

# How to Identify Great People Managers in Today's World of Work

Understand what  
makes a great people  
manager and enable  
their success.

SHL.



# The World of Work Today

The world of work is being reset and priorities have become multi-faceted. People are willing to take more personal risk to seek employers offering what is most important to them: autonomy, balance, a sense of belonging, an inclusive culture, meaningful work, and ongoing growth.

Amid all this change we have an opportunity to build something more engaging and sustainable than before. Whilst good systems, structures and tools are essential to moving things forward, it is people managers who hold the key.



Across the world, people are reporting **declining levels of happiness**.<sup>1</sup>



**Burnout is on the rise**, with the highest incidence among all worker groups being middle managers.<sup>2</sup>



Adaptability and **resilience levels have been depleted**.<sup>3</sup>



People continue to **leave work in search of something more meaningful**.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Gallup, 2022, [The Global Rise of Unhappiness](#)

<sup>2</sup> Forbes, 2023, [New Outlook On Burnout For 2023: Limitations On What Managers Can Do](#)

<sup>3</sup> SHL, 2022, [How the Pandemic Changed Our Adaptability and Resilience](#)

<sup>4</sup> Wellable, 2022, [Why Employees Quit \(And How To Keep Them\)](#)

## The Role of People Managers

Every day, people managers are relied upon to be the bridge between senior leaders and teams, to translate corporate messages and personalize work, to anticipate and adapt to change, to build genuine connections with individuals, to nurture new skills, mobilize talent, and build future-ready teams.

People managers are the glue binding individuals and businesses together.

With the right people and the right skills, equipped with tools and support to develop, people managers can help us bring a new, more fulfilling, and durable world of work into reality.

**DID YOU  
KNOW ?**

A manager can account for 70% of variance in engagement scores<sup>5</sup> and, alongside meaningful work and career progression, employees cite having an uncaring manager as reasons for leaving jobs.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Gallup, 2022, [Employee Engagement Solutions](#)

<sup>6</sup> Wellable, 2022, [Why Employees Quit \(And How To Keep Them\)](#)

# A New Era in People Management

## The Changing Role of People Management

**1990-2000**  
**Process**  
**Engineering**

A focus on eliminating bureaucracy. This brought an increased scope of work for managers as they started to adopt 'player-coach' roles, and led by doing as the 'expert'.

**2010**  
**Digitization**

In this period information became much more widely accessible. Managers lost a sense of control as individuals found they could access information directly.

**2015-2020**  
**Agile**  
**Movement**

Work became digital and more agile. Individuals could source wide connections and projects so managers lost their influence over individual career development.

**2020 - Today**  
**Flexible**  
**Work**

Flexibility and balance becomes the priority and managers have to navigate life and work for dispersed teams across cultures and time zones.

Moving away from technical expertise and a focus on performance, people managers are now working in a hybrid and digitized world, with dispersed teams and fluid priorities. With the pandemic-induced prioritization of flexibility, people managers must navigate broad and intertwined personal and work challenges. They need to renegotiate psychological contracts and personalize experiences to enable individuals to feel supported and able to grow.

## What makes a great people manager?

Successful people managers today require emotional intelligence to allow them to understand people, enable behavioral change, bring agile thinking, and empower others through trust and honest communication. They must ensure individuals are able to move to different jobs, teams, and projects to maximize their growth and impact on the business's success.

However, according to our latest research only a small percentage of managers have the skills required for success in today's world of work. To make progress, companies must focus on revising approaches to identifying, hiring, developing and promoting those who will make a difference in people management roles.

DID YOU  
KNOW



Leaders that focus on the more human behaviors of leadership (authenticity, empathy and adaptivity) are 37% more likely to drive highly engaged teams, yet only 29% of leaders demonstrate this approach.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Gartner, 2022, [Gartner HR Research Identifies Human Leadership as the Next Evolution of Leadership](#)





“I try to lead by coaching and empowering others. It feels good when a trusted relationship is created because of that, and I see that individual become a better professional.”

**Lucas Ellinikakis**, a People Manager at SHL



In today's complex, hyper-connected, and constantly evolving world, great people managers engage in these activities:

### **Building a Bridge Between Work and Life**

- Bringing to life change and transformation.
- Making corporate messages and purpose clear and simple.
- Balancing company goals with individual reality.

### **Understanding Individuals and Building Belonging**

- Demonstrating care and nurturing trusting relationships.
- Making work personalized.
- Bringing together diverse teams around a shared mission.

### **Cultivating Culture and Meaningful Moments**

- Brokering conversations around what hybrid work means.
- Role modelling the new normal.
- Building psychological safety.
- Making work meaningful.

### **Facilitating Thriving Teams**

- Providing honest and constructive feedback.
- Building teams with a mix of skills and personalities.
- Coaching and empowering within the flow of work.
- Enabling continuous learning.





“One of the key people manager skills is to be able to create trust and psychological safety, as this empowers individuals to take on new challenges and share what they struggle with to help them learn and grow.

I also believe it helps if you as a manager genuinely care about the people in your team – not only as employees and direct reports but also as humans and individuals – and are able to make them feel and experience this care.”

**Annika Widheden**, a People Manager at SHL





# Six Steps to Finding Great People Managers and Enabling Their Success

Understanding what makes a great people manager is the first step to building an engaged and productive workforce. Organizations must reconsider how they recognize, nurture, and empower their people manager population to drive critical outcomes in today's work environment. Here are six steps to identifying great people managers and enabling their success:

## Step One

**Clearly define and value the skills that will enable great people managers to thrive.** Often, successful individual contributors are promoted to people management roles with little understanding of their aspiration or ability to do so. Make sure your decisions are made on the skills required for success.

## Step Two

**Put in place objective tools and hiring and promotion processes** to enable those with genuine potential and capability to take on these critical roles. Our romanticized view of a leader who has unlimited confidence and oozes charm, has led organizations to overlook those who might be perceived as 'boring' and 'dependable' who, particularly when managing teams of people, could be more likely to deliver better results.

### Step Three

**Look specifically at diverse groups.** SHL's latest research on manager level hires and their behavioral preferences suggest that females are more inclined to show higher levels of care and build connections.

### Step Four

**Give managers space to do what they do best** and do not overburden them with individual contributor responsibilities or extensive bureaucracy. 61% of managers report having more responsibilities at work since pre-pandemic times in multiple areas of their jobs and this is leading to burnout.<sup>1</sup>

“It is valuable for people managers to be allowed to focus on their teams rather than to have too many parallel responsibilities. Ideally there would be additional resources to help support the team on operational challenges in their day-to-day, to avoid the manager being bogged down in details and to ensure timely responses to the team.”

**Annika Widheden**, a People Manager at SHL



<sup>1</sup> O.C.Tanner, 2023, Preventing Manager Burnout

### Step Five

#### **Invest in developing and refining people skills.**

Emotional intelligence, showing empathy, relating and connecting with others are all key ingredients that will ripple across your organization. To help people thrive, managers today need to be able to understand and support individuals across across a huge range of life and work topics. If prioritized and targeted, these skills can be cultivated.

### Step Six

#### **Celebrate and reward talented people managers.**

Make it aspirational to be great at motivating, engaging and empowering people at work. Provide them with the skills and tools to sustain, thrive, and celebrate those who can and want to be good at this highly skilled position.

“People managers are often squashed in the middle and need to sort out the issues passed up and down. When things are running smoothly its easy for organizations to overlook managers, but they become visible when things go wrong. Its important that organization’s recognize managers and look after their well-being too.”

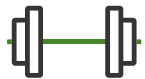
**Karen Hodges**, a People Manager at SHL





# SHL's Manager Hiring Solution

Using our science-led understanding of people at work, SHL has captured the behaviors essential to success in people management roles today. Our Manager Hiring Solution identifies individuals with that can:



**Build a strong culture** based on transparency, inclusion and empathy.



**Create connection** through meaningful work, striking a balance between people, purpose, and profit.



**Become agile and insight led,** ready for constant realignment to optimize business opportunity and individual potential.





shl.com

SHL brings powerful and transparent AI technology, data science, and objectivity to help companies attract, develop, and grow the workforce they need to succeed in the digital era.

We empower talent strategies to unlock the full potential of your greatest asset—people.