



“HR needs to take that lead,” she said. “But, in order to take that lead, you need to understand it. You need to know what’s coming up, be aware of what’s going on in other organizations — and be proactive about it.”

“It’s a different type of posture, different type of role.”

## **Cannabis, harassment**

With recreational cannabis now legalized across Canada, HR’s eyes will turn to the courts and case law in 2019, according to Louise Taylor Green, CEO of Ontario’s Human Resources Professionals Association (HRPA) in Toronto.

Employees have the right to consume cannabis, but must also comply with reasonable duties imposed by their employers, she said.

“Employers expect impairment-free workers, and we just don’t know yet how this will all play out in terms of thresholds for impairment, reasonableness of employer standards and appropriate monitoring and testing.”

HR can also expect “naming and shaming” to continue within toxic workplace environments that have condoned sexual harassment, said Taylor Green.

“The #MeToo movement is just that — a movement,” she said. “It isn’t an event and it doesn’t have a fixed start or end. Workplaces are evolving to provide their employees with easier access to reporting concerns and quicker access to an HR professional because a greater level of transparency is expected nowadays.”

The reverberations of the movement continue to trickle down to smaller organizations, according to Cissy Pau, principal consultant at Clear HR Consulting in Vancouver.

“The pendulum has swung really far one way, and whether it swings back or continues to swing far, we have more and more clients asking us to put on workshops and do training sessions and help clarify their harassment policies and bullying policies.”

Legal obligations and a heightened level of awareness amongst the public will ensure this remains top of mind for HR in the coming year, said Poirier.

“As HR professionals, we should actually make sure that it doesn’t go away, and that changes in behaviour actually happen in organizations.”

## **Changing laws**

Several governments tweaked labour legislation this year, and the continued overhaul of employment standards is expected going forward.

HR departments face surges in workload when this type of change is implemented, said Taylor Green.

“Changing legislation requires careful planning and, often, costly technology development to implement,” she said. “Scheduling systems, time and labour systems, payroll and benefit systems don’t reprogram themselves.”

Out west, employers are facing minimum wage increases and a new employer health tax, which will require

organizational review from HR, said Pau.

“Employers — especially on the smaller end — are going to struggle with things like the minimum wage increase and the impact that has on their entire wage structure.”

The legislated increases in compensation may require HR to review perks such as benefits and bonuses as organizations cope with additional business costs, she said.

### **Search for talent**

HR’s never-ending quest to find the best talent will be the greatest issue facing employers in 2019, said Pau.

And beefed-up efforts on branding to differentiate organizations in the marketplace could be necessary to help with recruitment and retention, she said.

“There’s such a competitive labour market right now for employers,” said Pau. “Employers need to be spending more effort figuring out a different way of sourcing talent in a genuine, honest kind of way.”

“I don’t think it’s going to go away. It’s a conundrum, for sure.”

Employer branding and employee experience will definitely be higher on the to-do list come 2019, according to Taylor Green.

“Everyone knows that great workplaces attract top talent, and the desire to stand out among peer organizations is manifesting as an emerging marketing discipline within HR.”

As employers seek to become more agile, job descriptions may too require an overhaul to leave space for wiggle room and possible organizational change, said Poirier.

“I think we’re going to see the end of job descriptions,” she said. “I don’t think everybody’s ready to go there, but I think this should be our aim for the future.”

Rather than hire for specific roles, HR should begin seeking out recruits with a “matrix of skills” to allow for more fluidity at organizations, said Poirier.

Once positions are more fluid, mundane tasks could be more easily automated, specific work could be farmed out to gig workers, while the most important duties could remain with internal staff, she said.

The gig economy also continues to gain ground with employees seeking to work when and where they choose, according to Anthony Ariganello, Vancouver-based president and CEO of CPHR Canada.

“We must adapt to this cultural change, ensuring our programs and benefits reflect this new trend,” he said. “HR needs to be ahead of the curve to ensure that programs are tailored effectively for all within an organization.”

A global economic slowdown is also possible in 2019, and HR must be prepared to address the potential of organizational restructuring, said Ariganello.

### **Technological advancement**

Investment in artificial intelligence (AI) also continues to increase at workplaces, he said.

“HR needs to be aware of this and, more importantly, (understand) how it will affect current roles and responsibilities and how they can be trained to adapt to this new technology.”

But even as AI heavily impacts some HR processes, emerging technologies remain largely unproven and expensive, said Taylor Green.

“HR leaders are competing for operating and capital dollars with the revenue-producing sides of their businesses, so getting access to that capital to invest in new technologies is an enormous competition,” she said.

Human resources professionals need to recognize how technology will impact their organizations — and not just from an HR perspective, said Poirier.

“We need to be able to understand the impact of technology on the organization and be able to anticipate how it’s going to impact jobs,” she said. “Will some of the jobs disappear? How will technology support our staff, and how it will change their reality?”

“It’s quite a change for HR professionals because the level of proficiency in terms of technology — understanding technology — is probably pretty average in terms of the profession. But the expectation from now on — that HR professionals understand all types of technology and how they impact the bigger organization — is a knowledge that needs to be acquired, if it’s not already there.”

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