

How to develop early career talent virtually

Article

Accepted Version

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<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7502-2875> (2021) How to develop
early career talent virtually. MIT Sloan Management Review.
ISSN 1532-9194 Available at
<https://centaur.reading.ac.uk/94862/>

It is advisable to refer to the publisher's version if you intend to cite from the work. See [Guidance on citing](#).

Publisher: MIT Sloan School of Management

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How to develop early career talent virtually

In our current, increasingly uncertain 'new normal' world, there's never been a more critical time to invest in early-career talent, ensuring entry hires are suitably equipped with sufficient developmental opportunities to kickoff, advance, and actualize their potential.

Favored methods for identifying and nurturing talent are internships and graduate programs; the latter experienced [6 percent growth in 2019](#) because countries and businesses increasingly competed for the best and brightest. Top programs typically required substantial face-to-face interactions, proving those new to work with opportunities to senior shadow employees, learn the ropes, and build confidence to accelerate into management roles. Yet, reliance on physical delivery meant entry hires have suffered severely since the introduction of remote work, halting [64 percent of training](#) and revoking [28 percent of job offers](#). By way of comparison, in 2009 following the financial crisis, only [9 percent](#) of employers withdrew employment to graduate talent.

Yet, with over half (59 percent) of 4,500 people surveyed wanting to continue to work from home — an almost six-fold increase from the beginning of lockdown — there's no time to waste for companies to begin running virtual early-career talent development activity. But how exactly can this occur (and thrive) remotely? And how can those new to the workforce grow and develop behind a screen?

To find out, we led a research study to examine 500 internships and graduate programs around the world (65 percent from North and South America, and 35 percent from Europe and Australia). Various questions assessed each organization's readiness for virtual development to commence in 2021 and identified the culture, process, and people factors that make or break good-natured efforts to grow talent and nurture early-career hires successfully. These included (among others):

- What events are you introducing to your class of 2021? How will you assess their impact?
- How will you gather feedback from employees and participants? And how will this feedback inform program design?
- What is the most critical factor when developing talent in your organization? And how can this occur virtually?
- Where do you envisage the future of talent development heading?

Triangulating data from participant responses helped us propose five crucial steps leaders must take when developing early career talent virtually.

First, set classes of 2021 up properly. Ensure everyone has the technology needed and knows how to use it. This requires online training as part of any induction, because when early-career hires can rely on their remote work set-up, we found it becomes 85 percent easier for them to connect with peers and reach out for help when needed. This is especially critical for diverse candidates because our study concluded Black and Hispanic hires were 145 percent less comfortable with virtual work, and Female hires were 70 percent more likely to be worried about having the right technology and resources. As such, we found that a clear communication line is paramount for a virtual track to work, which technology's

proper use provides. Even the most simple set-up, such as a WhatsApp group, we found to be effective over 90 percent of the time because it provided talent with a [sense of community and a platform to fire off any questions](#).

Second, connect early-career hires with mentors. Under normal circumstances, they'd be busy working alongside colleagues, enabling new starters to learn and network from their more experienced counterparts. Pairing each graduate with a mentor ensures that this opportunity for growth and connection doesn't go missing. Not only will having a mentor help talent develop personally and progress professionally, but it'll also provides them with [a dependable resource](#) for help or questions that arise throughout their tenure. Our study concluded this ensures they don't feel overly stressed or daunted by their new workload from a pastoral perspective - by over 70 percent.

Third, run frequent events, workshops, and training program. After all, talent development should be a place for learning and growth. However, when working remotely, learning opportunities tend to go amiss. Therefore, online sessions must make up for this deficit. The most effective virtual training exercises we observed included "Ask me Anything" sessions with various senior leaders, "Mix & Mingles" with fellow graduates, and thought-provoking Zoom events, and "Lunch & Learns," with top industry leaders. These helped more than 75 percent of entry hires we spoke to adopt company culture thoroughly.

Fourth, utilize the opportunities that remote work provides. It's now [easier than ever to connect with colleagues](#) on different projects and on different teams — even those that are on the other side of the world. Usually, early-career hires wouldn't have the chance to work with these co-workers since business travel is often reserved for senior employees- virtual meetings and collaborations weren't the norms. So allowing graduates to work with a broader range of employees while rotating through different departments [improves their confidence](#) by 80 percent and [figure out what they're most interested in](#). As [WayUp's](#) CEO & Co-Founder, Liz Wessel, told us, "sometimes, internships help you figure out what you want to do, and other times, it helps you figure out what you definitely don't want to do."

Fifth, ensure that the class of 2021 feels confident in their role and has a grasp on the opportunities in front of them, even if they're virtual. To achieve this, our research suggests granting more autonomy than ever - by reducing and reassigning responsibilities that are draining and disengaging. This trend is commonly referred to as '[Job Crafting](#)' — where workers design their own job descriptions, make modifications that suit them specifically to work in ways that better reflect their strengths, interests, and core values. We found this flip to the traditional top-down approach of job design very popular, with companies like Google, Facebook, McKinsey, Intel, Virgin, and KPMG. But because it's a bottom-up initiative, the methodology can be successful only if supported and encouraged by all management levels, particularly those mentoring graduates. Where instances of such commitment existed, our research showed that 92 percent of graduate crafters improved wellbeing, leading to a decrease in stress. Furthermore, 67 percent felt inclined to stretch past their comfort zones, resulting in more collaboration, and 77 percent were highly productive compared to those who did not use crafting. Consequently, this led to a graduate workforce that had better in-role performance, organizational commitment, job satisfaction, improved wellbeing, happiness, and self-efficacy - early-career turnover within

organizations using job crafting also decreased by 29 percent because those seeking to stretch their skills looked internally before pursuing roles externally.

So, when redefining and redeveloping tracks for the class of 2021, remember why you take on early-career hires and why they seek out these opportunities. For new talent, they can develop essential job skills, brightly kick off their careers, and build a new network of colleagues. For employers, they have the chance to develop the best young minds - who are likely to remain loyal to you for many years to come -and enhance company culture. Hence, in this remote work climate, it's crucial to develop a virtual culture and program that fosters community and continues to provide opportunities for new starters and employers - it's up to today's companies to support tomorrow's top talent, and there's no time to waste.