workers during natural disasters as well as platforms to help employees find volunteer opportunities that align with their personal interests.

Finally, many CAHRS employers have focused increased attention on the role of the people managers, recognizing the criticality of people managers as the key interface between the employee and the organization. Participants shared both about their companies' efforts to revisit managerial responsibilities to hone in on the most important areas of focus in order to alleviate managerial overload, as well as initiatives aimed to ensure that managers have adequate familiarity with the range of resources available in the organization that may be relevant in supporting their employees' needs.

This Summary Report was prepared by Reed Eaglesham and Rebecca Kehoe for participants of the "Engaging and Retaining Key Talent" Virtual Working Group.

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