



HRO TODAY RESEARCH FLASH REPORT

HR'S 2021 RESPONSE DEFINES EMPLOYER BRAND IN EMEA



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HRO Today Flash Reports are a series of ongoing research initiatives that address today's topics of interest in the HR community. *HRO Today* Flash Reports are focused briefs that can be used to support business decisions and further discussion among industry practitioners and thought leaders. The markets served are North America, EMEA, and APAC. This report covers the EMEA region.

This report examines the practices of candidate experience measurement, employer brand practices and the impact of COVID-19 on employer branding. It also discusses how the importance of diversity and inclusion messaging in employer branding has changed over the last 12 months.

Where appropriate, findings from this year's study are compared with those from the 2020 report, which also addressed candidate experience and employer brand practices in the EMEA region.

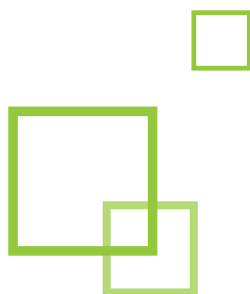
This study was sponsored by PeopleScout.

Methodology

From 1 September to 18 October 2021, a series of email invitations were sent to EMEA subscribers of *HRO Today* Magazine and *HRO Today* newsletters to take part in an online study on behalf of *HRO Today*. Study respondents were manager level or above within their Human Resources departments. Respondents were from the EMEA region. Additionally, the QuestionPro Audience panel was used from 13 October to 18 October 2021 to augment the study sample.

The 60 study respondents were screened to ensure that they were personally very familiar with their company's employer brand and that they were with organisations of at least 1,000 employees. Because of the size and diversity of the region and small sample size, these results should be viewed as directional.

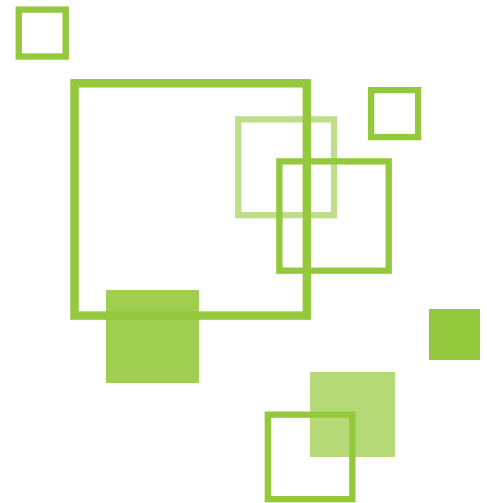
Those invited to take the survey were not aware of PeopleScout's sponsorship of this study.



INTRODUCTION

Recruiting in EMEA in 2022 looks radically different than it did at the start of 2020. Accelerated by COVID-19 and the movement for racial justice, changes that were expected to take years are happening in months. Virtually recruiting remote workers is the new norm for many. Internal mobility and upskilling programmes are being built out, many for the first time. Diversity, equity and inclusion are being treated with greater urgency and accountability.¹

But how have all these changes impacted the candidate experience? How will organisations refocus their employer brands to reflect new priorities? This report explores those areas and discusses the implications from the findings.



CONCLUSIONS

While companies' own overall assessment of their candidate experience acknowledges challenges, it has improved since 2020. More than three-quarters (76%) felt they had a good or excellent candidate experience, up from 59% in 2020. Given how tight the labour market is in many industries, recruiters cannot afford to have a substandard candidate experience. The best candidates will move on, leaving those with poor or even mediocre candidate experience practices behind.

The top three candidate experience challenges faced by employers are providing a timely interview process, onboarding practices in need of improvement and not having a formal way to capture candidate feedback. Processes that are not measured cannot be improved. Smartphone ownership in Europe is about 85%, and the rate is even higher among younger candidates. This means recruiters have 24/7 access to contact candidates for feedback. This feedback can include diagnostic information about the interview and onboarding processes that can be quickly implemented.

Employer value proposition (EVP) priorities cover a wide range of goals. The most widely held priority of an EVP is to showcase the work environment, as indicated by 60% of respondents. An organisation's commitment to diversity and inclusion was cited the second most often, by 50% of respondents.

Feedback about the recruiting experience remains sporadic, both from and to candidates. Overall, nearly one-quarter (24%) of recruiters surveyed never ask for candidate feedback, though more (42%) made it a standard practice than in 2020. Without capturing data, employers cannot construct an informed roadmap designed to deliver a superior candidate experience.

Feedback is consistently provided to candidates who were not extended an offer after face-to-face interviews 44% of the time, which is substantially down from the 56% offering feedback the prior year. Given the tremendous surge in recruiting activity between 2020 and 2021, recruiters may be too overwhelmed to take the final step in the process. Offering feedback can create goodwill between the candidate and company, add a candidate to the silver-medalist talent pool and help avoid negative social media chatter. However, legal considerations often dictate what can be given as feedback.

Employer brand plans progressively include social media. More than one-third (40%) of respondents indicated they plan more social media usage to improve their employer brand. Social media usage was up significantly over the past year, though as EMEA continues to emerge from the pandemic, it may be that social media usage is approaching saturation. Employer review sites are a component of social media, and 40% plan to use them as part of their plans to improve their employer brand.

Companies will continue to invest more in their employer brands. Nearly three-quarters (74%) of participants anticipate a greater investment, significantly up from 45% in 2020. Response to the pandemic gave companies an opportunity to distinguish themselves as a great place to work.

COVID-19 response is a litmus test for employer brand. Recruiters remain adamant about the importance of their employer brand as they move into post-pandemic mode. More than three-quarters (88%) of recruiters felt their employer brand is becoming more important in the long run. Companies' response to the COVID-19 pandemic will have a long-term effect on their culture, reputation as a great place to work, and ability to attract, recruit and retain talent well into the future. Almost every study participant (97%) indicated their company made an adjustment to their employer brand in response to the pandemic. The majority showcased what the company did to protect their workforce.

Diversity and inclusion (D&I) now plays a more prominent role in employer branding. For the vast majority (83%) of survey respondents, their employer branding strategy will change to include D&I as a critical component of the message. Failure to address it will reflect negatively on the current workforce and recruiting. D&I commitment will become a must have in employer branding.

DETAILED FINDINGS

Rating of Company's Candidate Experience

Using the scale below, how would you rate your company's candidate experience?

Study respondents were asked to rate their company's candidate experience on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1-Very Poor to 5-Excellent. In 2021, more than three-quarters (76%) felt they had a good or excellent candidate experience, up from 59% in 2020. While most feel they have a quality candidate experience, only 19% feel it is excellent, suggesting there is still considerable room for most to improve. More companies may be approaching that level, as the average rating for candidate experience in 2021 was 3.95, up from 3.75 in 2020.

The current recruiting environment means candidate experience is more important than ever before, as high demand combined with disruptions in the talent pool have led to an unprecedented labour shortage.

British employers are facing the most severe shortage of job candidates on record due to the post-lockdown surge in the economy and Brexit, pushing up starting pay for permanent staff at an unprecedented pace. The Recruitment and Employment Confederation (REC) said a reluctance by employees to switch roles due to the pandemic, fewer European Union workers and skill shortages were contributing to the staffing squeeze.²

In the rest of Europe, coronavirus travel restrictions mean workers can't cross borders as easily within the 27-nation bloc. The networks and pipelines that provide new workers have been disrupted. Job fairs have been cancelled and vocational training programmes upended. Universities have seen a slump in foreign students. Further, Brexit imposed an additional barrier to movement of labour, because the trade deal between the UK and EU that started in 2021 includes restrictions on movement and limited mutual recognition of some employee qualifications.³

Challenges with Candidate Experience

What are your greatest challenges with your candidate experience? Please select the top three.

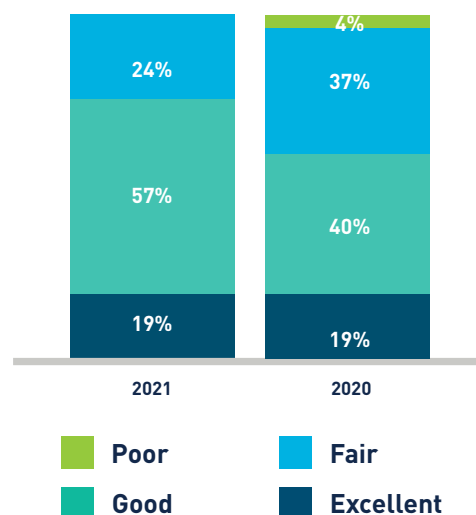
Study participants were asked to select the top three challenges they face with their candidate experience out of 14 options.

No area was selected more often in 2021 than the timeliness of the interview process, with 41% selecting it. This component of the candidate experience includes scheduling interviews, extending offers and negotiating contracts. In this environment, the most qualified candidates tend to receive offers quickly, so the more concise and focused the interview process, the better the chance recruiters have of candidates accepting their offers. Additionally, long delays and inefficiencies can negatively impact the perception of the company.

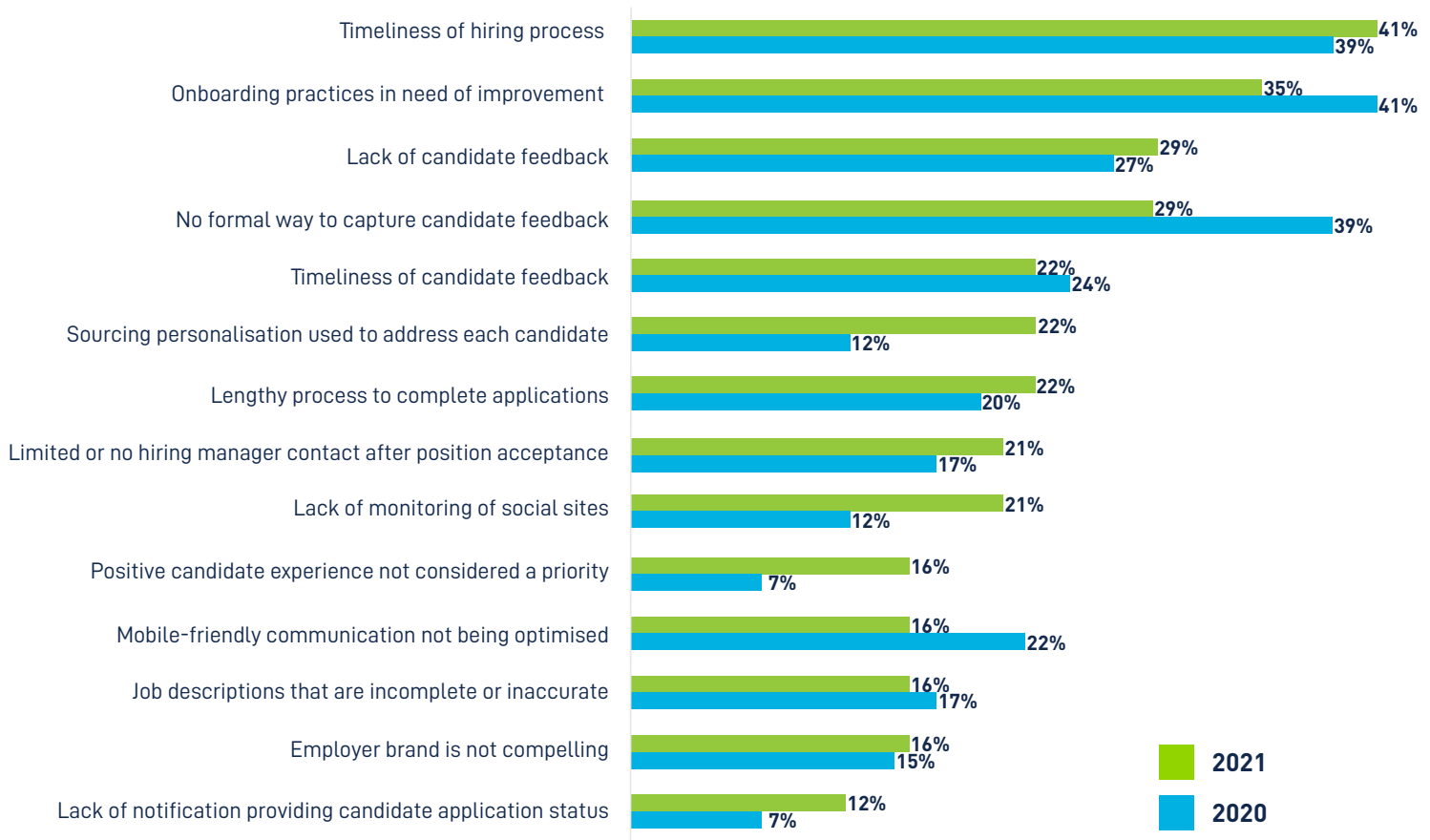
The second greatest challenge is onboarding practices in need of improvement, as selected by 35% of respondents. While this was also a challenge for many at the start of 2020, it became a more formidable task over the last year and a half. Companies began hiring again, but still faced the constraints imposed by the pandemic. Companies need to develop virtual training programmes that provide an engaging and immersive experience. Ways to do this include a highly structured accountability plan and providing a positive cultural environment.⁴

Areas related to candidate feedback were selected third most often, with a lack of candidate feedback and no way to capture it both selected by 29% of study respondents. A lack of candidate feedback is mostly an issue of recruiters' own creation. There is nearly 24/7 access to candidates through smartphones. The smartphone penetration rate in Europe is over 77%, reaching as high as 87% in Germany.⁵

RATING OF COMPANY'S CANDIDATE EXPERIENCE



CHALLENGES WITH CANDIDATE EXPERIENCE



Priorities with the Employer Value Proposition

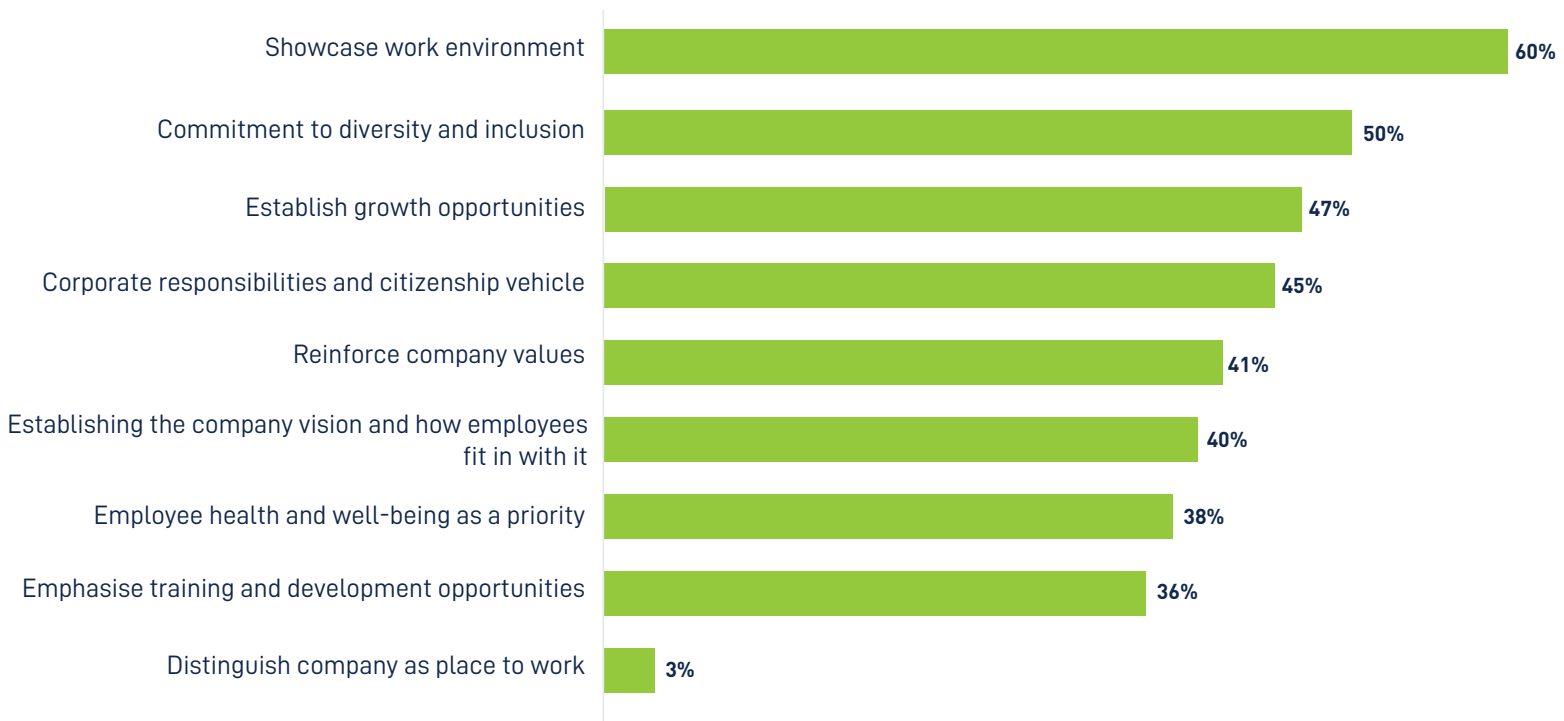
What are the priorities of your EVP? Please select all that all that apply.

Respondents were asked to identify all the priorities of their employer value proposition (EVP). Overall, the priorities of the EVP cover a wide range of goals, with eight of the nine examined selected as a goal by 36% to 60% of respondents.

The most widely held priority of an EVP is to showcase the work environment, as indicated by 60% of respondents. According to Forbes, Millennials value company culture more than any other generation before them.⁶ Companies can showcase their work environment by using an engaging website that is more than a way to submit applications, but a means to showcase how a company's visions and values contribute to its culture. An investment in original video content that showcases aspects of company culture will particularly appeal to Millennials and Gen Z. Social channels dedicated to showcasing company culture can also help companies stand out to candidates.

An organisation's commitment to diversity and inclusion was cited by one-half (50%) of respondents, the second most selected priority. Perhaps no priority changed more within the last two years in much of the world than defining and emphasising an organisation's commitment to diversity and inclusion. But including D&I as part of the EVP and making it company practice are two different things. A recent study shows that just more than one-half of UK leaders (52%) have communicated their D&I goals, and just a third of organisations (33%) have dedicated senior employees for D&I.⁷

WHAT ARE THE PRIORITIES OF YOUR EVP? PLEASE SELECT ALL THAT ALL THAT APPLY.



MEASURING CANDIDATE EXPERIENCE

Candidate Feedback on Recruitment Experience

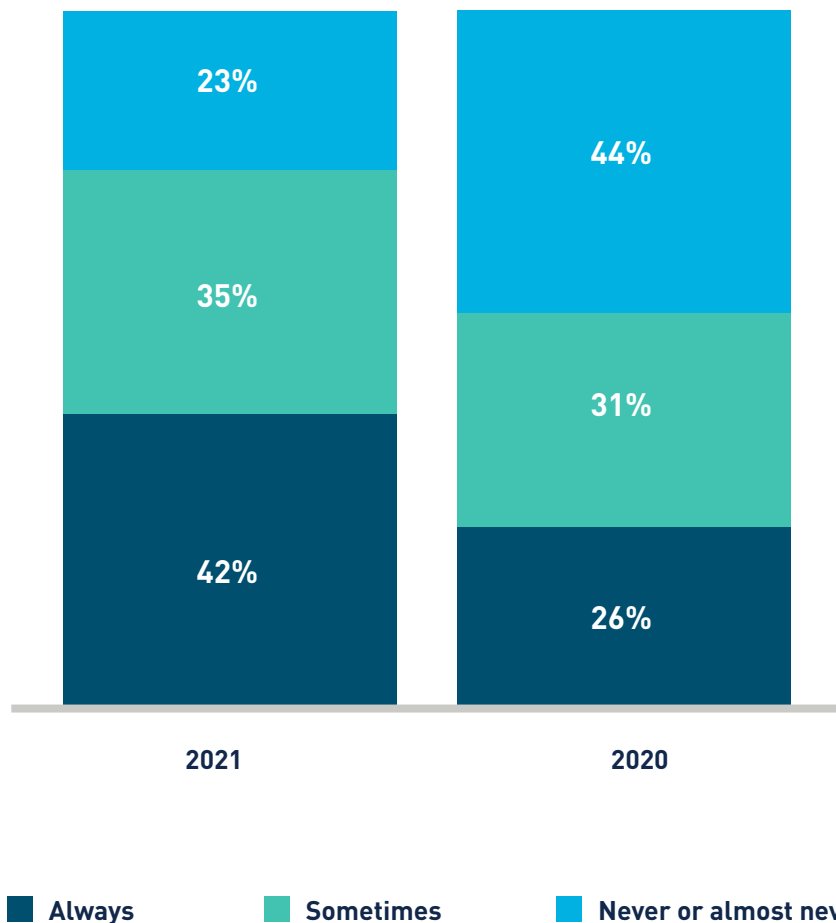
How often do you ask candidates to give feedback on their recruitment experience?

Respondents were asked how often they ask candidates to give feedback on their recruitment experience. In 2021, 42% of respondents are consistently asking candidates to give feedback, up from 26% in 2020. Conversely, nearly one-quarter (23%) of those surveyed do not ask for candidate feedback, far fewer than in 2020 (44%).

Asking for a candidate's opinion on the process inevitably gives more insight into key areas to work on, and more importantly, gives candidates a voice. Providing the opportunity to give feedback may even improve their perception of the experience. Eliciting feedback from candidates at crucial stages of the hiring process can reveal the strengths and weaknesses of that process, which is the first step toward improving it.⁸

There are two key areas in which to set up candidate touchpoints. After candidates have applied, send them a short survey about the application experience. This feedback solicitation should be conducted immediately after the application experience while it is still top of mind and before a candidate knows if they will progress in the interview process. The second area is hiring manager performance at each stage of the process. The candidate feedback may show that the breakdown in communication lies with a certain hiring manager.

FREQUENCY OF MEASURING CANDIDATE EXPERIENCE



Candidate Feedback after Face-to-Face Interviews

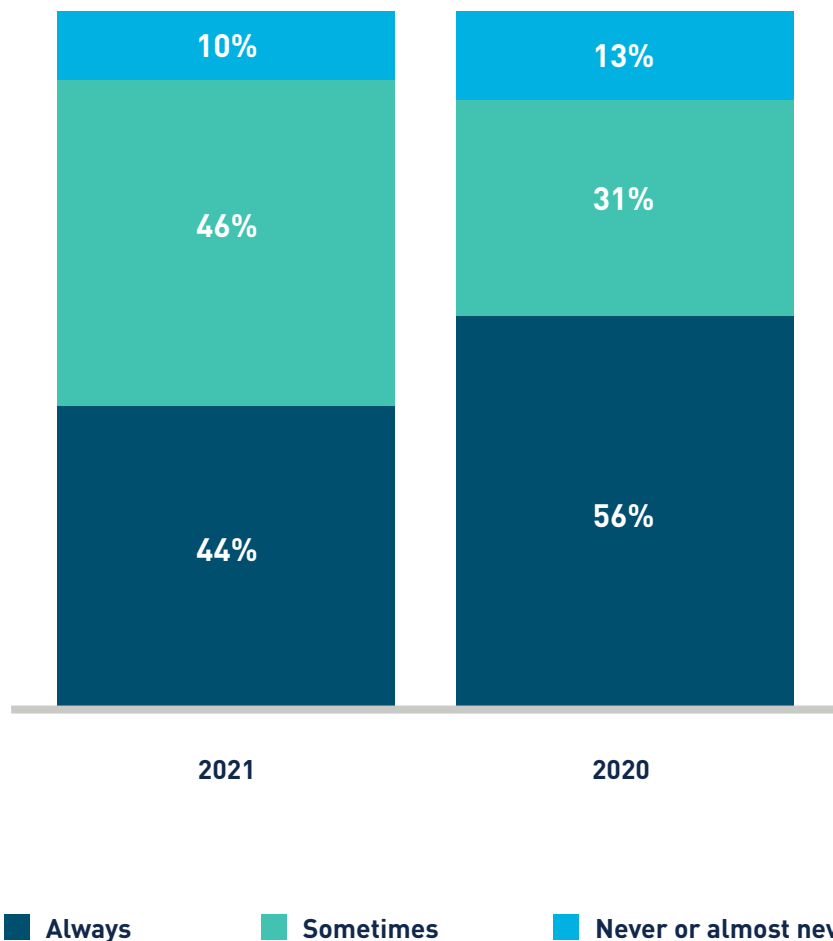
How often do you give feedback to candidates you reject after face-to-face interviews/assessments?

Study participants were asked if they give feedback to candidates they reject after face-to-face interviews. Giving feedback appears to be very situational. In 2021, about one-half (46%) give feedback sometimes. Less than one-half (44%) of participants make it a consistent practice, which is down from 56% in 2020. The increased demands placed on recruiters this year may be the reason for the decline.

There are several good reasons to answer inquiries from rejected interviewees. First and foremost, it can create goodwill between the candidate and the company. Applicants have a megaphone for their reactions to how they are treated. Leave them in the dark after they've worked hard to shine at an interview and an employer may have to battle criticism about their company on social media. Instead, provide constructive feedback, and develop mutual respect between the candidate and the company.

Creating a positive link also populates your pipeline for future hires. Employers should consider giving feedback only to interviewees who finish in second, third or fourth place. Beyond that is mostly negative commentary, which may have legal implications. Further, not all interviewed applicants will ask for personalised insights, which would reduce the amount of feedback required.⁹

CANDIDATE FEEDBACK AFTER FACE-TO-FACE INTERVIEWS



Plans for Employer Brand

Which of the following are part of your plans to improve your employer brand? Please select all that apply.

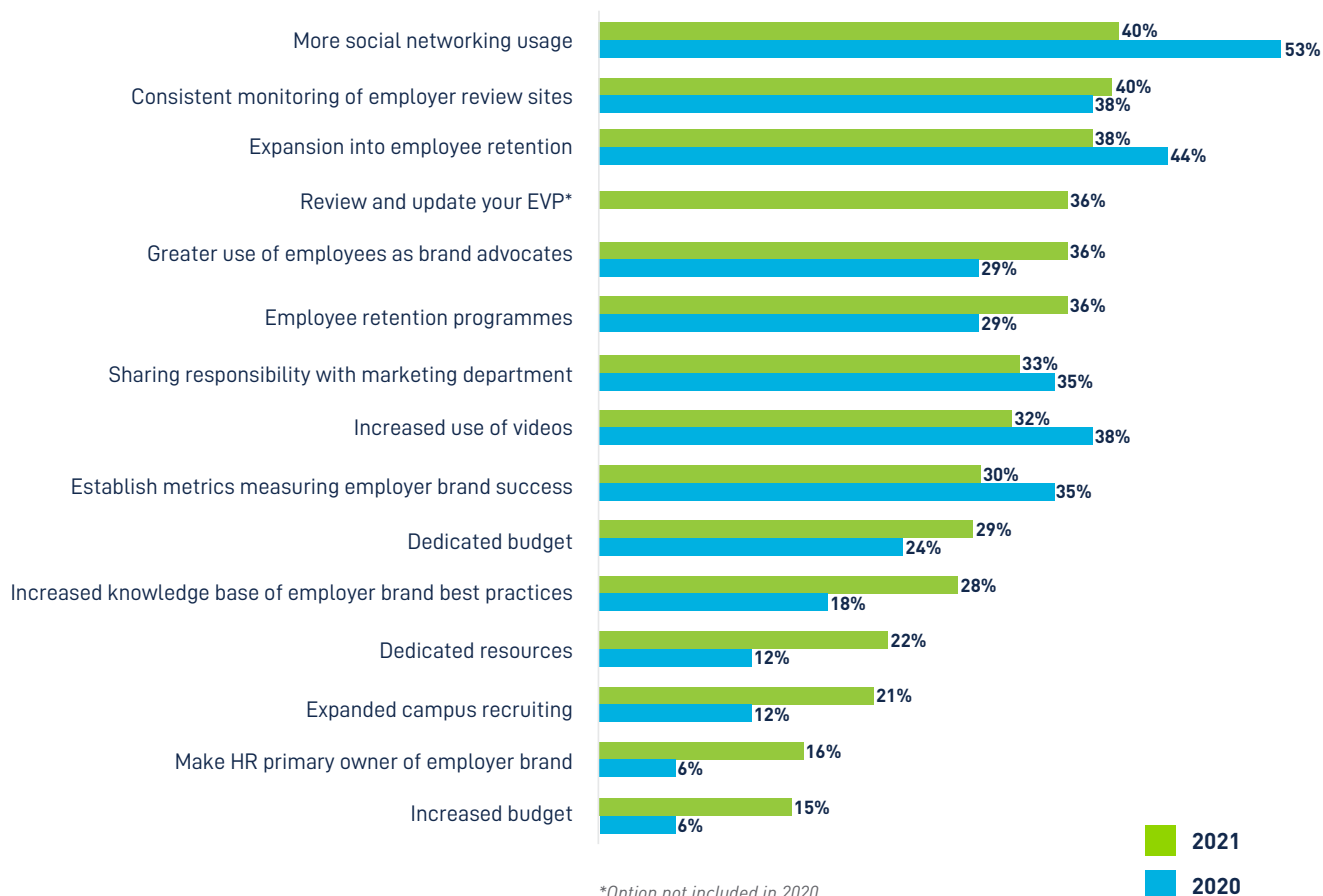
Study participants were asked to identify the areas they are focusing on in hopes of elevating their employer brand. They were shown a list of 15 factors and asked to select those they are planning to use.

The most anticipated area to boost employer brand is using more social media. More than one-third (40%) of respondents indicated they plan more social media usage, though that was down significantly from 2020, when 53% planned to use more social media. Social media usage was up significantly during the pandemic.¹⁰ But, as EMEA continues to emerge from the pandemic, it may be that social media usage is approaching saturation. Further, many of those who planned more social media usage have already accomplished their plans and are more focused on maintaining the higher level of usage already established in 2020.

Related to the increase in social networking usage is employer review sites. In 2021, 40% intend to use them as part of their plans to improve their employer brand, about the same percentage as in 2020 (38%). Examples of review sites included in this list are Glassdoor, Indeed, CareerBliss and Kununu. While there are many other platforms providing review sites for different regions or niches, companies should strive to monitor employer scores across all sites and develop a strategy and plan of action to address comments and reviews. Responding to both positive and negative reviews should be a tactic used to own the conversation.

Expansion into employee retention was selected by just over one-third (38%) of respondents. One of the major concerns in HR right now is the number of employees resigning, either because better opportunities have presented themselves, pent up demand when changing jobs in 2020 and early 2021 was particularly difficult, or as a result of stress and fatigue. "The Great Resignation" may not impact all companies equally, but it's a major concern to address.

PLANS TO IMPROVE EMPLOYER BRAND

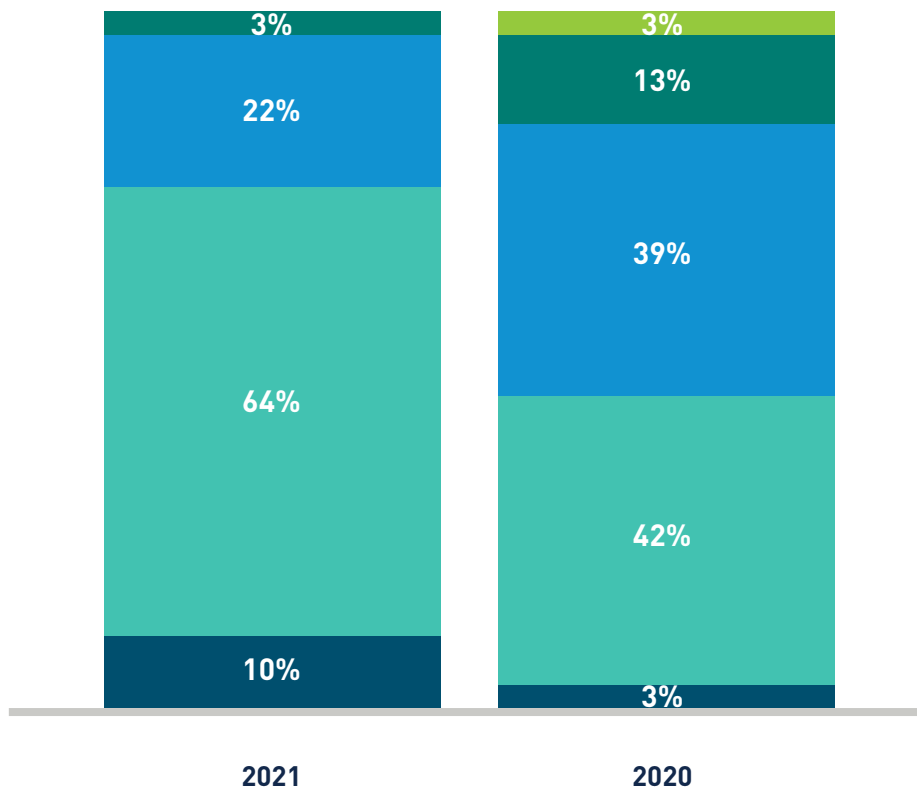


Anticipated Investment in Employer Brand

How do you anticipate the investment in your employer brand will change 24 months from now?

Companies will continue to invest in their employer brands. Nearly three-quarters (74%) of participants anticipate a greater investment, significantly up from 45% in 2020. Only 22% plan no change in their anticipated investment, either holding steady from 2020 increases or reacting to budget constraints as their companies emerge from the pandemic.

ANTICIPATED INVESTMENT IN EMPLOYER BRAND



 Much less investment

 No change

 Much more investment

 Less investment

 More investment

EFFECT OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON EMPLOYER BRAND

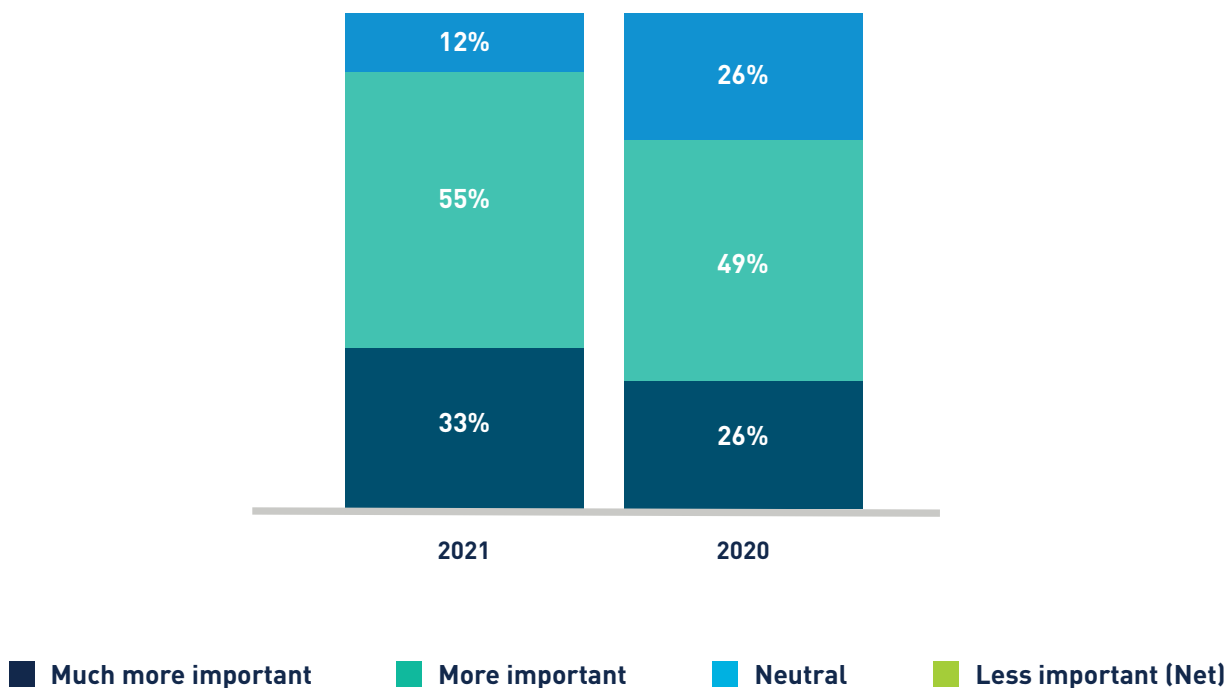
Long-Term Impact on Importance of Employer Brand

What will the long-term impact on the importance of the employer brand be given the COVID-19 pandemic?

Nearly nine-in-ten (88%) study respondents felt their employer brand is going to become more important in the long-term given the pandemic, up from 74% in 2020. How companies have responded to the pandemic will have a lasting effect on a company's culture, reputation, and ability to attract, recruit and retain talent today and in the future. Today's job seekers are looking at how organisations responded to the COVID-19 crisis and supported their employees through the turbulence of the past two years.

Organisations' actions in protecting their employees during the pandemic will affect their ability to both attract new talent and retain top talent because it indicates not only what the employee experience might be like, but also provides a window into the organisation's values. The way employers will be assessed, and their employer brands verified, is through policies that addressed how the company supported employees. Those policies include decisions about who was furloughed or temporarily laid off, how employee financial wellbeing was balanced with that of the organisation, how companies ensured employees' health and safety, and how employers supported employees working from home while keeping them engaged and productive.¹¹

EFFECT OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON EMPLOYER BRAND



Ways Companies Have Adjusted Employer Brand

In what ways has your company adjusted its employer brand in response to the COVID-19 pandemic?

Respondents were asked to select all the ways their company has adjusted their employer brand in response to the pandemic. Almost every respondent (97%) made an adjustment. More than one-half (59%) of those adjusting it actively promoted the ways the company has responded to protect employees. Into the third quarter of 2021, organisations continue measures designed to protect employees from potential infection. Working from home, rotating employees at the office, social distancing and numerous sanitation practices have been put into place to protect employees. Images of these practices are a key element of how companies convey how they care for their employees.

There was also increased emphasis on the employer brand for more than one-half (59%) of participants compared to 19% who indicated less emphasis. With the long-term impact of employer brand becoming more important, greater emphasis on it during the pandemic is consistent. The pandemic drove changes to employer brand and shined a spotlight on it.

Those who have adjusted employer brand most often focused internally, with more emphasis on the brand with the current workforce, according to 34% of respondents. Messages of reassurance and company priorities as they pertain to the welfare of employees have been more prevalently incorporated into the employer brand.

WAYS COMPANIES HAVE ADJUSTED EMPLOYER BRAND



How the Importance of Diversity and Inclusion Messaging has Changed

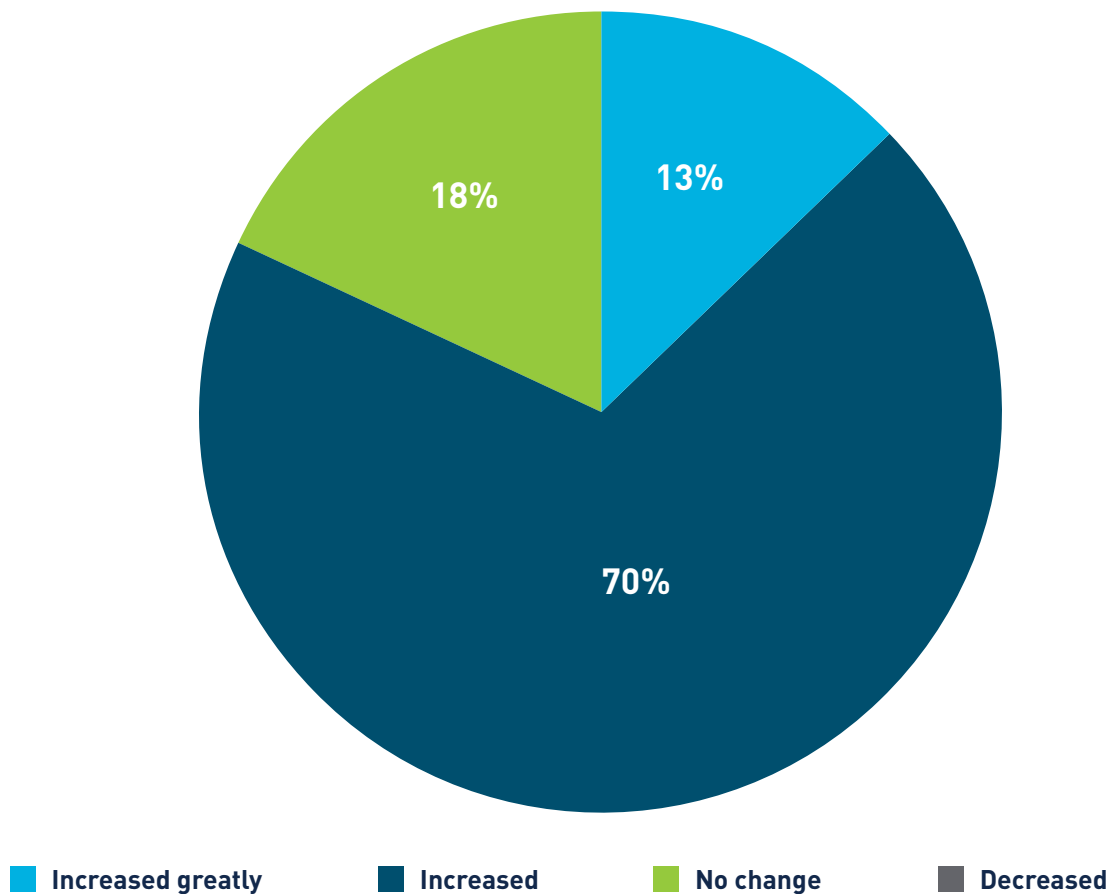
How has the importance of diversity and inclusion messaging changed as part of your employer brand over the last 12 months?

The vast majority (83%) of study respondents indicated that the importance of addressing D&I in employer brand messaging increased over the last 12 months, with most of the remainder stating no change.

But despite the importance of D&I in employer brand messaging, European organisations are struggling to translate D&I strategy into action. While D&I is a stated value or priority area for 76% of organisations, only 33% of respondents still feel diversity is a barrier to employee progression.¹²

A recent report from McKinsey found that a business with more diversity has up to 33% higher chance of being further profitable than less inclusive ones. Yet only 19% of all UK tech workers are women, and a mere 4% of the UK tech workforce is black, Asian or of minority ethnicity.¹³

HOW THE IMPORTANCE OF DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION MESSAGING HAS CHANGED



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