

# HR reality of Uzbekistan 2024:

Best practices and innovations

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# Hello!

**You are reading the case book "HR Reality of Kazakhstan 2024: Best Practices and Innovations".**

In April 2024, we released the first book on Uzbekistan cases. It caused a great resonance not only in Uzbekistan, but also in Russia, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Qatar – countries that are very interested in the Central Asian market.

## What did it gave?

Then international clients began to ask about the big growth point of Central Asia – Kazakhstan. Many of them are already working with Kazakhstan, many are just planning. It is important for international companies to know how things are going on with people, because this is one of the key aspects when starting a business in the country.

## Why did we decide to make a case book of Kazakhstan?

We realized that Kazakhstan is very attractive for international business. In this regard, we have prepared a book of successful HR cases in Kazakhstan, which we will actively show not so much inside Kazakhstan (you know each other's cases perfectly well), but rather in the markets of Central Asia, MENA and in Russia, as well as in other countries.

We really believe that Kazakhstan's serious cases will attract new partners and customers, enhance the already high status of HR Kazakhstan in the international arena, and also open up new "HR stars" to the world.

# What will happen next?

We plan that the edition of the Case Book of Kazakhstan will become an annual one. And there will be more and more participants in it. And we also want to make a Case Book for the whole Central Asia.

**We invite you to the fascinating world of HR cases in Kazakhstan. Read, ask questions to the speakers, share your experience!**



Alena Vladimirskaia

CEO TalentLab



Nenna Dobrina

Head of Headhunting  
Practice in Uzbekistan



Zaryana Sorochina

Editor of case books  
of Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan



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# CYBORGGENERATION is the best practice of working off negativity and working with “warm” clients



## Case leaders:

**Olga Neklyudova** – Head of the Target Sales and Telemarketing department,

**Laura Okpebaeva** – Head of the digital sales group,

**Ekaterina Figurskaya** – Lead in communication design

## Short description

Beeline Kazakhstan is the leader in the number of subscribers, recognized as the most respected operator in the country according to the results of the Reputation Institute audit. The company adheres to the principles of high-tech, customer orientation, providing the best customer experience, as well as comfort for employees.

The company is actively growing, which leads to the growth of new challenges. So, after analyzing the operational efficiency in telemarketing, we identified problem areas:

1. The customer base is constantly growing and a regular set of operators is not enough.
2. Employees make mistakes in the dialogues, and sometimes even can't handle the stress and leave.
3. The number of contacts was limited by the physical resources of the operators.
4. Operating expenses remained high.
5. The conversion rate is not growing and even working on the quality of calls does not help as it should.

Through trial and error, the company managed to implement cyborgeneration, which allowed to increase the number of processed contacts **per operator by 3 times, reduce the outflow of employees from 35% to 3%, and the cost of one sale now costs the company 56% cheaper.**

## **Detailed description**

The high turnover in call centers is due to the causes of burnout. Our company is no exception, although Beeline has a huge number of programs and contests aimed at retaining and motivating call center employees.

This is due to the fact that the work of operators with a cold customer base is associated with great stress, because no one wants someone to call them and sell something.

In addition, the operators are young people who are quite impulsive due to their age. When they conditionally receive 300 refusals in a day, and it happens that in a rough form, they begin to “mess up”. This means that the information is no longer being conveyed so joyfully and sincerely. In addition, due to fatigue, many important things about the product that need to be conveyed to the customer are missed.

We realized that this could not continue and tried to introduce the robot at the first stage, when operators receive the greatest dose of negativity, up to the swearing. **The robot takes on all the negativity because it doesn't care, since it is an “iron block”. And operators are already starting to interact with a “warm” client, who is not yet friendly, but already loyal.** At the same time, a person flexibly fulfills the main part of the objections exclusively of target customers who are already interested in the product.

This leads to the fact that during the day, operators talk to those customers who are ready to talk and listen. Customers can also express objections, say that it is expensive, doubt, but they do not take operators to the “emotional bottom”.

Accordingly, operators are interested in giving their best, stimulating conversion growth, and influencing the growth of their own income. At the same time, the business does not have any additional costs, they remain at the same level.

In addition, cyborgeneration has allowed us to minimize the outflow of operators who somehow lasted three months after experiencing great stress and realize that they no longer want to. We were able to minimize the negative and extend the life of employees in the company.

## **Solution**

Through trial and error, we came to CYBORGGENERATION! Combining a robot and a human has closed all the issues that any telemarketing now faces.

The project took 2 months to complete.



**1 The first month:**

- rendering the design of the project
- coordination
- and integration settings

**2 Second month:**

- Robot training
- pilot
- grinding
- commercial launch

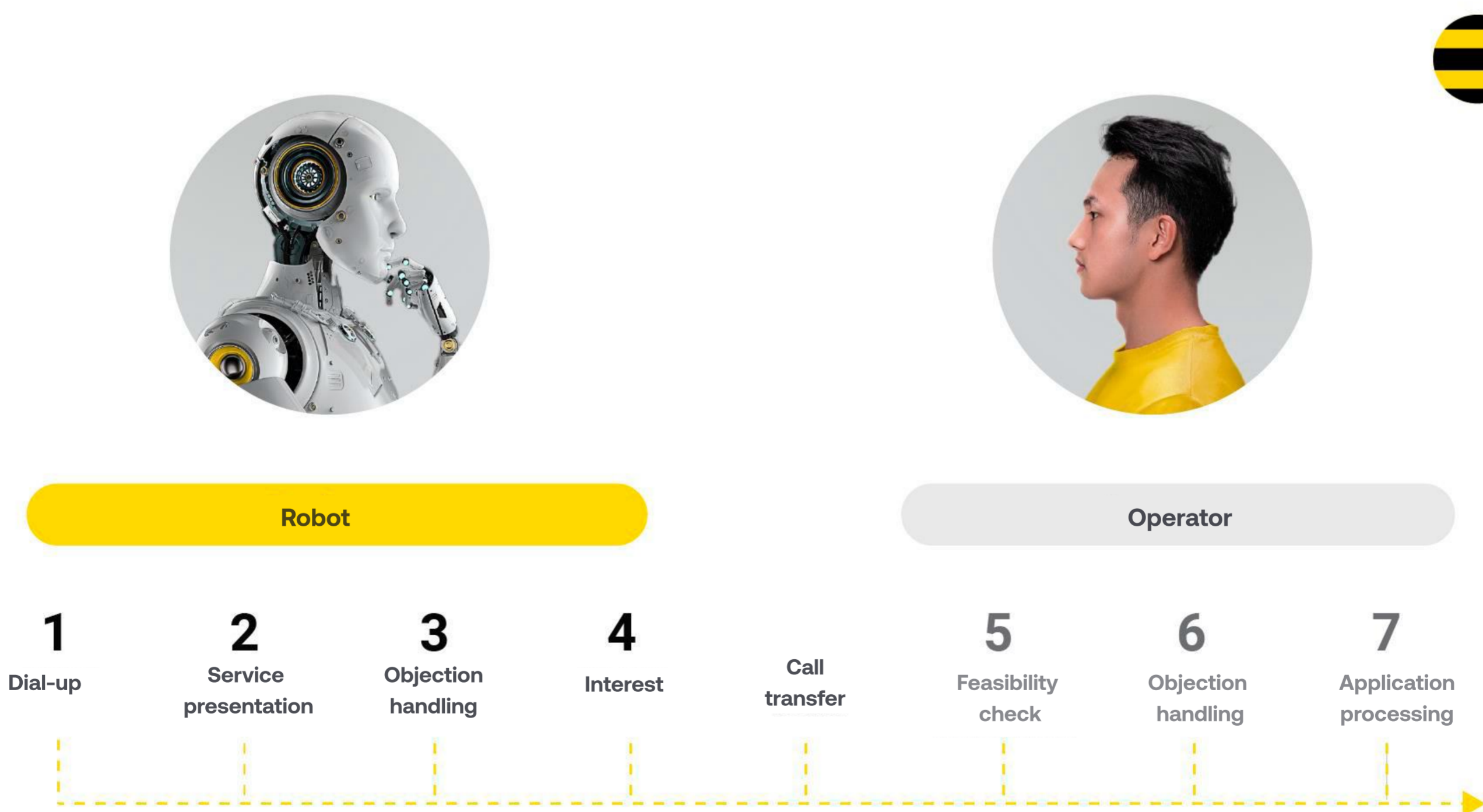
The first pilot showed a result of 3.3%. After the scripts were improved, the conversion rate rose to 5.3%.

**Implementation process:**

- The supplier creates a field for the agent (creating a robot for the project).
- We transfer the script and the subscriber base to the supplier.
- The robot starts the call.
- If the client agrees to transfer the call, the robot transfers the call to a dedicated split.
- There will be dedicated operators on the split who must receive calls.

By hosting cloud servers on the software vendor's side, we have paid special attention to protecting the personal data of our subscribers. Technically, this happens as follows: a call database is sent to the supplier in the form of a list of subscriber phone numbers, at which the robot makes a call and presale work is underway.

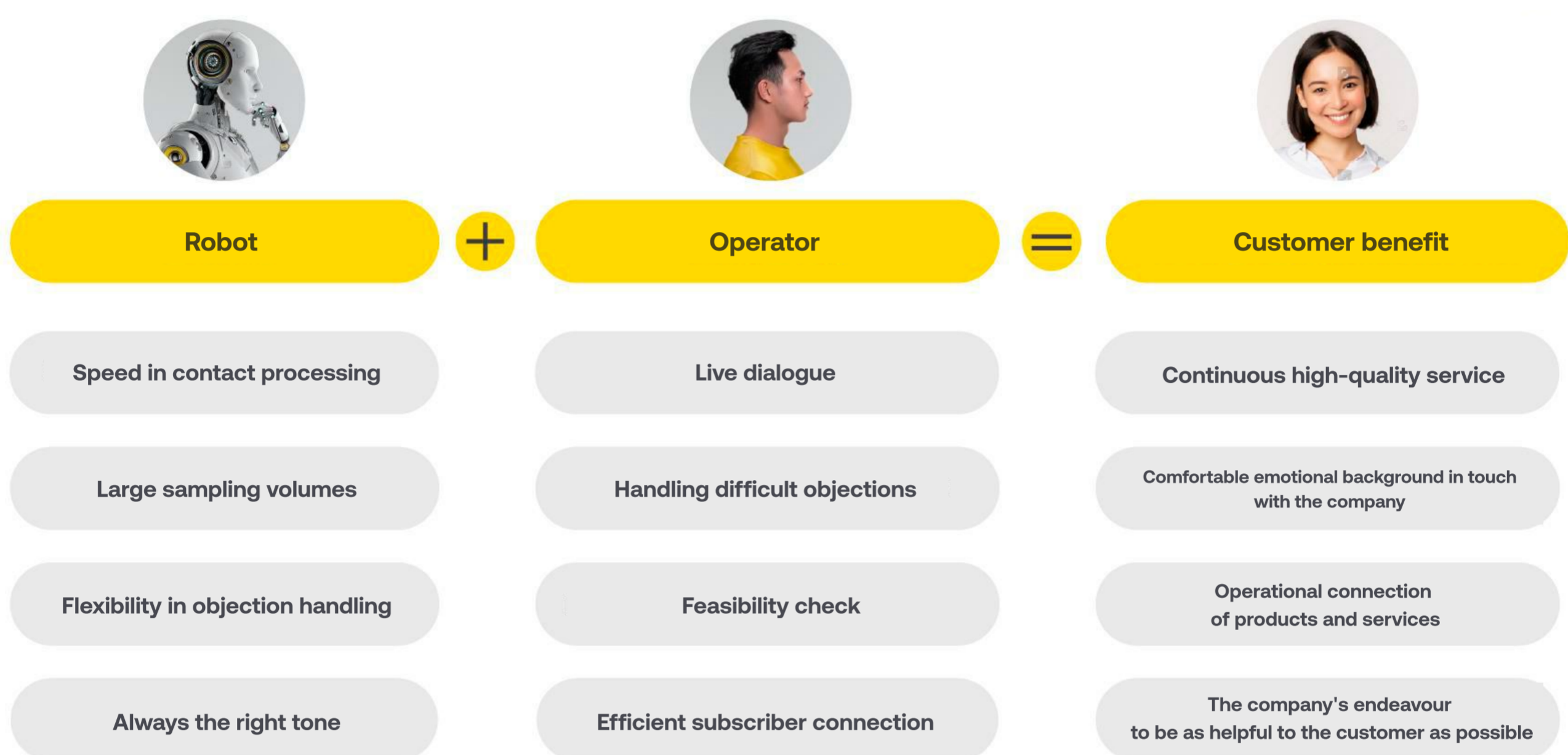
All confidential information of the client remains available only to employees of our company. From this perspective, cyborgeneration allows us to comply with the obligations of non-disclosure of personal confidential information





## Robot Capabilities:

1. Russian Russian, Kazakh and mixed (Russian + Kazakh) languages are recognized by the system and a response is provided to the subscriber's request in accordance with the programmed logic, by voice over the outgoing voice channel of the client.
2. It supports the formation of personalized messages from pre-recorded fragments, for example, date playback.
3. It supports the execution of requests to external systems and the formation of a VR menu depending on the response received.
4. He has artificial intelligence and effective communication skills.
5. Enables/disables tariff plans/services/promotions
6. Supports semantic analysis in case the subscriber uses synonyms on the topic or makes spelling mistakes in his statements.
7. Upon request, sends informational SMS to the subscriber with a brief description of the tariff plan or service.



## Difficulties

But first there was the **“epic fail”**, as a result of which we created an anti-advertisement for ourselves.

We came to a great result through unsuccessful experience of working with the customer base only through operators or only through a robot.

In March 2022, we launched sales of converged products only through a robot. Our team found itself overloaded with problems bearing monetary and reputational costs and risks. The reason for this is a robot that makes mistakes with addresses, performs an incorrect check of the technical capability of connecting the home Internet.

Subscribers sometimes pronounce the old name of the street, calling the district a numeric value, whereas it already had an official name. Thus, the subscriber who is interested in the robot's offer and agrees to connect will be lost because of the robot.

Complaints about incorrect identification of the address have increased many times. Customers attacked the call center to clarify the details of why there is no technical possibility to connect the Internet at their address. We did not lose hope of training the robot to identify the correct address, but everything was unsuccessful, and complaints grew. Nevertheless, in the end we managed to set up the robot correctly (routing setup cost the company \$13,000) and make sure that cyborgeneration brings results.

## What motivated you not to give up after the failure?

Of course, we were driven by the fact that we can:

- **get great results from a commercial point of view,**
- **significantly reduce the company's costs and**
- **remove the so-called “dirty” work from the operators.**

These are the three main interrelated things.

As a result of this project, we even formed a team called the “Systems Operational Support Group”, which works in the format of a constant search for innovations on how to improve business processes. This team offers creative technological solutions that solve these three main tasks.

## Time

Technical preparation, deployment of the platform and preparation for launch took two months, and in November 2022 we tested the first calls.

## Budget

The project costs consisted of routing settings – \$13,000, which paid off in the first month after the start of the project.

Payment to the supplier is made for the fact of the work performed, depending on the project. If we take the example of a convergent product project, then we pay the supplier for the fact that the call was received by the operator. 1 received call is 200 tenge.

## Results

**1** Telemarketing has become 3 times faster and 1.5 times more efficient!

**2** Before cyborgeneration, operators processed a database of 100,000 subscribers in 30 days and showed a conversion rate of 2.73%. Cyborgeneration made it possible to work out the same database in 10 days.

**3** The human factors of fatigue disappeared, and as a result, more dialogues began to be worked out. The emotional factors of the operator's persistence or aggressiveness are minimized.

**4** And the long—awaited conversion rate soared 1.5 times to 4.57%! And 3 times more sales with an increase in costs of 0 tenge!

**5** SAC (subscriber acquisition cost – price for 1 sale) – due to the introduction of the robot, it now costs the company 56% less.



## One sale is now 56% cheaper for the company



	Operators at 100,000 sample	Robot + operators at 100,000 sample	Robot + operators at 300,000 sample
Sample volume	100 000	100 000	300 000
Contact life span	30 days	10 days	30 days
Dial-up	70 000	70 000	210 000
A proposal has been announced	33 000	*	*
Transfer to operator	*	23 000	69 000
A number of sales	901	1 051	3 153
Conversion	2,73%	4,57%	4,57%
A number of operators	50	25	25
Remuneration per sale to operator	5 184	5 184	5 184
Salary part	5 500 000	2 750 000	2 750 000
Operator costs	4 670 266	5 448 902	16 346 707
Robot costs	-	259 622	778 865
<b>Outcome</b>	<b>10 170 266</b>	<b>8 458 524</b>	<b>19 875 572</b>
<b>Price per sale</b>	<b>11 289</b>	<b>8 047</b>	<b>6 303 !</b>

\* - irrelevant indicator

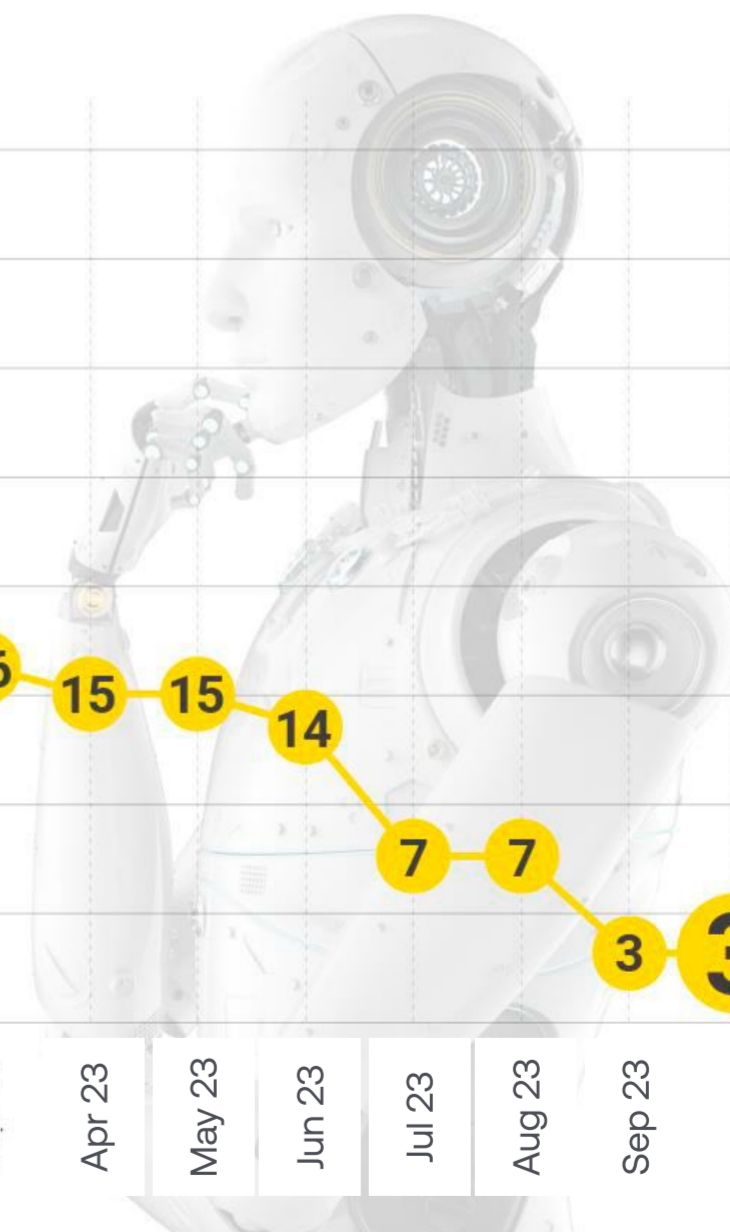
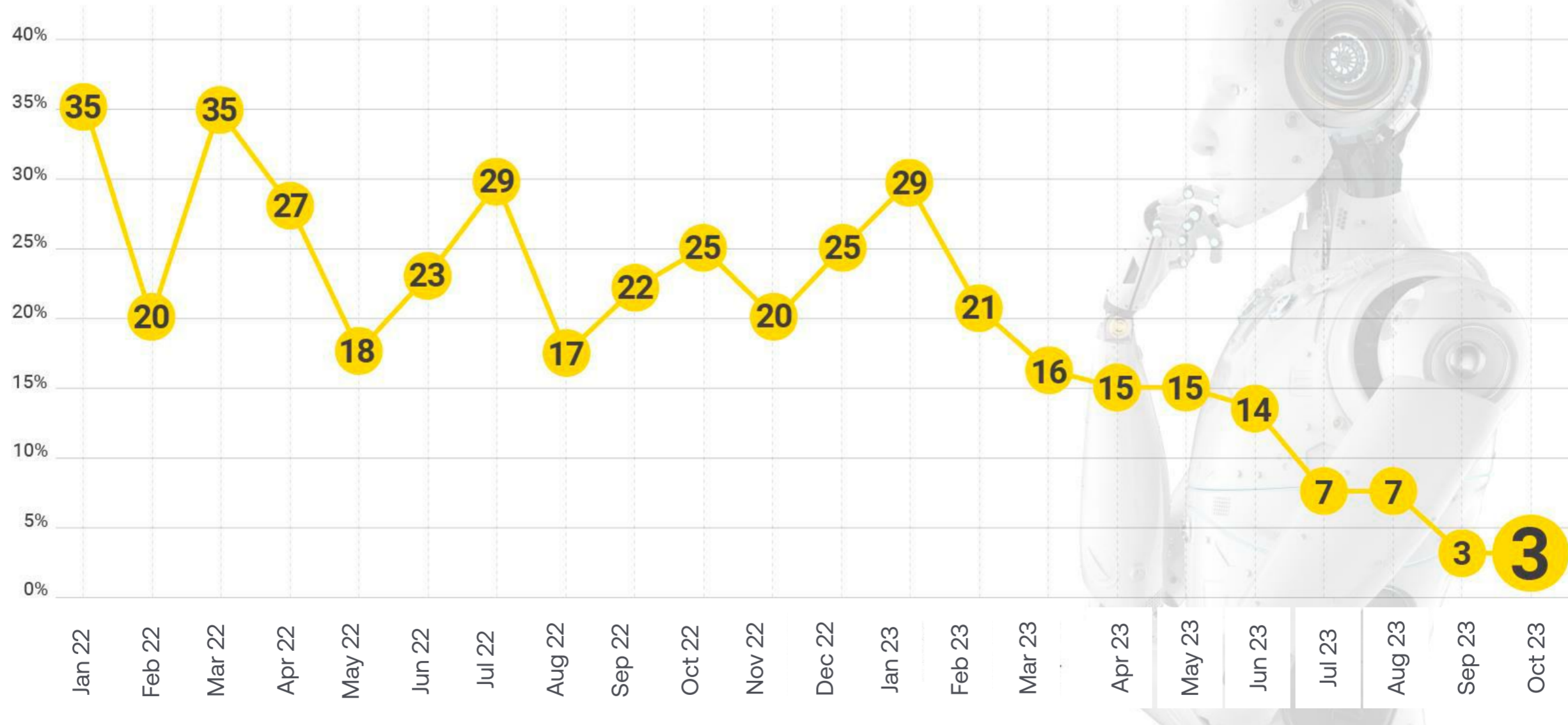
### For the company's employees, this led to:

- minimizing negative and stressful situations that contribute to burnout;
- leveling useless conversations when customers show indifference to the products offered;
- the level of complaints from customers has decreased to 0;
- process optimization: the robot manages to quickly identify the client who is really interested and redirect him to the operator;
- an increase in the number of processed contacts by 3 times;
- increase the conversion rate by 2 times;
- cost reduction per sale.

and also:

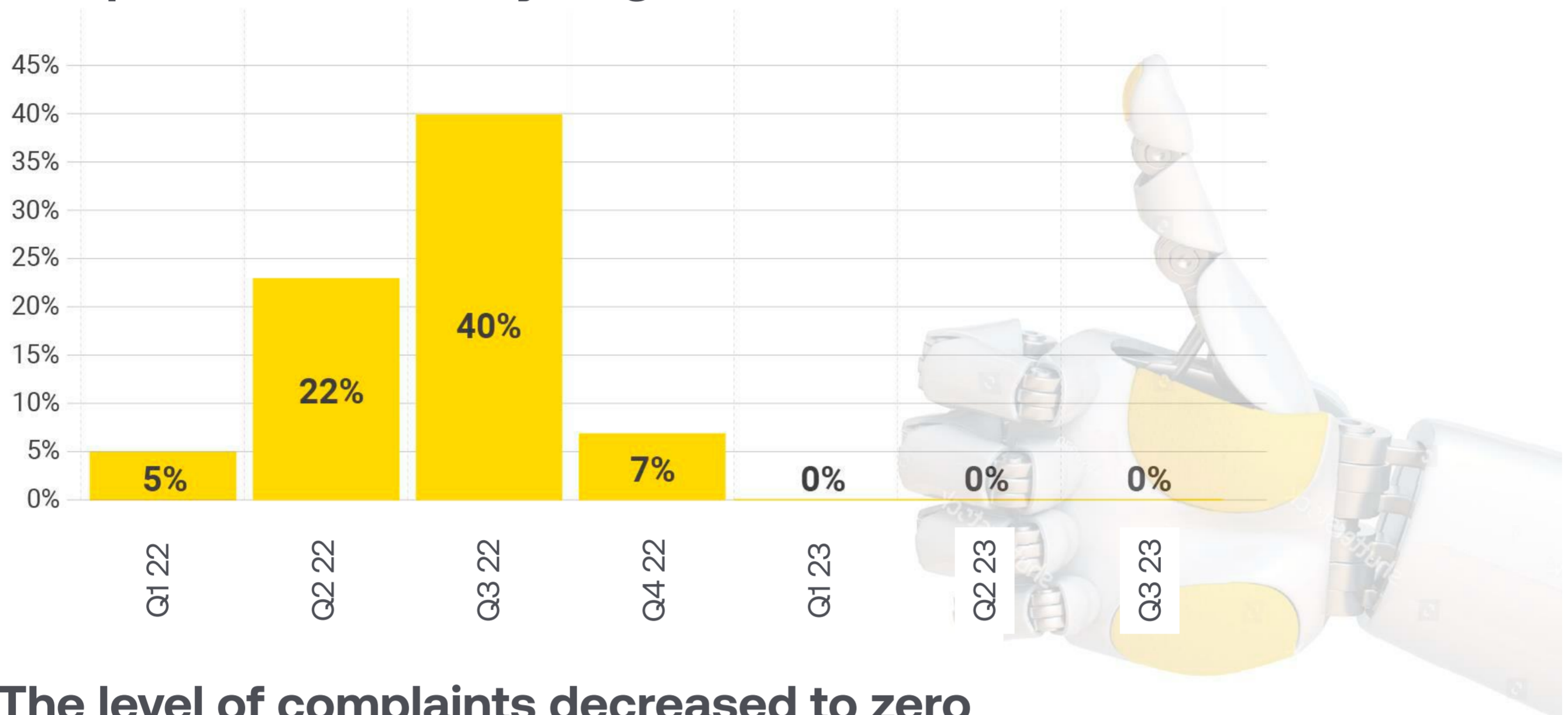
- The level of operator outflow decreased by 91%.
- The EPS level increased to 86%

## Operator churn rate decreased by 91%





## Dynamics of complaints reduction after implementation of cyborgeneration



The level of complaints decreased to zero

Implementing a similar case a second time, what would you do in a different way?

**We would have done it earlier.**

**Conclusion 1:** Be braver, launch pilot projects more often.

**Conclusion 2:** Do not go to the address, we are doing great without it.

We are currently finalizing the client's address recognition system. The robot will specify the client's address, check it through the database, and if the client has the technical capability, a ready, warm client will be transferred to the operators. For those customers who do not have technical capabilities, the robot will offer a router.

**Conclusion 3:** Add multilingualism when talking to a client. With successful further implementation, it will be possible to scale as a boxed solution to other Telemarketing departments or call centers.

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# What should you do to close up to 1000 vacancies in retail per month?

**Case leader:**

**Anna Chernyaeva** – HRD Magnum E-commerce Kazakhstan



## Short description

Magnum E-com is the largest online supermarket in Kazakhstan, started its work in 2021. During this time, 5 large warehouses were launched, the food delivery service was improved, express delivery was launched and grew 10 times.

**The intensive growth of orders required rapid business development through the opening of new darkstores and the expansion of existing capacities.** This assumed the closure of 500 to 1000 vacancies per month during peak periods. The process was complicated by the fact that the company did not have a reporting system set up, and vacancies had to be closed every week.

HR was tasked with **timely and complete staffing of all warehouses by line staff.** This became possible due to the systematization and automation of HR processes. Thus, it became possible in the company to track outflows, recruiters' effectiveness, predict the candidate funnel and much more.

## Detailed description

When I joined the company in December 2022, I was faced with the fact that the company did not have systematic reporting on the effectiveness of recruiters, outflows, etc. At the same time, there was a great need for constant closure of linear positions in warehouses: assembly, layout, delivery, couriers and acceptance. Between 50 and 500 people are employed in each of these sectors. Since this work involves hard physical labor, it can be compared with seasonal work. In this regard, we are faced with a large number of employees leaving.

**In general, we needed to build HR processes:**

- **understand the candidate funnel;**
- **the effectiveness of recruiters;**
- **what happens to staff turnover in general.**

This formed the basis of the recruitment systematization process.

In addition to the fact that we work with existing warehouses, every year we plan to open new warehouses, which requires additional resources. **Currently, the recruitment team closes from 500 to 1000 vacancies per month, depending on the periods and the opening of new warehouses.**



## Solution

Employees leaving is not a problem that can be solved in 1 month. This will not be solved by the fact that we will introduce a social package, provide medical insurance and food, and the leaving will be stopped. **Working in a warehouse is hard physical labor in cold conditions (freezing zone, refrigerators, etc.).**

We live in weekly sprints. Every week, darkstore updates its demand for the number of employees by sector. The recruitment team has a week to close this need.

In this regard, we are constantly working on automating processes in order to reduce the amount of hard physical labor of employees. We have developed a backlog – a priority list of tasks, according to which automation is carried out to facilitate manual hard work.

**We have analyzed the current recruitment system and identified areas in which we need to change or improve processes.** For more effective systematization, we have divided the entire process into parts:

### 1 **Formation of the need for human resources on the part of warehouses (short-term (weekly sprints) and long-term planning (year)).**

Since this year, we have been calculating the volume of orders and the number of warehouses on a regular basis, based on these data, FTE (Full-time equivalent) is calculated.

- a) For this indicator, we calculate number of leaving employees and
- b) the number of recruiters in order to cover the need.

Next, on a monthly basis, we monitor the results and see what changes are taking place. In accordance with these changes (opening dates of warehouses, volume of orders) we are adjusting the need for employees and recruiters.

### 2 **Goals in % for the fullness of teams in each sector (min/target/max).**

In order to more clearly focus the recruiting and operations department on the staffing of the teams, as well as to set priorities correctly, we have determined for ourselves the target values for the recruitment of sectors. For example, the minimum target should be at least 80%, the target 90-100%, the maximum target for some sectors may vary between 101-110%, taking into account the reserve for people.

### 3 **Evaluating the effectiveness of existing recruiters.**

An important component is the effectiveness of closing vacancies for 1 recruiter. In our case, it was important to ensure that there were at least 50 closed vacancies per month for 1 recruiter. The company currently employs 25 recruiters.

These calculations formed the basis for resource planning in recruiting for the next calendar year. To strengthen the teams and ensure the necessary productivity, we have changed the HR structure and added HR manager positions in each warehouse.

Previously, recruiters were subordinated to team leaders in recruiting in cities.

### 4 **Calculation of the need for recruiters based on the volume of vacancies per month and performance targets (500-1000 vacancies).**



**5 Recruiter profile and systematization of recruitment work (scripts, candidate funnel, filters, reporting systems).**

We managed to automate the process through the Magnum Recruiter program. This system contains candidate data, recruiters' comments, as well as a funnel from the first contact to the person's entry into the company.

**6 The system of motivation of recruiters.**

At a certain point, we realized that the recruiters' motivation system must necessarily include a bonus part for closing vacancies. The introduction of additional bonuses allowed us to increase the motivation of recruiters and increase the number of vacancies being closed.

**7 Evaluation of candidate search and selection tools (online platforms, referral program, ads).**

The effectiveness of a recruiter begins not only with competent planning in resources, but also in a well-established system. Everything is important here: the recruiter's profile, job descriptions on websites, scripts that recruiters use when communicating with candidates.

We paid special attention to the automation of the reporting system, previously the reporting was conducted in Excel and had a significant error. It was important for us to automate the funnel with the ability to output data to dashboards for each recruiter, sector, warehouse. For automation, we used our partners' self-written system, but there are products on the market that are similar in content. To increase the number and quality of calls, we have implemented a candidate dialer system that allows us to listen to recruiters' scripts on the record.

**8 Difficulties and opportunities affecting the speed and quality of selection.**

The main difficulty is the competition in the market. The struggle for blue-collar workers is now strongly felt, especially in the summer season. This creates difficulties in searching during peak seasons: in August we see a large decrease, in December the number of orders increases sharply, more than 2 times. At the same time, the timing of the selection becomes even more compressed. Often we also face the fact that we need a large number of staff in the last three days of December, and then these people are not needed, because in January such a need is no longer relevant.

This is a task for recruitment, because you need to come up with flexible forms of hiring, payment, and conditions. It is very difficult at the moment, during peak periods, to rebuild the process of recruitment, training, calculation and payments.

An additional difficulty is that there are not many companies in Kazakhstan that would provide mass recruitment services in the volume we need at reasonable prices. The agencies that are on the market cannot always cover all our needs.

## What should you do to close up to 1000 vacancies in retail per month?

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### Consistency and coherence in the interaction between HR and the operations department.

The first thing we took into account was the correct formation of resource requirements from warehouses based on order volumes. For effective planning, we began to hold weekly meetings with the Operations Department (OD) to determine the needs of line staff and prioritize.

We began to work more often with middle managers so that they communicate more often with employees and predict decrease in advance (who will quit, when). For example, one of the employees needs to get married and he will not be able to work for 2 weeks, but after that he will return and continue working. Or if someone moves to another city, managers can offer a job in another warehouse.

## What channels do you use for recruiting?

When searching and selecting specialists for mass positions, coverage is important. We've been experimenting:

- with the promotion of vacancies on hh.ru
- with an Instagram target,
- with a chatbot,
- Ads on job search websites and nearby settlements (this tool really works when it comes to mass recruitment to warehouses),
- referral programs.

After analyzing the funnel by source for several months, we came to the conclusion which channels are really working for us and focused on them. The rest was put aside so as not to waste resources and time.

### For us, the main channels are:

#### 1. hh

we get up to 80% of candidates from it

#### 2. referral program

bring a candidate – get the money, despite the fact that the candidate must work for a certain time

We use Instagram targeting mainly during peak periods.

In mass recruiting, it is important to be able to work not only with responses, but also with a cold base of candidates, so recruiters use both channels in their work – both a "warm" stream and a "cold" base. To do this, a contact center was opened in 2023. Now the candidate's support is assigned to the call center. This freed up recruiters in order to expand the candidate funnel, get more feedback, and close more vacancies.



## What should you do to close up to 1000 vacancies in retail per month?

### Time

1 year (various stages were finalized during the year)

### Budget

The budget for automation is \$5,000, the budget for search and recruitment is \$70,000 (hh, referral program, ads, Instagram target) per year.

### Difficulties

Initially, we did not take into account the factor of seasonality and the so-called peaks, which affected the speed of recruitment and the % of fullness of teams in certain months. For example, in August, due to the start of studies, we had a large number of students leaving, in addition, the base of candidates active in the market at that moment decreased. All this affected the fullness of the teams in the warehouses in September.

### Results

In general, we managed to establish consistency in the process of searching and selecting specialists for mass positions, not counting individual peaks that we did not take into account initially. By the end of last year, we reached an average annual rate of 80% in terms of team occupancy in all warehouses, by the end of 5 months of this year, our figure reached 90%. Some of the warehouses have reached the threshold of 100% fullness on a monthly basis.

## Implementing a similar case a second time, what would you do in a different way?

We would implement a faster motivation system for recruiters (salary + bonus for closed positions), calculate peak periods and prepare a back-up plan in advance. A very important role is played by the formation of a plan B in case unforeseen circumstances arise. For example, sick days, lack of resources in the HR team. In general, any plan should be accompanied by an assessment of potential risks and an understanding of how we act in non-standard situations. Special attention should also be paid to outsourcing opportunities. Unfortunately, the outsourcing and mass recruitment market is not so developed in Kazakhstan, this increases the burden on internal recruiting teams, that is, in 90% of cases, you have to rely more on your own strength, especially when it comes to large volumes.

What should you do to close up to 1000 vacancies in retail per month?

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## What are non-obvious things that companies need to pay attention to when repeating your case?

**In mass recruitment, the main thing is speed.** There are many offers on the market and the candidate can refuse at any stage, so it is important for us to shorten the candidate's path from the first contact to joining the company. An internal HR call center is working to maintain contact with candidates and support them at all stages. Also, to shorten the candidate's path, we always analyze the input filters – any little thing, even such as a list of documents for signing a contract, affects the final speed of the process. In our work, we do not stop doing a systematic analysis of processes and are looking for opportunities to optimize them.

In conclusion, it is worth noting that work efficiency is possible only when there is **an established contact between the two interested sides**. In our case, this is **the HR department and the operations department**. Regular departmental meetings on the status of work, daily "check hours" allow us to stay always in touch and in a single context, which significantly affects our joint work.

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# How did the grading system help to solve the problem of turnover and motivate employees to develop?



**Case leaders:**

**Arina Podafa** – HRD,

**Alexandra Sorokovikova** – HRBP

## Short description

Freedom Pay (formerly Pay.Box) is a leader in the international payments market with 10 years of experience, providing Internet acquiring services in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. The company joined Freedom Holding Corp 2 years ago, becoming part of the ecosystem.

Previously, the company did not have a unified system for evaluating the skill level (grade) of developers. In this regard, various difficulties arose: due to the subjective opinion, team leaders' assessments could differ; **the developers did not have a common understanding of the system for evaluating their qualifications, there was no clarity in describing career opportunities, and different salary levels** for employees with similar qualifications.

All these problems led to a large turnover of developers – **33%**, there was a constant comparison with each other, and resentment against the company like: "they don't like me", "they don't appreciate me". At the same time, given the high competition in the IT labor market, this problem directly affected the company's efficiency – the speed of product development, the loss of unique knowledge, and the increase in developer onboarding time.

To solve these problems, it was decided to develop its own grading system, which was developed and implemented in six months, which reduced turnover **to 10%**. The teams in the company have learned to speak the same language, see the future development of each developer and be more effective.

## Detailed description

In 2021, the company faced high staff turnover – **33%**, and had to close more than 15 developer vacancies per month. But the greatest pain was that the Team leaders did not have the understanding and ability to evaluate applicants by grade level. They just often compared applicants with current or former employees, which was not the right decision.

This situation was aggravated by the fact that employees of the same skill level could receive different salaries due to the lack of clear pay range. The developers themselves did not understand where they could grow and develop, all this contributed to their departure from the company.

## Solution

As a result, we came to the conclusion that the company needs **a grading system**. To do this, a working group was created consisting of 3 team leaders and HR BP IT, which met regularly for detailed discussion and development of the system. The final version of grading was coordinated with the technical and HR directors

## The process of developing a grading system:

### 1. Setting goals

The Working Group agreed on the planned result, the format of work and the collection of information, as well as the timing of implementation. We decided that it is necessary to develop a 9-level grading system, where each category (junior, middle, senior) is divided into 3 levels (1-3). This allowed us to thoroughly define the requirements for each grade level.

### 2. Collecting information

HRBP IT conducted a series of personal interviews with team leaders, in which they described their portrait of the ideal employee of the company, located at each of the 9 levels of grades. This helped us understand what exactly should be included in each level.

### 3. Description of grades

At this stage, a large number of discussions were held, as a result of which 9 levels of grades were described in detail in the context of hard and soft skills. We have clearly spelled out what a developer should know and be able to do at every grade level, from junior to senior.

### 4. Grade rating system

We have developed an Excel evaluation form in which each developer is assigned a "+" or "-" for each criterion. The amount of "+" affects the grade level. Visual diagrams have also been developed that show the level of development of hard and soft skills.

### 5. Information campaign

We held a presentation for all the company's developers, where we explained the grading model and the principles of passing the assessment.

### 6. Pilot evaluation

All developers were evaluated according to the new model (self-assessment and evaluation of the team leader). After the assessment, meetings with each employee were organized with the participation of HR BP IT, and individual development plans were developed for each developer.



### 7. Grading regulations

Based on the results of the pilot assessment, we have made the necessary adjustments to the description of grades and prepared grading regulations.

### 8. The frequency of evaluation

Grading takes place **twice a year**, which allows us to support the continuous development process of the hard and soft skills of the development team.

## The grade assessment process:

01

### Evaluation

Each developer independently evaluates the level of their competencies by filling out an Excel spreadsheet. The team leader, together with HR BP IT, also assesses each criterion using "+" or "-"

02

### Discussion of the results

HRBP IT and the team leader jointly hold a meeting with the developer and discuss the grade level. This point is very important for ensuring transparency in the company and building proper communication between the manager and the employee. If the developer can reasonably prove that he owns one or another skill, HR BP IT and the team leader agree and put a "+". In the opposite case, the score remains the same.

03

### Visualization and development plan

Based on the results of evaluating all the criteria, an Excel chart is created that clearly displays the strengths and weaknesses of the developer. HR BP IT and the team lead develop an individual development program for each developer, according to the results of which, if successfully implemented, he can increase his grade.

04

### The frequency of grading

Grading takes place 2 times a year: in winter and in summer. This motivates employees to constantly develop their skills in order to regularly increase their grade based on the evaluation results.

05

### Adjustment of criteria

Grading criteria are adjusted no more than once a year. This happens due to changes in technology, if we see the need to strengthen hard and soft skills for a certain grade. In some cases, adjustments may affect the fact that some grades become a little more difficult to achieve, but the changes are not so drastic.

## How did the grading system help to solve the problem of turnover and motivate employees to develop?

### Time

The development and implementation of the grading system took 6 months.

### Budget

All data was entered manually in Excel, so there were no additional costs. If you automate the grading system, there will be costs for the system.

### Difficulties

- 1 The difference in the understanding of different grades among team leaders.** At the very beginning, team leaders often could not evaluate candidates from the market, comparing them with previous employees and candidates, more often relying on intuition rather than any specific criteria and requirements. When there were more disagreements, it was decided to build a grading system. There are no discrepancies now, as the grading system is clear and transparent.
- 2 It is difficult to agree on the level of development of soft skills for each grade.** When developing the grading system, we carefully studied the soft skills of our employees and created a portrait of the ideal developer of each level. Our requirements and expectations were formulated taking into account the real needs of the team. The key values and vision of the Company were necessarily taken into account. Realizing that everyone can interpret soft skills in different ways, we have added comments to each skill. This helped our employees better understand what is expected of them and confidently move towards professional growth.
- 3** As the grade level increases, there are fewer and fewer examples of specific employees to rely on (for example, senior level 3 is an "unseen creature").

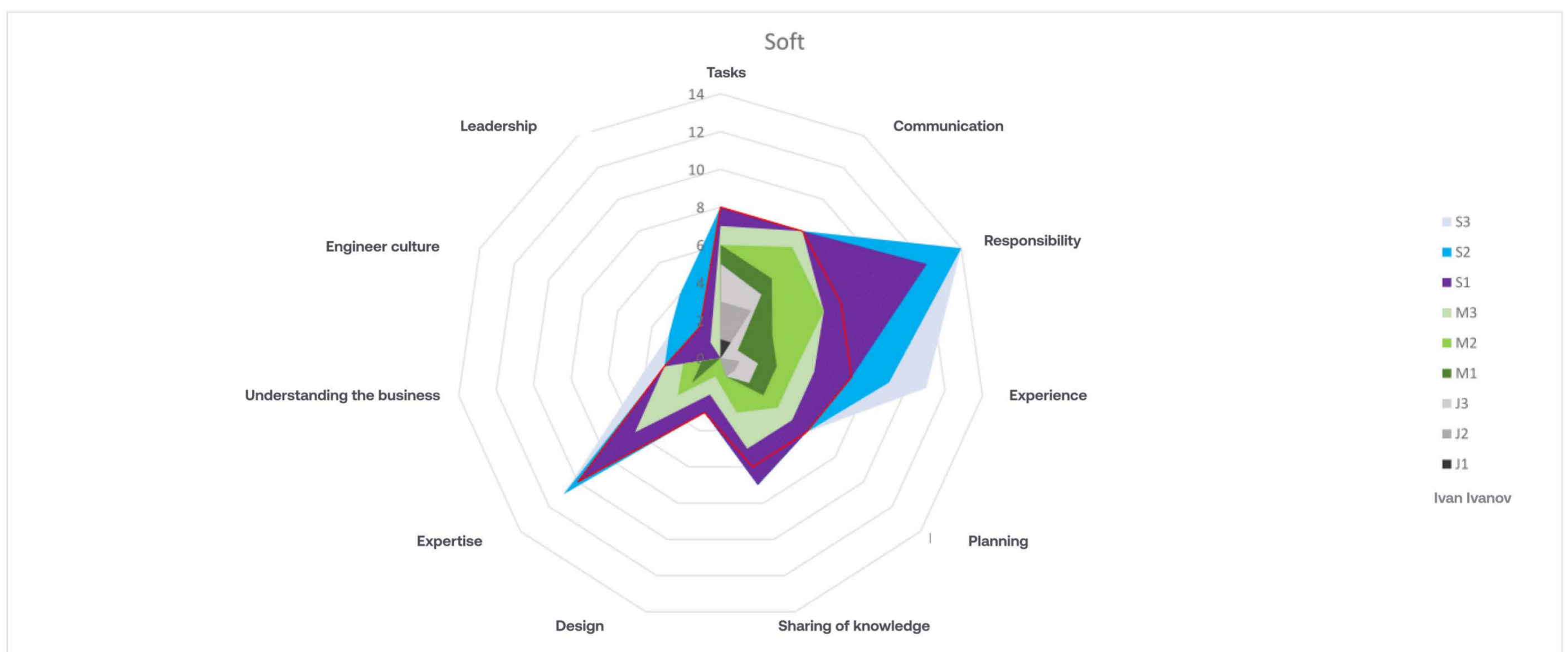
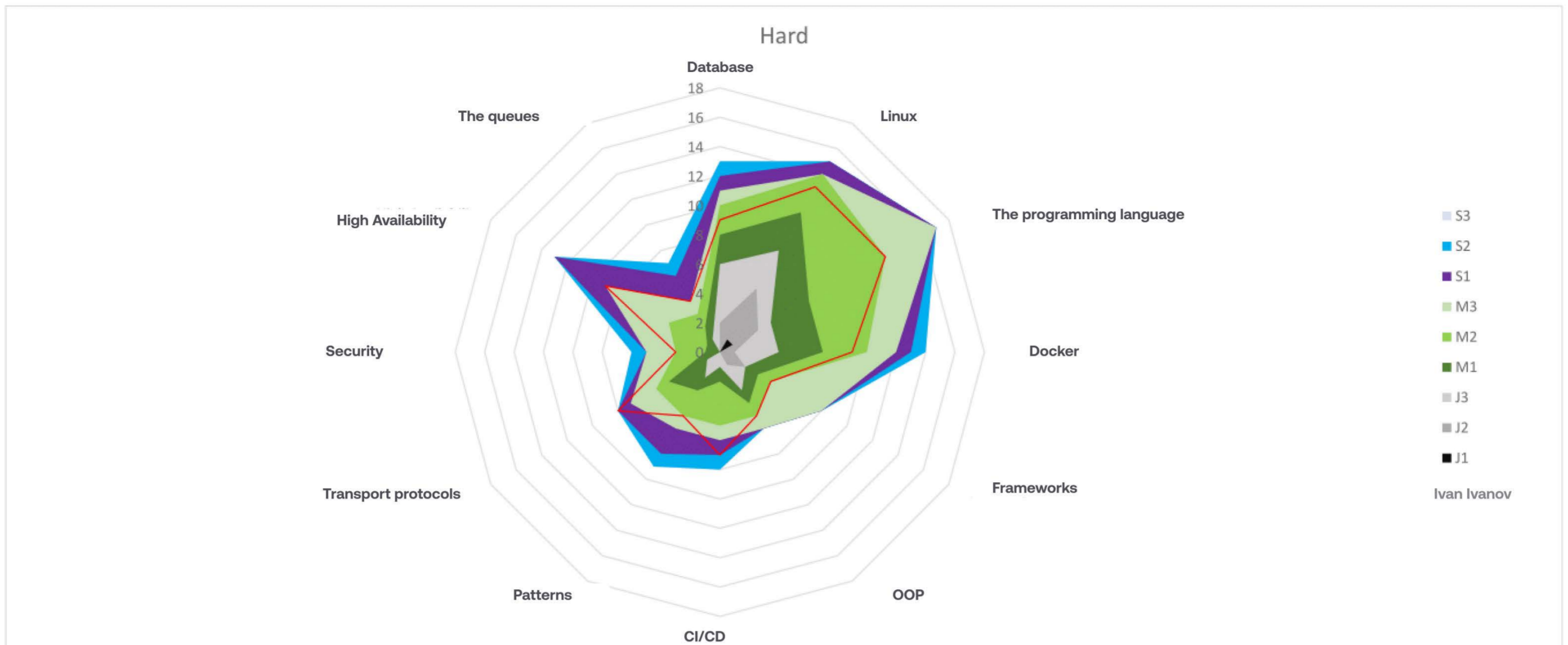
### Results

- 1. We have managed to achieve transparency in the assessment of grades.** Now team leaders and developers alike understand the grading system.
- 2. 100% of developers have an individual development plan,** in which it is written very simply and clearly what they need to know, be able to do and do to get a higher grade.
- 3. Turnover in the IT team decreased to 10%.**
- 4. It was possible to create a visual representation of the assessment** (the level of competence development).



How did the grading system help to solve the problem of turnover and motivate employees to develop?

## Visual representation of competences



## Number of employees in % according to the grades

<b>Hard</b>		J1	J2	J3	M1	M2	M3	S1	S2	S3
Normal		3	14	32	53	81	105	118	124	124
Score		3	14	30	45	63	80	89	94	94
Percent		100	100	94	85	78	76	75	76	76

<b>Soft</b>		J1	J2	J3	M1	M2	M3	S1	S2	S3
Normal		2	9	17	24	36	48	68	76	79
Score		2	9	16	21	33	45	62	68	70
Percent		100	100	94	88	92	94	91	89	89

**How did the grading system help to solve the problem of turnover and motivate employees to develop?**

## **Implementing a similar case a second time, what would you do in a different way?**

Excel spreadsheet - this was our demo version. Everything would be much easier if we immediately implemented the project in some kind of application, software. Therefore, we are currently planning to automate the grading process. This will reduce manual labor for processing and analyzing evaluation forms.

In addition, an automated system is a good tool for storing a complete history. We are faced with the fact that Excel already has difficulty "digesting" forms for 40 developers, the number of which increases every six months and requires other tools that process more information quickly and have convenient visualization tools.

## **Which companies can benefit from your case?**

IT companies that are at the stage of grading implementation. And also for those companies that want to talk openly with their employees, understand how to motivate the development team.

It will also be useful for those companies that do not know how to adjust salaries according to the skills of employees.

## **What are non-obvious things that companies need to pay attention to when repeating your case?**

**Conclusion 1:** Detailed grading (a matrix with 9 levels) works well where there are more than 15-20 people. In the analytics department, for example, we have 8 employees and it is still quite difficult to make a grading system, since employees are about the same level and there is simply not enough data to describe all levels in detail.

**Conclusion 2:** You have to be prepared for the fact that employees may negatively perceive the assessment and consider themselves underestimated. There are exactly the opposite cases when team leaders overestimate employees. In any case, this leads to the fact that an incorrect assessment leads to bad consequences – the undervalued leave, the overestimated do not fulfill their tasks.

**Conclusion 3:** Very strict grading requirements within the company leads to the fact that employees can be rated higher in the market and, accordingly, offer better conditions. It is important to maintain a balance in the assessment, without understating or overstating the requirements.

If you want to consult on any HR issues (it's free), write to us at [alena@vladimirskaya.uz](mailto:alena@vladimirskaya.uz) >



# QR Academy: how to build a training system for GenZ so that the company can actively grow



## Case leaders:

**Dennis Hwang** – HRD,

**Aigul Yamaldinova** – Head of the Training and Development Department,

**Aigul Moldabayeva** – leading specialist,

**Ulpan Yerzhana** – specialist

## Short description

Qazaq Republic is a Kazakhstani clothing brand founded in 2017. In a short period of time, the company was able to become one of the most recognizable domestic brands. Currently, the company employs more than 250 people. Most of the employees are young guys, representatives of generation Z.

The company, which began its activity as a startup, quickly transformed into a medium-sized business. This has led to challenges in adapting employees to new roles and requirements, especially when moving from linear positions to managerial ones. Despite the rapid career growth within the company, employees needed additional knowledge and skills necessary to successfully fulfill new responsibilities such as time management, project management and others.

To solve this problem, the QR Academy project was created — an internal educational project covering all levels of the company. QR Academy offers training in both soft skills (public speaking, emotional intelligence) and hard skills (marketing, HR, logistics). The programs are adapted to the needs of Generation Z, which contributes to high employee engagement, motivation and effective work in the company.

**This made it possible to train 180 employees in six months, as well as create an NPS of 94%.**

## Detailed description

In 2024, the company faced rapid team growth. The main difficulty was that, despite the rapid growth of the company and the increase in volumes, employees need additional knowledge and skills, taking into account new tasks and challenges. This is especially noticeable when starting work in line positions, as many guys in line positions are just starting their professional careers, as well as in the process of internal rotation, when promising employees move to managerial positions.

## Solution

The idea of the QR Academy project was born based on this task. It was necessary to create an internal platform that could:

- implement employee training and development requests,
- Develop exclusive educational materials,
- Conduct training promptly.

**The project team was tasked with creating an educational platform with a systematic approach to employee training and development.**

## The QR Academy Implementation Process:

# 01

### Collecting information

As part of the QR Academy project, it became necessary to study successful practices of creating internal training centers and corporate universities. To do this, we held discussions and exchanged experiences with companies from the fields of trade, logistics, hospitality and restaurant business.

**a)** We held a number of meetings and discussions with representatives of these companies, during which we **managed to gather information about various approaches to training.**

**b)** Based on the information received, we have created our own educational system:

- we have implemented practices that correspond to the specifics of our company, such as the use of **external and internal trainers;**
- integrated **gamification** and other modern approaches.

# 02

### The study of Target audience

We studied the target audience — employees, most of whom represent the GenZ generation. In order to arouse interest in the project, maintain motivation to learn and keep attention, we turned to modern trends in learning and took into account the peculiarities of information perception by young people.



## 02

**a) Research analysis.** We started by examining existing research on Generation Z to understand their preferences and characteristics.

**b) Focus groups and conversations.** We organized small focus groups and conducted conversations with representatives of the target audience. The group included about 18-20 people. During the week, we talked with them to get their opinion on various aspects, such as the introduction of gamification, motivation, and preferences for the learning format.

**c) Data assessment and analysis.** Based on the collected data, we formed a portrait of the target audience, which allowed us to better understand their needs and expectations.

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## 03

### HR team training

All members of the QR Academy team completed the Corporate Trainer course, which allowed them to independently develop the methodology and content of training programs, as well as conduct training in soft skills areas. The leaders of other departments who wished to join the project and successfully passed the selection took a similar course.

#### The motivation of department leaders to join the project was based on:

- 1 Development and growth:** Participation in the project was perceived as an opportunity for personal and professional growth. Department leaders saw it as a chance to develop their coaching skills, improve public speaking skills, and pass on their knowledge to others.
  - 2 Engagement and patriotism:** The project was presented as an important contribution to the development of the company. Department leaders were motivated by an inner sense of commitment to the company and its success.
  - 3 Career development:** Although department leaders did not have direct promotions in connection with coaching, participation in the project gave them the opportunity to prove themselves and demonstrate their leadership qualities. This could affect their career prospects in the long run.
- 

## 04

### Removing the request and forming the training menu

The company's strategy is developed by top managers within the framework of strategic sessions and determines the direction of development for the coming years. Based on this general strategy, a "People Strategy" and "Function Strategies" are formed, which set the focus on developing certain skills in teams. These tasks are then transferred to the employees' KPIs, and based on them, individual development plans are created, which have been named as a Skill Map.

## 04

Skill Map is implemented in accordance with the 10-20-70 concept: 10% of the time is devoted to learning through training and literature study, 20% – knowledge transfer through mentoring and experience exchange with colleagues, and 70% – implementation of projects to consolidate the acquired knowledge in practice. We have renamed the "individual development plan" to Skill Map for more effective communication with GenZ. This is a marketing approach aimed at making the tool more understandable, accessible and motivational for young employees. The Skill Map also serves as the main source for the formation of the training menu provided by QR Academy.

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## 05

### Teaching methods

In the context of the rapid development of the company and the need to maintain the relevance of educational programs for GenZ employees, we decided to focus on adapting training to modern trends and preferences of this audience.

#### To do this, we use the following methods in training:

- 1 interactive and game elements in training, such as quests and intellectual quizzes;
- 2 physical activity and creative tasks, including photo hunts;
- 3 creating and publishing content on social media.

## 06

### Motivation to learn

To promote the culture of learning within the company, we have developed and implemented a PR campaign through internal communication channels. This includes: reels-videos with feedback from training participants, creative announcements and gamification elements.

**The accumulation system.** Employees receive about 20 points for completing the training, completing all tasks and receiving a certificate. The points system varies depending on the duration and complexity of the training: a one—day course earns 1 point, complex training - up to 50 points. These points can be exchanged for corporate merch (300 points) or breakfast with the founders (500 points). The top participants have currently scored from 180 to 200 points and have the opportunity to accumulate the required amount within six months.

At the current stage, the task is to evaluate the effectiveness of the tool and identify possible difficulties and successful indicators. The next step will be to integrate the system into Bitrix, where employees will be able to see their points and exchange them through their personal accounts.



# 07

## Branding of the QR Academy project is an important element of its concept

The team independently developed the format and templates of training programs, memos, and announcements, providing a unified visual style for all training conducted under the patronage of the QR Academy. An important part of the concept was the reinterpretation of the traditional names of the trainings. For example, instead of "Public Speaking", Speak Up appeared, "Workplace Efficiency" became Office Skills, and "Emotional Intelligence" was transformed into EQ. The feedback results showed that the updated titles contributed to increased employee engagement and increased training entries.

### Employees of all levels are trained at the QR Academy:

#### 01

##### Line staff.

The work began with the development and implementation of training programs for line staff. These programs included basic processes and new initiatives aimed at improving the skills of employees working directly in stores.

#### 02

##### Store managers.

The next stage was the training of store directors. Leadership and management skills development programs have been launched for them, as well as processes related to store management have been updated.

#### 03

##### Office staff.

For office staff, emphasis was placed on the development of soft skills such as public speaking, emotional intelligence and office skills necessary for effective work in a corporate environment.

#### 04

##### Top management.

Management and leadership training were conducted for top managers, including young executives who have recently taken up their positions. It is important to note that among the top managers there are representatives of generation Z. About 50% of the current top management team consists of young professionals who just 4-5 years ago began their career in the company as sales consultants in stores, and have now grown to senior positions.

## Time

QR Academy is a project that has been launched in 2 months.

The project began in February 2024 and this case presents the interim results at the end of July. The project continues its activities.

## Budget

7 million tenge ~ \$15,000

The budget was allocated for renting premises for large trainings, organizing coffee breaks and lunches during events, as well as for the purchase of office supplies such as certificates and markers. In addition, the funds were spent on paying for the services of external trainers.

## Difficulties

The difficulties faced by the team in the process of launching and implementing the project were associated **with tight deadlines** and high expectations of high-quality implementation.

The project team, motivated by ambitious goals, set themselves tight deadlines to show the first results. This desire for a quick launch and the need to create a high-quality product in a limited time led to a number of related difficulties. The team had to learn on the go: develop training methods and find external experts to conduct highly specialized training.

Despite the difficulties, the project team was fully involved in the processes and motivated by an inner desire to achieve success. The support from the founders and leaders of the company played a key role in moving the project forward, which allowed us to overcome difficulties and achieve our goals.

## Results

1. During the six months of work at the academy, 25 training sessions and master classes were held from 7 internal trainers and 7 external ones. The team has trained more than 180 employees, which is 70% of the total number of the company's staff. The average NPS score was 94%.
2. In key functions: shops and logistics, "schools"/directions are organized together with partners, in which the focus is on the development of hard skills and familiarity. Soft skills training sessions support the effective work of teams.

All the initiatives planned for the first half of the year were successfully launched and brought the desired result. Initially, the team aimed to meet the KPIs set by the founders, including achieving an NPS score above 90% and conducting about 15 training sessions in soft areas. However, the team was able not only to achieve, but also to exceed these goals by conducting more training and achieving even higher results.



# “Evolution of heart rhythms”: how to implement a product approach in HR



## Case leaders:

**Ainura Koshoeva** – Chief People Officer,

**Tatyana Stolyarova** – Team lead for talent assessment and management functions,

**Olesya Kravchenko** – Scrum master/Agile Coach

## Short description

Tele2 is one of the fastest growing telecom operators in Kazakhstan, providing mobile communications and data network services.

The emergence of **Digital In house** (the introduction of digital solutions) required more flexible and transparent project and resource management. In addition, **a large amount of work in HR led to non-transparency and a long service release cycle, which reduced employee motivation and engagement.**

These factors led to the introduction of a product approach. It took us **1,5 years** to do this and brought the following results to the company: **turnover decreased** from **36 to 25%**, the company twice became the best employer in the country according to hh site. In the team, the time to complete tasks was reduced **from 120 to 73 days**, and transparency increased **from 4,3 to 7,8.**

## Detailed description

The decision to switch to a product approach was made due to significant changes in the company related to the transition of development from outsourcing to inhouse. This step necessitated a transformation of the approach to work and organizational culture.

This was also facilitated by:

- **the need for business to adapt quickly:** rapidly changing market conditions and business requirements for flexibility and responsiveness;
- **the need to improve the quality and predictability of projects:** the introduction of standardized methodologies to improve the quality of products and the predictability of project execution.

It became obvious that significant changes were coming due to the introduction of the Agile philosophy, including Scrum and Kanban methodologies, which required restructuring both in the organization and in the HR function.

## Solution

**1** First of all, I understood that a big transformation was taking place in the company. In this part, HR will either stand aside and wait for instructions, or begin to lead these processes. Since I had experience leading Agile transformations, we started implementing changes from the HR department, which we renamed the People Office (with a shift in focus from HR processes to People-oriented services for employees). **This is important because if the HR function is not rebuilt at the moment when Scrum masters and Agile coaches appear, HR will become a stopper of all changes.**

**2** Secondly, in December 2021, we developed the People Strategy for the first time as part of a business strategy that builds a product-oriented team.

**3** Thirdly, many initiatives from stakeholders began to come to us and employees did not know how to structure the increased volume of work. For example, we needed to recruit a large number of developers into different functional teams, and the recruiter did not know how to prioritize these tasks.

**Taking all these three factors into account, we came to the implementation of Kanban.**

## Kanban Implementation Process:

01

### Creating a roadmap

As part of the development of the People Strategy, we also created a roadmap. In conditions of high variability, we switched to quarterly planning in order to flexibly respond to any changes.

02

### Conducting training workshops for teams

The training was conducted both for representatives of various directorates and for People Office employees in the format of Change-experience design.

#### We taught:

- 1 Working with Kanban boards.** The basic principles of using whiteboards to manage tasks and prioritize work.
- 2 User Story.** Understanding and writing user stories that help identify which specific pain HR service solves for employees.
- 3 Conducting an interview.** How to conduct interviews with employees and candidates, what questions to ask in order to get the most relevant information.



**4 Design thinking.** An introduction to the basics of design and creative thinking to create end-user-oriented solutions.

**5 Facilitation and interaction with teams.** They taught negotiation and facilitation skills in cross-functional teams.

### The training format:

- Workshops were held on a regular **weekly basis**. The training was conducted in small steps so that employees could gradually learn a new approach. It is important to note that the training was not conducted in the format of separate training sessions. Instead, knowledge was introduced gradually in the course of work, which allowed employees to immediately apply new skills in their projects.
- Kanban meetings were also **held regularly 2 times a week**, where we discussed our results. Currently, when everything has settled down, we have Kanban meetings 1 time (every Friday).
- We conducted workshops internally (for example, by me and other experienced employees), and with the involvement of an external Agile coach. He helped to reveal specific topics more deeply.

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## 03

### Team monitoring

At first, the process was associated with subjective assessments, such as satisfaction with teamwork or the level of irritation due to the use of Kanban. Gradually, with the development of the process, the team switched to quantitative metrics, which made it possible to more accurately assess the situation. For example, they began to track the number of cards on the board, the number of stoppers and the time of completing tasks. This made it possible not only to objectively assess the current state, but also to predict the deadlines for completing tasks.

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## 04

### A retrospective with the involvement of an external consultant

At the moment of emotional burnout and the peak of employee resistance, we decided to hold a reboot session in order to rebuild the processes of implementing the methodology.

**Insights from an expert:**

- 1 Resistance.** “HR is the most untrained function in an organization, because as a rule, HR conducts training themselves and thinks that they know everything.” It is much easier to implement a Kanban board in a business unit than in a support unit.
- 2 Hypothesis testing.** We continued to implement the methodology and agreed that if we had a failure, we would confirm that the product approach does not work in HR.
- 3 Find support in the face of a Scrum master.** The coach highlighted those people who were in no way ready to accept the changes, and were about to leave. To make the implementation of the methodology more effective, he advised identifying a Scrum master. It is important that an ambassador appears within the team who wants to start leading the process, and not be appointed by the management.

05

**A 3-month experiment**

Following the results of the session with the coach, we agreed on a 3-month experiment to get some kind of result. We decided that we would implement the methodology sparingly during this period.

06

**The first results**

For the first year, the team was “unstable”, we faced resistance, but nevertheless, by the end of 2023, we managed to build processes taking into account the product approach, establish work and show results in 2024.

**Difficulties**

**Turnover in the People Office has increased to 50%.** I faced a lot of resistance. Many were overwhelmed and experiencing emotional burnout. Thus, the team openly sabotaged the implementation of Kanban.

My employee Olesya acted as a Kanban master (later she became a certified Agile coach and was promoted in the company). But the team was categorically against it. As a result, they refused to continue working along this path.

Nevertheless, I understood that a complete rejection of the methodology would not be beneficial. **We found a compromise solution:** we agreed with the team that we would try to continue working for three months, but in a more gentle mode. These three months have been very difficult for us. The team could not refuse to perform my tasks, but they performed them reluctantly, with obvious resistance. Some employees even stopped going to meetings and conferences.

However, despite all the difficulties, we managed to continue our work. Three months later, the team saw that the methodology was producing results. Over time, meetings on the Kanban board have become commonplace for us.



**The problem of prioritizing tasks.** Initially, employees took on more tasks than they could actually complete. This led to the need for strict prioritization on my part. The team began to openly discuss which tasks are really important and which can be postponed. This increased the level of awareness among employees, who now realized that not every task had to be completed immediately.

## Results

1. We held 70+ Kanban meetings and 4 retrospectives.
2. According to the survey results, **transparency within the team increased from 4,3 to 7,8.** Employees began to openly post all their tasks, which allowed them to better manage their workload and avoid situations when someone secretly performs secondary tasks.
3. **Willingness to help each other** – the team connects to solve the tasks of other participants, for example, organizing corporate events, participating in research and diagnostics.
4. There is **competition for a place on the board**, which helps teams focus on the tasks that bring the most value, increases their motivation and promotes more effective management of resources and priorities.
5. **The speed of task completion has increased** (Time to market – 73 days). Previously, the company measured this indicator, and the process could take about 120 days. After the introduction of the product approach, the use of Kanban boards and regular monitoring of metrics, it was possible to reduce TTM to 73 days.
6. **The number of blockers has decreased.** One of the key achievements was the reduction of the number of blockers by 80% — from 30 to just 4. This suggests that we have managed to significantly improve work efficiency by eliminating most of the factors that slow down the execution of tasks.
7. **The number of completed tasks has increased.** In 1.5 years, we have implemented 38 tasks. This confirms that our efforts to optimize processes have borne noticeable results. In comparison with previous periods, when the number of completed tasks was significantly less due to insufficient organization, this result demonstrates a qualitative improvement.
8. Inspired by our example, **other departments also began to implement the Kanban methodology.** We were the first in the company to implement a product approach and started conducting open sprint reviews where everyone could ask questions and get answers. We launched a transparent communications process that covered all departments, from marketing to IT, and allowed us to improve processes within the company.
9. **The role of the head in prioritization has changed.** The head has become a key figure in prioritizing tasks that employees independently distribute among themselves. The task of the manager is to keep the focus on priorities and monitor the implementation period.

## Time

1.5 years

## Budget

We spent 2 million tenge ~\$4,200 on Agile coaching services.

## Implementing a similar case a second time, what would you do in a different way?

Flexible methodologies should be selected based on the following questions: “What do you want to achieve? What is your goal?”

Don't do it just because it's mainstream. Scrum will not work in conditions of high certainty and where there are large teams. Short iterations are suitable for small teams. It is better to rebuild the value delivery process by streamlining the task flow. Kanban is well suited for this.

## Which companies can benefit from your case?

To all companies that are at the stage of change or are seeking to introduce new approaches to management and communication.

The Kanban method is also great for **companies seeking to improve processes**. For example, in recruiting teams, it helps to track at what stage the approval of offers or candidates may be delayed, which contributes to the continuous improvement of the team's work.

This approach is also useful for **HR departments that want to implement agile techniques**. But the important point here is the willingness of management and employees to take this approach. In our case, the key point was that we believed in this method, and thanks to this faith we were able to succeed.

## What are non-obvious things that companies need to pay attention to when repeating your case?

### 1 A cultural shift.

The introduction of transparent processes and horizontal management can lead to a significant cultural shift. This is an unobvious benefit, which manifests itself in the fact that employees begin to manage their tasks and processes more independently, rather than relying on instructions from above. This transforms the company's culture, making it more flexible and focused on the collective achievement of goals.



**2 Changing the role of the manager.**

There is a risk that managers will begin to feel unnecessary in the team, as management becomes more distributed. In situations where teams begin to work effectively autonomously, the manager may have a question: "What role do I play now?" This can cause tension, as managers may start to worry about their position and importance. However, it can also be a benefit if viewed as an opportunity for managers to focus on more strategic tasks.

**3 Identification of problems in business processes.**

Kanban methodology allows you to identify hidden problems in business processes. For example, when a task is delayed due to waiting for action from other departments (lawyers, financiers, etc.), it becomes obvious where bottlenecks exist and what needs to be improved. This may cause resistance from other departments, which may not want to change established processes. However, this transparency helps to improve overall business processes and interaction between departments.

**4 Resistance to change.**

An unobvious difficulty lies in the fact that an initiative to improve processes and introduce a new approach can meet strong resistance, especially from those who are not ready to change or see this as a threat to their status. This requires the company to be prepared to deal with conflicts and support change at all levels of the organization. When you begin to enjoy innovating yourself, you begin to attract other teams and departments that begin to make changes in their teams. There is an interesting paradox, as soon as we stop changing or “treating” someone, resistance immediately decreases and people want to do what you do coolly, not through pain, but through curiosity.

**5 You become a driver of change.**

The introduction of such methods turns you into drivers of change not only within your department, but also throughout the company. This can cause tension, but in the long run it will lead to significant improvements, which will be an important competitive advantage.

**6 Allocating a budget for an Agile coach.** When implementing a product approach, it is necessary to allocate funds for training and retrospectives with a coach, because it is very difficult to implement changes and work out objections alone.

# “The Champions League” is an employee motivation system that increases company sales and reduces staff turnover

## Case leader:

Anvar Beknazarov – HRD Qazaq Oil



### Short description

Qazaq Oil is a leading retail distributor of petroleum products through a network of gas stations, occupying 25% of the market share in the retail of petroleum products.

The success of the brand depends on each employee equally regardless of his position. At the moment, Qazaq Oil employs more than 5,000 thousand people at 380 gas stations throughout Kazakhstan and this number is growing every month, but often due to **geographical remoteness, many stations did not feel like part of our family.**

“The Champions League” has allowed to unite employees even from the most remote locations, as well as motivate them to develop. Thus, **staff turnover decreased by 6.71%, the company's sales increased by 1207%, and the quality of service increased by 17%.**

### Detailed description

The problem was the lack of corporate identity and sense of belonging among employees at remote gas stations. As a rule, employees at a remote gas station feel isolated, do not realize their connection with Qazaq Oil, and they do not have communications with other gas stations. This leads to the fact that **employees do not feel part of a single whole and work as if on their own.**

In addition, there was a problem of differences in the equipment of the stations. Some gas stations had shops, pastries and petroleum products, while others sold only petroleum products. This created unequal conditions for employees, as the opportunities and working conditions varied significantly. For example, stations with shops and additional services could provide more comfortable conditions for employees and customers, which is not available for stations selling only petroleum products.

Being in such conditions, employees felt less important and demotivated. **This led to a decrease in the level of engagement, motivation and, as a result, increased staff turnover.**



**This was accompanied by real problems of the company:**

- 1** staff turnover;
- 2** lack of growth dynamics in sales of high-margin products;
- 3** lack of competitive spirit between gas stations;
- 4** lack of proper attention to service and customer service;
- 5** the lack of involvement of remote gas stations in the company's goals, plans and indicators.

## **Solution**

Qazaq Oil has decided to organize an internal corporate competition. The main task was to combine different gas station formats so that every employee, starting from the tanker and ending with the territorial manager, would participate.

Inspired by football, we decided to organize competitions based on the principle of the Champions League, the most prestigious football tournament. To do this, we have launched our own Champions League. Employees of gas stations all over Kazakhstan compete in it.

## **Specifically for this, Qazaq Oil has developed:**

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01

**The dashboard in Power BI**, which reflects the results of each gas station team in real time, shows the achievements of any employee at each gas station, as well as:

- an indicative plan for today with a % completion scale;
- statistics on production indicators;
- personnel shifting and personal data of employees;
- personal statistics of gas station employees;
- the rules of the competition and the GNI approved by the order.

02

We launched a Telegram bot so that employees can see their results and the results of other teams. Cashiers who did not have constant access to a computer could easily check their data through a bot.

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**“The Champions League” is an employee motivation system that increases company sales and reduces staff turnover**

**In order for the competition to be fair and fair, we have divided all gas stations into 4 leagues, depending on the range and availability of additional services:**

### **1. League A:**

Gas stations where they sell petroleum products, as well as coffee, hot dogs and hamburgers.

### **2. League B:**

Gas stations with an assortment of A-league, but with lower sales volumes.

### **3. League C:**

Gas stations where only petroleum products are sold.

### **4. League D:**

Gas stations with a similar range of C-league, but with lower sales volumes.

**The competition is held in 3 stages:**

- 1 qualifying (February 01 – March 31) AB/CD;**
- 2 main stage (April 01 – December 31) A, B, C, D;**
- 3 the final (January 2025).**

According to the results of the main stage, the first three teams from each League with the highest number of points in their League will be selected to participate in the final of the competition.

As part of the finals, the gas station teams will compete in January 2025 with each other in practice and theory for knowledge of their functional responsibilities. The commission will evaluate the professional skills of each participant and according to the results, the team that had no violations during the competition and which scored the most points will take first place in its league.

We have also identified an additional prize for the best branch directors and territorial managers – a trip to an info tour to the best gas stations in Europe to share experiences.

## **The evolution of the project**

In 2022, the first “Champions League” was formed from 8 leagues. Then we carried out quarterly measurements, according to the results of which we effectively awarded the winners at each stage.

In subsequent launches, we began to measure the indicators on an annual basis.



### **We have also increased the number of production indicators:**

- petroleum products (PP) plan (fact of execution);
- consumer goods (CG) plan (fact of execution);
- revenue per 1 car;
- number of PP receipts per employee (PP load per employee);
- NPS indicators;
- speech analytics;
- coffee conversion;
- conversion of Hot-dogs+Gamburgers;
- the share of unique Vklife users among individuals.

## **Time**

The time from the idea to the implementation of the project took 6 months.

All employees liked the Champions League so much that it is held on an annual basis. The motivational program began in 2022 and has been going on for the third year in a row. Transformations and improvements are being made to the program every year.

## **Budget**

The cost of implementing the Champions League program is mainly related to valuable prizes for the winners, which are an incentive for all participants:

- 1) 1st place for the A-League - a week's trip to Egypt/Qatar/UAE for the entire gas station team, including the territorial manager, worth 10,000,000 tenge (~\$21,000), as well as the presentation of the rolling Cup at the New Year's corporate party.
- 2) 1st place for the B League - a ticket to the resort recreation area in Kazakhstan for the entire gas station team, including TM, in the amount of 5,000,000 tenge (~\$10,500).
- 3) 1st place for the C League - certificates for household appliances for the entire gas station team, including TM, in the amount of 2,000,000 tenge (\$4,200).
- 4) 1st place for the D League - A bonus of 100% of the salary.
- 5) Additional prizes. A trip to an info tour abroad is provided for the best employees.

**TOTAL: 17,000,000 tenge ~\$36,000**

## Difficulties

### 01

#### Low employee engagement

1. One of the main reasons for the lack of employee engagement was a misunderstanding of the essence of the competition. It was not clear to many why the competition was being held and how it affected their daily work. This led to the fact that they did not see the point in participating. In addition, there was an opinion that only top gas stations could win, which demotivated other employees and created a sense of injustice.
2. 1.2 During the implementation of the program, there were also minor difficulties related to the involvement and motivation of adult employees. They may not have understood the essence of the program or did not know how to use new technologies.

**We used the following strategies to work out objections:**

- **Communication through managers.** We have focused on educating and motivating managers at all levels. The managers, understanding the essence of the program, then explained the details to their subordinates. This has helped to improve the understanding and perception of the program among employees.
- **Support within the team.** The employees involved began to actively motivate their colleagues. This created a positive dynamic, where collective support and pressure stimulated the participation of even those who were initially skeptical.

### 02

#### Lack of understanding of score calculations in the standings

Difficulties in understanding how points are calculated and which indicators are taken into account also hindered the full involvement of employees.

- To improve the situation, a presentation was held for territorial branch managers, during which the objectives of the competition, evaluation criteria and the scoring process were explained in detail. This helped the managers to better understand the essence of the competition and convey this information to their subordinates.
- We also used analytical tools such as Power BI and Telegram bot, which allowed us to visualize indicators and results in real time. This made the process more transparent and understandable for all participants.



## Results

Thanks to this competition, the company has shown impressive results in terms of its main production indicators.

### 1. Sales have increased.

- Petroleum products +15%
- Consumer goods + 99%
- Coffee + 447%
- Hot dogs + 173%
- Baking + 473%

### 2. Improved service score: +17%

- Active users of customer loyalty cards increased by 56%

### 3. The turnover rate decreased by 6.71%.

- In 2022 – 28.02 %;
- In 2023 – 21.31%;
- An increase in the number of responses on the HeadHunter site by 15.3%:  
2021 – 11,859 responses;
- 2022 – 13,680 responses.

## What are non-obvious things that companies need to pay attention to when repeating your case?

It is important to pay attention to the need for constant adaptation and timely response to changes occurring during the implementation of the project. Based on our experience with the Champions League, we can see that the competition that was held in 2022 is significantly different from the 2024 competition. This means that in order to achieve maximum efficiency and benefit from the project, it is necessary to regularly update and adjust its elements. The success of the program depends not only on the initial launch, but also on the ability to flexibly make changes as needed.

If you want to consult on any HR issues (it's free), write to us at [alena@vladimirskaya.uz](mailto:alena@vladimirskaya.uz) >

# How to cope with high turnover in retail?

Case leader:

**Gulshat Sadykova** – HRD of Shaya Kazakhstan LLP



## Short description

The Alshaya Group is a dynamic family business, first founded in Kuwait in 1890, and is one of the world's leading franchise operators of more than 70 well-known brands: Starbucks, H&M, Mothercare, Debenhams, KidZania and others.

There are currently 36 Starbucks coffee shops in Kazakhstan in 3 cities of the republic: Astana, Almaty, Shymkent. The coffee shop chain is growing every year, and 2 more coffee shops are scheduled to open in 2024. There are plans to develop the brand in other countries of the Central Asian region. The total number of employees in Kazakhstan is 430 people, 30 of them work in the support office (management company), the rest are partners (employees of coffee shops).

The company is actively growing and developing, at the same time, the turnover rate in coffee shops is growing, which amounted to **138%** by the end of 2023. The company began to solve this problem through work in 4 areas: **data analytics** (automation of turnover accounting), **remuneration system** (C&B, rewarding & recognition), **corporate culture and communication channels** (feedback & exit interview), **training in managerial skills and onboarding programs**.

As a result, **turnover decreased to 71% in the first half of 2024 (from 74% in the second half of 2023)**. By the end of 2024, the annual rate is expected to decrease to **120%**. In 2025, the turnover target is projected to be **100%**.

## Detailed description

In 2023, the turnover in the company was 138%. Since the number of office staff is less than 10% of the total, the main problem of turnover is associated with employees of coffee shops, especially in the lowest positions – baristas. It would seem that this is a normal situation for retail and catering, but for me it was abnormal because:

- a) I worked in companies where the maximum turnover rate was 25%,
- b) comparing with the MENA markets, which includes our company, the management also noticed that this is also too high an indicator for them.



## How to cope with high turnover in retail?

A high turnover rate is inherent in the retail market and the main arguments of brand managers explaining the high turnover rate were objective factors:

- 1 often a barista position is the first workplace for young applicants without work experience and qualifications;**
- 2 due to low salaries, working in coffee shops is usually considered as a part-time job, rather than a full-time job;**
- 3 the largest number of candidates are students who are attracted by flexible working hours and the opportunity to work part-time.**

Usually, such employees are not loyal enough to the company, because they have other career priorities – studying at the university, searching for short-term earnings for certain purposes, searching for various career opportunities to determine their own career preferences.

## Why is it bad?

High staff turnover affects the continuity of business processes, increases the company's costs for staff training and education, the effectiveness of task performance, and the overall level of motivation and employee engagement.

## Solution

We have analyzed the state of functions and processes. As a result, it was determined that the **turnover rate is the main measure of the success of working with staff**, as well as an indicator of development zones. In addition, it turned out that this indicator **in Kazakhstan is higher** than in other Starbucks companies.

It is important to note that the indicator was not monitored on an ongoing basis. In this regard, as a first measure to solve the problem, data on turnover for the entire year 2023 were collected monthly in order to analyze possible seasonal fluctuations in the indicator and identify measures to reduce the impact of seasonality.

**It turned out that there were 2 bursts of increased turnover in the year associated with the end of the school year, when students are busy preparing and passing sessions, as well as the beginning of the school year, when students determine that they will not be able to combine study with work.**

### We have developed a step-by-step action plan in 4 areas:

# 01

## Monitoring and analysis of turnover indicators

1. When I joined the company, I could not get acquainted with the statistics, because this **process was not systematized**. Usually, with such large indicators, monthly records are kept to monitor the dynamics and understand what changes have affected it.
2. We had some difficulties with the 1C provider **to set up automation** of the turnover report in order to receive timely information in different sections for the possibility of analysis and continuous monitoring. It took some time, but it worked out in the end. Before that, the HR officer manually collected data and performed calculations.
3. **We conducted an analysis based on one-to-one interviews with coffee shop managers**. The survey revealed that managers work on average for 5+ years (very stable staff). I couldn't figure out where such turnover rates come from if managers work for a long time. It turned out that the highest turnover is among baristas. If we extrapolate the turnover rate only for baristas now, then by the end of the year the figure will be 200%. Shocking, unrealistic figures. Next, we analyzed the barista turnover in the first week, the first month and the first 3 months. Most often, in Starbucks coffee shops, after the first three months, the barista gets a promotion. Therefore, the first month is more indicative for us.
4. The analysis also showed that there are **problems in the selection of a barista**.
  - A barista in a coffee shop is not only a person who makes coffee, but also a cleaner, loader, cashier, etc.
  - Many candidates left due to the fact that it is inconvenient to get to the coffee shop.
  - There are requirements for military registration, there were cases when they were taken directly from the workplace to the army.
  - Many other nuances that arise in the first three working days.

In this regard, we proposed to take interns for three days and, based on the results, decide whether to employ a person or not. But the legislation does not allow us to do this, so we have official employment from the first working day.

**Therefore, we decided to improve working conditions in other areas.**

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# 02

## The reward system

We managed to get the head office to review salaries and the bonus system, because for several years there has been no indexing, despite the fact that new players are appearing on the market and competition is growing.

1. **Salary revision**. Barista salaries are really low (at a level below the market). Since May 1, 2024, we have increased salaries by 7%.
2. **The bonus system**. Since July 1, the bonus system has been revised for the better. Previously, bonuses could only be obtained with 100% fulfillment of the plan, but now everyone who completed 85% receives bonuses.
3. **Recognition programs** – Partner of quarter/ Leader of quarter competition. Awarding the best employees for demonstrating the corporate values of the company: professionalism, efficiency, courage, belonging, joy. Employees can nominate each other through a questionnaire, providing a justification for their appointment. Next, the commission examines the proposals and makes its decision.



# 03

## Corporate culture and communication

**1. We conducted an engagement survey.** The company engagement survey is conducted on a regular basis with the approval of the head office management. By the end of 2023, employee engagement increased by 6 points (eNPS: 2023 – 1.05, 2024 – 7.6 according to the results of the Pulse survey\*). A positive indicator shows that the number of employees recommending the company as an employer is greater than the number of dissatisfied ones. But the excess of only 1 point in 2023 shows that there are almost as many or slightly more recommenders as there are dissatisfied ones, but the indicator in 2024 is higher, which means that the number of recommenders is growing, and dissatisfied ones are decreasing.

\* – eNPS is calculated using the formula: % promoters – % detractors.

9-10 – promoters (ready to recommend their employer)

7-8 – neutral position (they do not recommend, but they do not mind working in the company)

1-6 – detractors (they are not ready to recommend their employer and do not want to link their career with the current company)

- 2. Working with coffee shop managers** to establish selection processes, build effective communication with baristas (they often do not see growth prospects, but they always have career growth opportunities).
- 3. Development of communication channels.** We are developing new communication channels, such as the program “Everything will be fine, TOP” – everything will be fine, your support office (familiarization of coffee shops with the functions of the office, aimed at building supportive communication between the office and partners), and we are improving the current ones, for example, we have expanded the formats of forums (not just a platform for informing, but a training system with elements of team building, focus groups, feedback and discussions).
- 4. Exit interview.** Upon dismissal, employees of coffee shops fill out a feedback form where they can choose a reason for dismissal from the proposed list or specify their own. After analyzing the reasons, it turned out that the salary factor, which was most often referred to by brand managers and coffee shop managers, took only the second place from the rating, the first reason according to the results of the analysis was the desire to find a job in their specialty, i.e. students are trying to find career opportunities related to their fields of study. Therefore, we have focused on training coffee shop managers so that they can properly motivate baristas to grow in the company, which greatly helps us in retaining and reducing turnover.

# 04

## Training in managerial competencies and onboarding

- **Onboarding.** We conducted focus groups and identified growth points, prepared an introductory presentation, and plan to launch before the end of the year.
- **Training and workshops** for coffee shop managers are currently in development. We plan to launch it next year.

### Time

At the moment, **8 months** have passed. It is impossible to close the problem of turnover in a few months. The problem will be solved on an ongoing basis in order to achieve a 100% reduction in turnover by 2025, as well as continue to decrease in subsequent years.

### Budget

The budget of recognition programs is 1 million tenge (~\$2,120) per year, an additional budget for the revision of the PO and the bonus system.

### Difficulties

Difficulties in automating the calculation of HR indicators, insufficient managerial competencies of employees, the need to coordinate projects and budgets with the head office, insufficient time and financial resources.

### Results

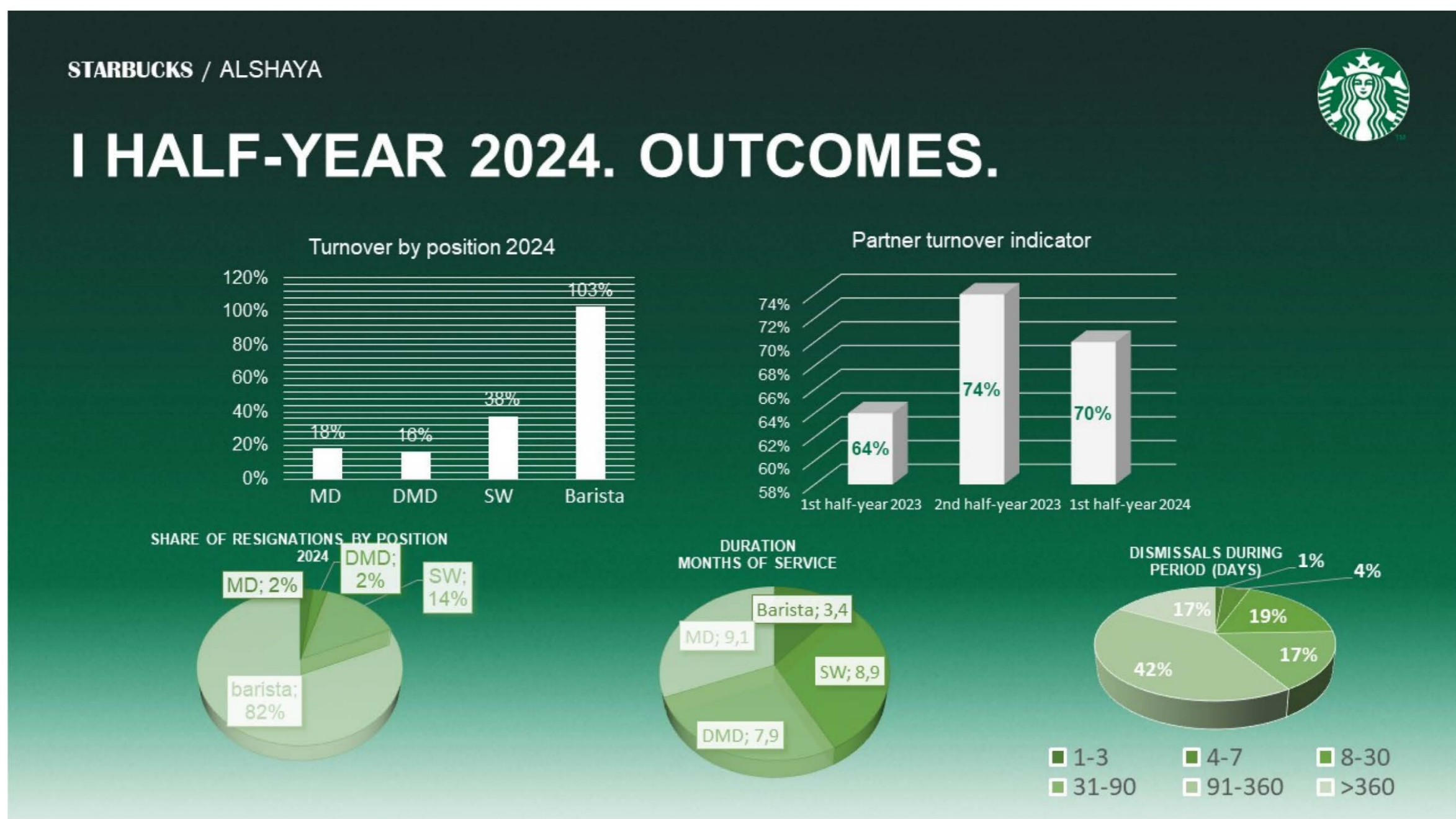
#### At the moment:

- an automated staff turnover report has been set up,
- wages have been increased by 7%;
- the bonus system has been improved,
- communication channels have been established.

**Turnover in the six months of 2024 was 71%, which is still a high indicator, but shows a downward trend compared to 2023\*.**



## How to cope with high turnover in retail?



\* Starbucks has been operating in Kazakhstan for 8 years, but in October 2022 the company was divided into 2 new companies (because it represented other brands: Mothercare, Body shop). Therefore, the figures above reflect the period only from 01.10.2022, although in fact the duration of the criminal code is more than 5 years, there are employees who have been working for 8 years, i.e. since the opening in Kazakhstan.

## Implementing a similar case a second time, what would you do in a different way?

For the effective development of the project and to convey the seriousness of working with this indicator, it is necessary to introduce a turnover indicator into the system for evaluating the effectiveness of managers. Of course, such a measure will cause resistance, therefore, I would start developing managerial competencies at the first stages of the project, and not as one of the measures that was not in the primary priority. I would also prioritize the onboarding program, which we started working with a little later.

Additionally, it is necessary to include not only brand managers and coffee shop managers in the project, but also the management staff of lower-level coffee shops, since the highest level of turnover among baristas, it is important that all coffee shop mentors understand the correct processes of communication, onboarding and barista motivations.

To complement the project with brand development measures, since the Starbucks brand itself is strong, not enough attention has been paid to the development of the employer's brand.

## Which companies can benefit from your case?

Retail market companies, especially the restaurant business, food service chains.

## What are non-obvious things that companies need to pay attention to when repeating your case?

The HR support office works with coffee shop managers. It is important to make sure that communication reaches the most ordinary employees, as well as the head office is aware of everything that is happening.





# Leadership Club and CEO Scholarship: how the formation of a talent pool and employee motivation at Kulikov helped significantly reduce costs



## Case leaders:

**Sergey Dolzhenkov** – Director of Organizational Development,

**Dmitry Efremov** – Head of Corporate Culture and Internal Communication

## Short description

Kulikov Confectionery House is a company that started with a family business, and now is an international brand with more than 100 stores in Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Russia.

Taking into account the general trend towards business development and expansion, Kulikov faced the task of not only **retaining existing active employees, but also preparing future leaders**. At a time when the company is actively growing and opening new directions, it is necessary **to form and maintain a talent pool** to ensure the stability and continuity of business processes.

The problem was solved by creating a “Leadership Club”, which allowed the company to increase employee engagement and loyalty, as well as retain talent.

This, in turn, influenced the growth of the company's efficiency. Thus, the **POC (production overhead costs) decreased by 17%, and production efficiency increased by 12% over the past year.**



## Detailed description

The idea of creating a “Leadership Club” came as a logical continuation of the Leadership Academy, a training system for line employees.

The Leadership Academy has enabled the formation of a critical number of leaders, who are the core of the club. At the Academy, employees study in various fields, including courses on:

- project management,
- effective communication,
- team motivation,
- content production,
- overcoming fears and conflict resolution.

Completion of the Leadership Academy allows employees to obtain the status of a "leader" and join the “Leadership Club”.

**Initially, the Academy was a "Leadership Club", but it operated only within the framework of one stream. The Leadership Club was founded in order to unite graduates of all streams, as well as keep them after graduation from the academy and raise them further, until a suitable vacancy opens.**

**Our decision to create a “Leadership Club” was based on the following factors:**

- 1 Low employee engagement.** The company had a problem with involvement in projects, which required the formation of a critical group capable of actively engaging in the work and inspiring others.
- 2 The uniqueness of the business.** Unlike most confectionery companies that use conveyor production, our company has many elements of manual labor. This creates unique conditions that are difficult to convey to external specialists who are accustomed to standard systems. Expats and external consultants often face difficulties in understanding and adapting to such features.
- 3 Problems with external specialists.** When trying to attract specialists from Russia and other countries for specific tasks such as marketing, many refused due to the complexity and specifics of the work. The market also played a role, as conditions and requirements in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Russia differ, which made it difficult to attract and retain external employees.
- 4 The specifics of the tasks.** The company not only produces confectionery products, but also expanded its activities by launching a horeca and manufacturing products for retail chains. This requires a more comprehensive approach to training and management than just working in a pastry shop.



**5 The market and the lack of understanding.** External contractors and outsourcing companies often refused to cooperate due to a lack of understanding of the scope of work and the uniqueness of the business. This made it difficult to find solutions and led to refusals to cooperate.

The formation of the "Leadership Club" as a personnel reserve program is aimed at uncovering talents and developing horizontal leaders (office, production and store employees) who will be able to show their abilities and prepare for future leadership positions.

## Solution

**The Leaders Club** is an association of graduates of the Leadership Academy who, in addition to their main work, are ready to participate in additional projects that affect the growth and development of the company. Employees with a grade below M5 (middles and juniors) can participate in the club. Grade M5\* and above (including top managers and seniors) are not allowed to participate.

\* – If an employee receives a promotion above grade M5 during the period of participation in the program, he loses his scholarship, but receives a salary increase due to a new position.

Training is held within the framework of the club, and participants receive tasks – **"Achievements"** aimed at developing managerial skills and strategic thinking. Some of these "achievements" cover the tasks of increasing involvement in the company's projects, as well as encouraging participants to take initiatives and implement them. **In fact, participants become agents of change, help various departments in the implementation of their business tasks and improve working conditions.**

A CEO scholarship has been developed to motivate employees. CEO scholarship is a salary increase on a competitive basis with a time limit.

Within the framework of the "Leadership Club", **the best participants receive a salary increase of 10,000 som (1st degree) and 15,000 som (highest degree) every month for one calendar year, after completing tasks during the past year.**

In short, participants complete tasks in advance, while trying to prove themselves from the best side, because not only the fact of execution, but also the quality is evaluated. Scholarships in the company are awarded on the basis of performing "achievements" and active participation in projects.

### The rating of the members of the "Leadership Club" to determine the nomination for the scholarship

#1	 Байгондиева Роза	25
#2	 Искаков Нурдин	15
#3	 Жвакина Светлана	15
#4	 Кудайбергенова Кымбат	15
#5	 Савченко Наталья	6
#6	 Курбанов Фурхад	0



We have identified the main “achievements” that must be performed to receive a CEO scholarship:

## 01

**Initiative.** Employees should regularly submit their ideas through a special platform. These ideas should be taken into account by the company. It is necessary to be active in offering initiatives, even if they are not implemented immediately.

## 02

**Active participation.**

Employees should be active participants in the “Quality Circle” or community. At a higher level, this may include the leadership of such groups.

## 03

**Completing additional tasks.** Employees must complete additional tasks as required by the company. This may include collecting materials, conducting research, or training other employees.

## 04

**Involvement in projects.** Participate in food safety training, organize corporate events, introduce new tools or instruct employees.

### How is the competition process going?

- 1 Employees submit their initiatives and complete the assigned tasks.
- 2 The HR team keeps records of the completion of tasks and collects information about the results.
- 3 At the end of the year, a dossier is compiled for each participant, where all achievements and results are recorded.
- 4 The decision is made by a commission consisting of the project organizers, top managers and direct supervisors of the participants. The organizers present the results of each participant, and the commission decides whether to award a scholarship or to refuse. Managers can speak out in support and defense of their employees, and the final decision is made after a general vote. Thus, the objectivity of the decisions taken is ensured.

### Participants receive a scholarship throughout the year and may be deprived of it:

- in case of violation of a number of rules (receiving a reprimand, dismissal);
- when promoted to a key manager.

If the employee does not receive a promotion within a year, the scholarship is terminated. In this case, the employee's salary returns to the previous level, but it may be higher due to the general salary indexation and changes in the company.

However, employees who perform well tend to get a raise, and their salaries continue to rise. If an employee does not show growth, he may lose the scholarship, but he still has other opportunities for motivation and promotion through bonus programs and a general system of financial remuneration.

Thus, we have created a motivational system that encourages employees to both grow and actively participate in the company's projects, thereby allowing them to form a talent pool and retain talent.

## Time

The Academy has been held annually since 2021. The Leadership Club was launched in 2023.

## Budget

The main expenses are related to the payment of scholarships. Increase in salary:

highest degree: 15,000 som – no more than 5 people annually – 900,000 som (~\$10,000).

first degree: 10,000 – no more than 20 people annually – 2,400,000 som (~\$28,500).

The platform for submitting initiatives and recording the completion of tasks does not require additional costs, since it was adapted from another system already used by the company. Its service and maintenance are on the company's resources.

The training is mainly conducted by internal staff. If external speakers are invited, this is most often done on a barter basis or within the framework of non-commercial agreements, such as the exchange of experience and guided tours.

## Difficulties

### 01

#### Selection difficulties

Under simple conditions, a large number of people were recruited to enter, but the quality of candidates was lost. Under difficult conditions, the percentage of applications decreased by 2-3 times. Initially, 120-150 applications were received, but after the conditions became more complicated, their number decreased to 50-60.

- Previously, quotas for divisions were used, which resembled a system of budget places per region. The managers provided lists, and we recruited these people. We had two groups each year, 30 people in each, that is, an average of 60 people. Despite the large number of applications, there were about 20 active participants at the exit, of which about 15 received a scholarship.
- A simple entry system allowed candidates to come on the recommendation of a supervisor or leader of the previous year, but this did not always happen on their own. Often they just agreed without much interest.



01

- When we introduced the task selection system, the situation changed. We provided access to our distance learning platform, where candidates had to complete a number of tasks. Last year, we used our cartoon on employee competencies. The candidates had to watch the series and answer the questions in an essay format. In this way, we could evaluate their way of thinking and potential. Those who completed all the tasks and described their thoughts well, regardless of literacy, were selected.

02

### **The lack of a clear structure and criteria at the initial stage**

Not all employees understood exactly what was required of them to receive a scholarship and participate in the “Leadership Club”.

03

### **High start, low finish**

At the beginning, the activity is many times higher, by the end of the year, when it's time to sum up, there are half as many active and involved participants.

- **Financial motivation.** Many participants initially go to the project with financial benefits. However, they quickly lose motivation when they realize that they will receive the reward only next year. Most often, it was those who put money in the first place who left the project by the end of the year.
- **The duration of the project.** The project lasts for more than six months, and participants lose interest and motivation as it progresses. We tried to reduce the workload by the end of the year and build the program so that participants showed final knowledge, but even this did not always help to keep them involved.
- **Social psychology.** In the beginning, the enthusiasm is high, but as you progress, the interest gradually fades. It is difficult to deal with this, as it is part of human nature.

04

### **Time limitations**

At the factory, the high season starts in October and ends in April. There is also a corporate tradition of annual general leave 2 times a year – the factory and the office go on vacation for 2 weeks at the same time at the end of April, and then in July. Therefore, it is necessary to have time to implement the project in 5 months (training, joining the club, and completing tasks).

At the beginning of the project, when the high season ends, there comes a period with less workload, and employees can become more actively involved in project activities. This allows them to devote more time and attention to the tasks of the project.

However, as we approach October, a new high season begins, and the main work in production needs to be redoubled. This significantly increases the workload on employees and reduces their involvement in the project.

As a result, if the project lasts for more than six months, by the end of the year there is a decrease in the activity and motivation of participants, as they are forced to switch to fulfilling their main responsibilities.

## Results

### 1. Creating a sustainable talent pool:

This made it possible to quickly appoint qualified employees to managerial positions as they become available. As a result, the time for the selection of candidates was reduced and the smooth operation of departments was ensured. 17 of the 26 graduates of the first stream of the Academy became managers in various departments and directions.

### 2. Development of leadership competencies:

Participation in the Leadership Academy and the Leadership Club provided employees with unique opportunities for personal and professional growth.

### 3. Increasing employee motivation:

Having a CEO scholarship has become a powerful motivational factor for employees. The opportunity to receive a monthly salary increase for meeting certain criteria stimulated employees to actively participate in corporate projects, increase productivity and introduce innovative ideas.

### 4. Strengthening corporate culture:

Projects aimed at developing leadership and supporting employee initiatives have contributed to the creation of a more cohesive and engaged team. The participants organized and headed various communities and quality circles, which allowed employees to share experiences, share ideas and jointly solve emerging problems. This strengthens the corporate culture and increases the level of trust within the company.

## Implementing a similar case a second time, what would you do in a different way?

**1 We immediately considered the problem with understanding the evaluation system.** In the first year, this caused confusion, as people did not understand how their projects were evaluated. We would initially introduce a system that takes into account both the economic and social aspects of the project, so that participants could not only present figures, but also show the emotional impact and motivation that their projects create.

**2 From the very beginning, we introduced the practice of creating short videos.** This would help the participants to better present their projects and demonstrate the results achieved. This approach allows us to take into account not only objective indicators, but also subjective ones, which makes the assessment more comprehensive and fair.

**3 Changed the work schedule and distributed the workload more evenly throughout the year.** In the first year, many participants "fell off" by the end of the project due to an increase in the amount of work in high seasons. We would have adjusted the deadlines in advance and distributed the load so as to avoid overloads at the end of the project.



## Which companies can benefit from your case?

Our case can be useful for companies that have a large staff and strive to develop talents among their employees for career growth. Our experience can also be useful for companies that face difficulties in hiring external specialists due to the specifics of their activities. The development of internal personnel reserves and training programs will help overcome these difficulties and ensure the necessary development within the company.

## What are non-obvious things that companies need to pay attention to when repeating your case?

Companies should pay attention to several non-obvious, but critically important aspects:

- **Matching promises and results.** It is very important that all the promises made at the start of the project are fulfilled by its completion. This applies not only to financial rewards, but also to career opportunities. Project participants should see that their efforts are truly appreciated and lead to the promised career growth and opportunities.
- **Transparency of the process.** Decisions on appointment to vacant positions should be transparent and objective. If the members of the personnel reserve see that the promised career opportunities are not being realized, and vacancies are occupied by people without objective reasons, this dramatically reduces motivation and trust in the project.
- **Support and protection of participants.** Managers and HR should actively support members of the talent pool, especially when opportunities arise for their career growth. It is important that they are ready to defend the interests and rights of the participants, showing that the project really works and brings real results.

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# How to grow from a startup into a company with a staff of 150 people and maintain the cultural code?

Case leader:

Zarrina Bekejan – HRD



## Short description

Citix is a Kazakhstani startup company, the first in the world to combine smart city technologies and digital outdoor advertising innovations in its products. The company was launched in 2018, having formed a unique corporate culture and a special approach to work.

In 2023, Citix became the leader in the digital out of home (DOOH) industry, and the number of employees increased **from 70 to 150 in a year**. This growth has created the need **to strengthen the adaptive culture and invest more time in integrating new employees**.

In 2023, the company also entered the international market — Turkey and the MENA region. This led to new challenges: in order to **build business processes and adapt them to the markets of new countries, it was necessary to clearly distinguish the functions of the founders and team members**, who previously combined many tasks, as is often the case in startups.

To do this, the company launched a transformation program in 4 areas: **differentiation of responsibilities, adaptation of employees, improvement of working conditions and implementation of changes** through tools: diagnosis of personal characteristics, profile report, personality type guide, coaching sessions.

The project cost the company **\$12,500** and brought impressive results: **the sales plan was exceeded by 18.5%, staff turnover decreased from 34% to 20%, the engagement rate increased to 81% in 2023, and in 2024 to 95.9%**.

## Detailed description

In the process of transformation from a startup to a large organization, we faced the need to adapt business processes to the international market, including the MENA countries (UAE, Qatar and Saudi Arabia) and Turkey.

**The main tasks were to separate functions and create systematic processes in order to move from the chaotic work of a startup to a structured enterprise.**



## Solution

We focused on preserving and unlocking the potential of the team, adapting employees, improving working conditions and implementing changes. Personality diagnostics, profile reports, management and coaching sessions became important tools in this process, which helped to solve problems and preserve the company's values.

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# 01

## Employee evaluation

To begin with, we evaluated team members and candidates to identify their strengths and areas that need to be developed. We used modern methods and tools:

- **Team coaching.** We invited a coach to establish communication with employees and work on individual problems of each. The choice of a specialist was not accidental: a coach is not only an expert, but also a third party who is able to evaluate employees neutrally, unlike HR.

Coaching sessions helped to better understand the individual characteristics and desires of employees. For 6 months, they received individual consultations and training to improve their professional skills and personal growth.

- **Diagnosis of personal characteristics.** We used MBTI diagnostic techniques and Gallup tools. These methods made it possible to determine the psychotypes of employees, their talents and work preferences, and helped to distribute roles in the team and find the most suitable candidates for senior positions.

**These practices have helped us improve communication, identify and develop talents, and create a cohesive and effective team.**

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# 02

## Profile report

Based on the results of the diagnosis, we provided each member of the working group with a separate report describing the results of their personality assessment. A coach prepared a profile report for 17 top managers, and then trained the HR team to provide reports for the rest of the employees.

---

# 03

## A guide to the type of personality

We have provided employees with a detailed guide describing their personal portrait, strengths, areas for development and motivation. This guide helped employees better understand their unique traits, which we described in the profile report, and use them to improve work efficiency.

The manual was developed by a neurocoach coach. It included MBTI techniques and neurophysiological approaches. The trainer trained the internal HR department in assessment techniques and tools; this allowed HR to independently diagnose and analyze the results.

## 04

### Recommendations for interaction with employees

We have identified suitable functional roles to reveal the potential of employees, identify motivational preferences and potential stressors. We also developed strategies to develop employees' business competencies; this optimized their roles in the team.

## 05

### Creating a psychologically comfortable environment

We have equipped a comfortable office with poufs, where employees could relax and discuss their problems and ideas in a relaxed atmosphere. This helped us to build proper communication at the initial stage and make the atmosphere at work open and trusting.

#### Outcomes

Thanks to the diagnosis of personal characteristics, we assigned employees to suitable positions:

- 1 Commercial Director.** The division, which works directly with customers and plays a key role in the business, did not have a commercial director. The company already had potential candidates, but we didn't know who would be better suited for this role. The diagnosis helped us identify the most suitable candidate. **After this appointment, the commercial division formed a strong top team, and the team immediately began to show significant success. Sales growth compared to 2022 was 92%.**
- 2 Head of Creative Production.** There was no clear leader in the department that develops advertising campaigns. Diagnostics of the personal characteristics of employees showed that there are underestimated talents in the team who are able to effectively lead this area. Based on the diagnostic results, we decided to make an internal promotion, appointing one of the employees to the role of head. This appointment proved to be a success: **the division began to actively develop and achieve significant results; this was an important step in our transformation. The number of commercials has increased from 6 to 53 per year.**

#### Time

6 months

#### Budget

The total budget of the project amounted to 5,806,533 tenge (~\$12,500). A significant part of the budget was spent on paying for the coach's work and paid versions of testing. There were also free versions that could show the big picture.



## Difficulties

### 01 **Using only MBTI to assess the personal characteristics of employees did not provide a complete picture of their competencies and capabilities.**

This led to some mistakes in the distribution of roles and responsibilities, which had to be corrected in the course of work.

Nevertheless, we managed to change the situation and thereby increase the productivity of the team. For example, at first we did not see the talent of an ordinary designer who often helped colleagues. The coach drew our attention to his work, and we decided to make him the head of the design team. Thanks to this, the team has increased its performance from 6 videos to 126 today.

### 02 **Due to the rapid and significant expansion of the staff, new team members have become more difficult to adapt and integrate into the process.**

The large number of new employees has led to an overload of the HR department and failures in communication and coordination. In addition to conducting personnel and differentiation of responsibilities, we needed to hire employees, telling them about their functions.

### 03 **Coaching sessions turned out to be more difficult and longer than we had planned.**

Some employees needed more time and support to develop competencies. The process was also slowed down due to the fact that significant time was spent on sessions of the CEO, director of transformation and HR director, and it was difficult to find the right time for everyone:

- CEO — 1.6 hours a day, 8 hours a week (20%);
- Transformation Director — 1.6 hours a day, 8 hours a week (20%);
- HR Director — 4.8 hours a day, 24 hours a week (60%).

In total, the working group spent 40 hours per week in sessions.

## Results

#### **1. Increased sales:**

- We have exceeded the plan for 2023 by 18.5%.
- Sales increased by 92% compared to 2022.

#### **2. Increasing the production of creative videos:**

- The number of commercials has increased from 6 to 53 per year.

#### **3. Saving the command:**

- Staff turnover decreased from 34% to 20%.

#### **4. Achieving a positive level of engagement:**

- According to the results of the first half of 2023, the engagement rate was 81.2%.

## Implementing a similar case a second time, what would you do in a different way?

**Conclusion 1:** Instead of using only the MBTI methodology to diagnose personality traits, we would add other proven assessment tools — for example, Gallup StrengthsFinder and Hogan Assessment. This way we would be able to get a deeper and more comprehensive analysis of the strengths and areas for employee development.

**Conclusion 2:** We would strengthen the feedback process, including regular meetings with employees to discuss their progress and provide additional recommendations. Coaching sessions can be conducted not only individually, but also in the format of group training. This way we would develop teamwork and improve communication.

**Conclusion 3:** We would increase the involvement of senior managers in the transformation process to ensure a better understanding and support for change at all levels of the organization.

**Conclusion 4:** We would implement a system for monitoring and evaluating the results of changes in order to track progress and adjust strategies in real time.

## What are non-obvious things that companies need to pay attention to when repeating your case?

- 1. Understanding the internal culture.** First, it is important to understand and feel the internal culture of the company. This will help to avoid mistakes and establish effective implementation of changes. This process can take from three months to six months.
- 2. Adaptation of methods.** Please note that the experience and methods that have worked in other organizations may not work in your company due to differences in culture and structure.
- 3. Understanding the multifunctionality of startups.** Startup employees often combine different functions; this complicates the definition of their roles and directions. Perhaps the team was used to doing a lot of tasks.

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# Open microphone is a tool for establishing communication and transparency in the company

**Case leader:**

**Leyli Ushurova** – HRD Choco



## Short description

Choco is the largest IT holding company in Kazakhstan, founded in 2011. The company started its journey with a project Chocolife.me, which later grew into an IT holding company with six different IT projects. Currently, the company is focused on the implementation of IT solutions for B2B. The company employs about 300 employees.

The startup was actively developing, attracting talents and experts in its field. Nevertheless, there were some problems in the company at the beginning: when management made decisions, employees, seeing potential risks in decisions, sometimes did not raise these issues, assuming that management took into account all possible aspects and did not consider it valuable to intervene. As a result, mistakes were made and the company suffered losses.

Then, the company decided to correct the situation by introducing **the rule of open dialogue**. Besides getting profit from mistakes that have not been made, transparency has increased in the company as a bonus, communication has improved and team spirit has strengthened.

Implementation of “An open microphone” based on an Internet system, where employees have the opportunity to leave questions and get answers to them, cost about \$ 2,300 and brought **communication in the company to a qualitatively new level**.

## Detailed description

There were employees in the company who, even realizing the possible risks or having suggestions, did not express their thoughts, believing that the management was better informed and made the right decisions. Over time, it turned out that such unspoken opinions could save the company a lot of money if they were voiced on time.

As a result, management realized the importance of employees openly sharing their ideas and warning about possible risks. Regardless of who is wrong – the founder of the company, the head or a colleague – the task of the team is to identify and discuss all kinds of problems in a timely manner so that the business benefits from this openness.

## Solution

That's how the idea of an **"Open Microphone"** came about – a platform for high-quality communication: acceptance of objections, questions, suggestions and ideas by management from employees. CEOs being busy do not always have the opportunity to talk to employees, and an open microphone is held on a regular basis (once a month every third Friday), which allows them to stay in touch and maintain proper communication in the company.

We wanted people to fearlessly express their ideas, ask their questions, and there was no concealment in the company. For sure, many companies have come across the fact that issues related to decisions made in the company are often discussed in smoking rooms or there is some uncertainty. This does not always lead to something positive, often the effect is exactly the opposite – employee dissatisfaction is growing, and at the same time opposition is emerging. This is also perfectly solved with the help of an **"Open Microphone"**, when every employee can safely ask any question and get an extensive answer.

The inspiration for the introduction of the **"Open Microphone"** was a case from the Google Aristotle project, where the key factors of successful teamwork were studied. One of the most important conclusions was the awareness of the importance of psychological safety: when employees can openly talk about their ideas and mistakes without fear of negative consequences, this contributes to better team work and reduces the risk of serious mistakes. We decided to implement this principle in our company, which became the basis for creating an **"Open Microphone"**.

Initially, the **"Open Microphone"** sessions were held through Zoom conferences, and questions were collected through Google Docs, i.e. the implementation did not cost any money at first. However, over time, we have developed and implemented our own Internet system, which has made the process even more convenient and efficient.

Questions are now collected in an online system where employees can anonymously or openly post questions, like and dislike, and write comments. And then, at the appointed time, all employees of the company connect to Google Meet, where managers turn on microphones and cameras, and answer all questions live. This solution not only simplified the sessions, but also made the process more transparent and technically more advanced.

**The most important thing is to show initiative and will on the part of managers to build a competent dialogue in the company. Fortunately, our founders value their company, invest in it and understand the importance of this open dialogue.**



## Step-by-step operation of the “Open Microphone”:

- 1 Posting a publication about the beginning of the collection of questions in the Internet system and Telegram group a week before the “Open Microphone”.
- 2 During the working week, employees write questions, like/dislike and leave comments on the questions.
- 3 Every third Friday, an “Open Mic” is held at Google Meet, during which 50 issues are discussed for 2 hours. This event is mandatory for everyone, so it is included in everyone's Google calendar with a link to Google meet. The event is held online to include all regional employees. On average, 150-180 employees attend the meeting. Some commands are connected from the same computer.
- 4 All questions are shown on the screen and read out.
- 5 At the end of the meeting, you can ask questions that arose at the moment and were not pre-recorded.

Later, following the meetings, we noticed that some questions were being asked several times, we created a list of frequently asked questions and answers, and published it in our Intranet system. It includes the following questions:

- **What should I do to get a promotion?**
- **How to become a shareholder of the company?**
- **How to get a parking space?**

In the Internet system, it is possible to write questions in anonymous and non-anonymous formats (specifying the name to whom the question is intended). By default, the system is configured to accept anonymous applications. But for us, the main task now is to achieve maximum transparency, so that employees openly indicate the name of who is asking the question.

**We have positive changes: if before 100% of the questions were anonymous, now 30% of them are with a name.**

## Time

The work in the Internet system took 2 weeks, taking into account the bug fixes.

## Budget

1,020,000 tenge (~\$2,222) – the cost for the paid hours to the developers who created “Open microphone” in the Internet system.

## Difficulties

Sometimes it happens that the manager answers an employee's question and the answer does not satisfy him. And sometimes the answers may be misunderstood and require additional clarification after the "Open Microphone".

## Results

**In addition to the fact that the company has become more transparent and open, over time, employees have become better at formulating questions, and managers have begun to give clear and understandable answers.** The ability to correctly express the right thought and choose the right words is an art, and the "Open Microphone" helps to develop in this direction, taking communication to a new level. We teach everyone to live in reality, avoiding distortions of information and misunderstandings. Managers often demonstrate work files and spreadsheets during responses, which helps to increase the level of understanding and trust.

## Implementing a similar case a second time, what would you do in a different way?

We would immediately make likes and dislikes. This idea was suggested to us later by the staff.

## Which companies can benefit from your case?

Our case can be useful to all companies that have difficulties with "psychological safety", as well as to those companies in which it is vital, i.e. related to health and life in general (mining, production, etc.).

Overall, building proper communication, I think, is relevant for all companies, therefore, the case will be universal.

## What are non-obvious things that companies need to pay attention to when repeating your case?

It may not be easy to introduce openness and transparency in a company, especially if the mentality of employees is that seniors should not be objected. Now there are more advanced and open-minded young people in Kazakhstan who easily adapt to the company, but still there are employees who used to work in government organizations or banks, for whom openness is still an obstacle.

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# How the Wellbeing Program helped retain employees and increase staff engagement?

**Case leader:**

**Elena Leader** – HR Head Kazakhstan, Central Asia & Caucasus



## Short description

Sandoz is an international pharmaceutical company, the world's leading manufacturer of generic medicines and biosimilars. It is one of the TOP 10 companies in the retail market. The company's products are represented in 140 countries around the world. The company's sales amount to more than \$100 million in the markets of Central Asia and the Caucasus. The company has been showing double-digit growth compared to last year for the past five years.

At the end of 2021, when the economies of the countries began to recover and the markets revived, **the turnover of “field” employees in the company increased sharply from 9% to 23%**. They were lured to higher wages, without offering career growth and development.

Sandoz has decided that it is impractical to do a counteroffer or “break” the market and the internal fair system. Therefore, they focused on **strengthening the well-being program**.

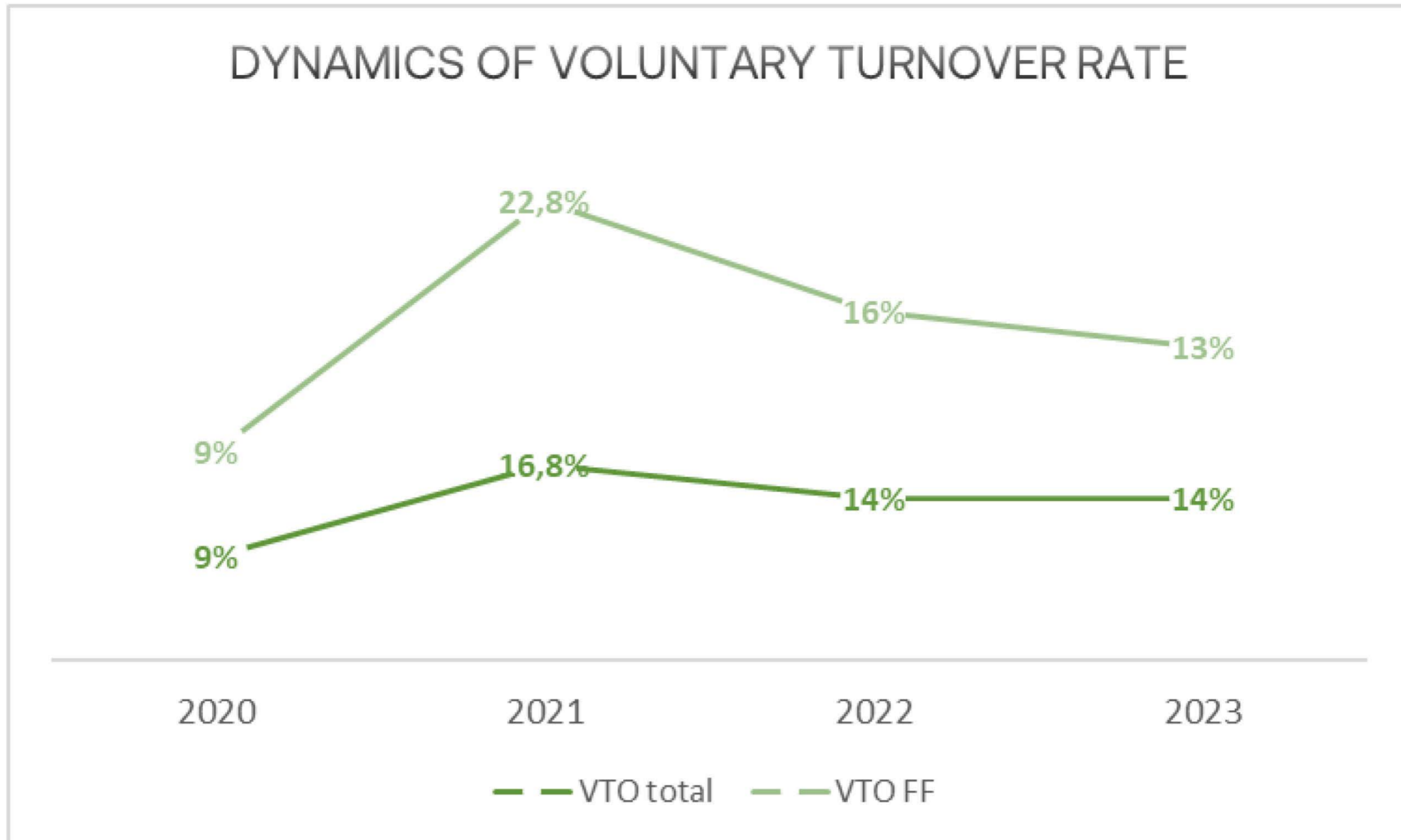
These measures have **reduced turnover by 1.6 times**, as well as significantly increased the indicators of engagement, well-being and inspiration and willingness to recommend the company.

## Detailed description

During the pandemic, the company significantly increased its sales, which had an impact **on increasing employee motivation and loyalty**. Moreover, due to the knockdown, Sandoz provided additional payments to employees so that they could work comfortably from home, and retained the bonus payment to field teams despite the fact that visits were not carried out. It was obvious that the employees were satisfied with the working conditions and material remuneration.

However, at the end of 2021, the activity of pharmaceutical companies in the market increased in terms of hiring staff after a lull in the covid period. This led to an increase in **employee turnover** at Sandoz in early 2022. If in 2020 the VTO (Voluntary Turnover) indicator was **9%**, then in 2021, it already amounted to almost **23%**.

**How the Wellbeing Program helped retain employees and increase staff engagement?**

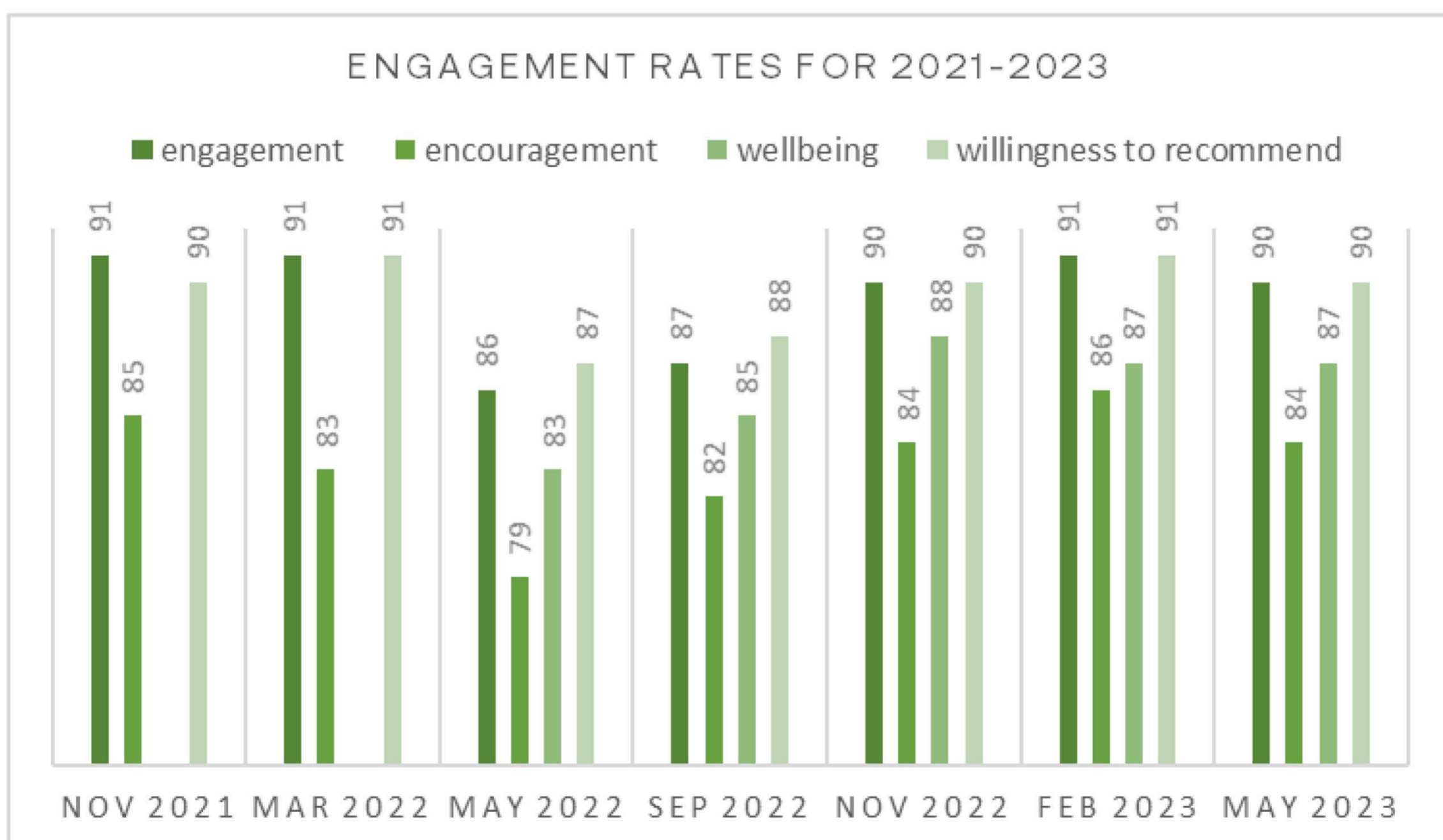


**After analyzing the indicators, we found out that the greatest turnover is observed among “field” employees (medical representatives), who are offered a large salary in the market, but without career advancement.**

We understood that:

- we cannot constantly make a counteroffer (it is not reasonable);
- this destabilizes the company's internal fair payment system.

In addition to the increased turnover rate, by the 2nd quarter of 2022, **the indicator of engagement and, in particular, indicators of well-being, enthusiasm and willingness to recommend the company as the best place to work decreased.**





## Solution

Thus, we have chosen a comprehensive approach to solving problems. The HR team has developed a draft corporate well-being program aimed at strengthening employee engagement and the attractiveness of the employer's brand.

We analyzed the activities, benefits, and conditions that we had at the time of the decline in indicators and structured them in four directions, around which we further deployed the activities of the well-being program, so as to also influence the retention of staff and the attraction of talent to the organization through the activities of the program.

Among other things, it was important for us to influence the vacancy rate in order to ensure the stability of the human resource, thereby having a positive impact on business growth.

When retaining employees, we did not rely on an endless increase in wages, but on motivating employees to develop in the company and social benefits.

**1 mental development and growth;**

**2 physical comfort;**

**3 working environment;**

**4 social influence (uniting people around different missions).**

### 01

- Financial advisors
- Legal advice
- Psychological support
- Coaching
- Mentoring
- Meditopia: Mindfulness
- Corporate training:
- Coursera, LearnLight, Alpina Publisher

### 02

- Healthy lifestyle consultations
- Educational sessions
- Flexible schedule
- VHI (voluntary health insurance) and sick leave compensation
- Compensation for parental leave
- Financial assistance in case of disability
- Additional vacation days
- Indoor activities (yoga, healthy eating days, step challenges, etc.)

### 03

- Relocation Policy
- Meal compensation
- Updated vehicle fleet for the field team
- Parking compensation for the field team
- VPN and mobile access to the systems
- Mobile phones for the field team \ mobile communication and Internet payment
- Coworking space in the office
- Theme days in the office
- "Snacks" in the office
- First aid kits and doctor's consultations

### 04

- Uniting employees in Employee resource groups around common ideas:
- Wellbeing activators
  - Social volunteering (cleaning in nature, sending humanitarian aid, etc.)
  - ECO (recycling) program
  - SDZ.Ed: Medical essentials (training employees in basic medical knowledge to know how to help relatives and friends)

We have consistently supplemented and developed the well-being program taking into account the planned budget from year to year.

# 2022

- 1. The design of the program.** In 2022, we formed the design of the program. At that time, we were already doing some activities that affect the well-being of our people. But it was scattered, not systematic. We evaluated the resources that we already have within the organization and that work to take care of the well-being of our people, and what activities we are already conducting. We asked our employees what people like, what wellbeing activities they visit.
- 2. Educational sessions about health.** In 2022, in the direction of "Physical comfort", we held sessions on human health: "Healthy cholesterol", "Immunoprophylaxis".
- 3. Activity.** Wellbeing weeks, "Foodie time" in the office (joint healthy breakfasts on Thursdays), "Cinema time" in the office, involved employees in outdoor activities (running a marathon, hiking in the mountains).
- 4. VHI (voluntary health insurance).** The conditions of voluntary medical insurance have been improved (the limit on dentistry and medicines has been increased by 20%).
- 5. Financial assistance** in case of disability (in case of full/partial disability) has been introduced into our compensation and benefits policy.
- 6. Relocation program.** In the direction of improving working conditions, we have implemented a relocation program so that employees whose relocation is initiated by the company experience less stress and we support them by creating more comfortable conditions when transferring to another territory.

# 2023

- 1. Team building and systematic work.** We have assembled a team of wellbeing activators from among the company's employees, who became initiators and coordinators.
- In the direction of "**Mental development and growth**", we
  - have implemented a support program for employees, where they have access to consultations from coaches, psychologists, financial and legal consultants, healthy lifestyle consultants, pet care consultants, mindfulness practice consultants;
  - provided employees with corporate access to the **Meditopia app** to practice mindfulness;
  - implemented a resource for the development of Alpina Publisher employees to read literature on mindfulness and growth thinking.



## How the Wellbeing Program helped retain employees and increase staff engagement?

3. In the direction of **physical well-being**, we continued to hold sessions for employees aimed at maintaining a healthy lifestyle and taking care of health:

- Workplace Safety Session,
- Healthy Body Session,
- Wellbeing weeks,
- Healthy Eating Week.
- We have created a Wellbeing guide for field staff.
- We held a challenge on the steps of "I can do it", went to the mountains and went to the Charyn Canyon.

### Time

**2 years (2022-2023).** The well-being program is our long-term project, so from year to year, we continue to develop it.

### Budget

**2022: \$3,800**

**2023: \$8,500**

### Results

The logic of the solution worked. By the end of 22 years, we managed to obtain the following results:

- The turnover rate in these areas decreased to 14%;
- engagement and well-being indicators have returned to previous levels;
- the term of work of an employee in the company, who was accepted into these positions through the new methodology, increased from 4.0 years to 4.3 years;
- the company's profit per person increased from 12% to 21%.

### Implementing a similar case a second time, what would you do in a different way?

Employee resource groups (a team of Wellbeing activators), which was created in 2023, could have been created earlier. Initially, we all organized HR functions with resources, without involving colleagues. However, when employees participate in activities, receive feedback and gratitude for organizing and conducting certain activities, this has a much more effective effect on the formation of belonging in the company. It is much easier to promote and involve employees in well-being activities when they hear not the opinion of HR, but the opinion of their colleagues.

## Which companies can benefit from your case?

Wellbeing is a trend, it is heard annually in the statistics of global research. In particular, given the theory of generations, the growth of competition, the speed of change, the candidate today is interested not only in salary. The topic of well-being and psychological security has strengthened in the approaches to the work of international business, but it has not yet been universally supported locally. So, our case will be useful to all those companies that seek to attract and retain the best talent, taking care of their well-being.

## What are non-obvious things that companies need to pay attention to when repeating your case?

Before launching, evaluate the characteristics of your target group – who these people are, what needs they have. It is not a fact that the content of our wellbeing program will be 100% suitable for any organization. There may be deviations depending on the field of business, the age of employees, etc.

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# How to organize the transformation of a company in a period of external uncertainties?



## Case leaders:

**Yulia Tsoi** – HR Project Manager and HRBP,

**Kymbat Turdalieva** – HR BP LLP "Food Solutions KZ"

## Short description

It is a restaurant chain, renamed after the departure of the McDonald's brand, in 2022 from Kazakhstan.

The company had **to rebuild all business processes, as well as recreate the reputation of a reliable employer.** During the period of rebranding and uncertainty, when the company remained nameless and the restaurants were closed, employees worried about the future of the company and their jobs, which caused great turnover in the company. This led to disorientation and demotivation of employees, many of whom came to work through association with a well-known brand.

Faced with a crisis within the company, management has developed an action plan covering management of change, modification of communication strategy, employee training and adaptation, employee retention and motivation.

**The action plan allowed the company to rebuild in six months, ensure 100% staffing, reduce turnover from 92% to 79%, neutralize negative consequences and increase the attractiveness of the company.**

## Detailed description

The decline in the company's reputation and high staff turnover became a significant problem after the departure of the McDonald's brand. These changes required a comprehensive approach to restoring the trust of both employees and customers.

**The current situation was caused by several reasons:**

- **the loss of associations with quality and reliability:** the new company name did not have the same fame as McDonald's, which led to the perception of the company as a local organization without the previous reputation;

- **reduced customer trust:** the transition to a new name and loss of recognition have made the company less attractive compared to competitors;
- **The influence of external political factors:** in the context of geopolitical and social tensions, uncertainty about the company's affiliation has increased distrust, especially among clients with Islamic values and those who are sensitive to political conflicts.

### Solution

Given that people have always been a priority, we have focused on working with the following areas: recruiting, adaptation, employee retention and the development of a corporate well-being program.

In the process of leaving the country, we faced the need for large-scale changes in the structure and processes of the company, which became a challenge for all employees. To deal with this, we have developed and implemented a detailed action plan that covers all aspects of the transformation.

## 01 Change management

To do this, a detailed action plan has been developed and implemented for each department. It included detailed instructions and a description of the necessary steps, which helped employees to clearly understand their tasks and roles in the transformation process.

- To coordinate all actions and minimize risks, **a crisis management group** was formed, headed by the CEO of the company together with the heads of key departments. This group dealt with the operational solution of emerging problems and ensured the coordinated work of all departments.
- **Weekly status meetings** were held to maintain control over the implementation of the plan and promptly respond to emerging difficulties. These meetings allowed the company's management to track progress, make necessary adjustments and ensure the successful implementation of the rebranding in the face of significant changes.
- **We conducted visits in all the cities of our presence, covering 24 restaurants, and had conversations with all the teams.** The survey results showed that before the brand left, 85% of managers and 82% of employees felt a lack of information and understanding of the changes. After that, this indicator changed by 95% and 93%, respectively, indicating a significant increase in the level of anxiety and uncertainty among employees.



# 01

The following steps have been taken to solve this problem:

- 1. Supportive visits.** The team of the Department of training and Special projects began to carry out supportive visits to restaurants in order to communicate vividly with employees. These visits were aimed at clarifying the rebranding process, answering questions and removing uncertainty.
- 2. Regular opinion polls.** Regular opinion polls have been launched to assess the level of anxiety and understanding of changes among employees. This allowed us to identify and address problems in a timely manner.
- 3. Payment for downtime and film demonstrations.** Downtime days were paid for to maintain employee moral spirit.
- 4. Free online training.** Free online training has been launched for all employees, which allowed them to continue to develop and maintain their qualifications in the face of changes. Platforms such as Lerna, Skillbox and GeekBrains are included.
- 5. Bonus points to attract subscribers.** Lotteries for employees were held on corporate pages on social networks, and the winners received branded prizes.

# 02

## Changing the company's communication strategy

In addition to the introduction of the Kazakh language, the strategy itself has become more focused on supporting employees and their involvement in work processes. These changes included:

- 1. Active involvement of the HR department in work processes.** The company has strengthened the participation of the HR department in the recruitment and recruitment processes, which made it possible to quickly respond to personnel needs. Now the central office is actively engaged in mass recruitment of employees, helping restaurant directors and HR specialists. This has become especially important in the context of staff shortages after the brand's departure.
- 2. Improving internal communication and accessibility of HR specialists.** In order to keep employees informed of the strategic goals and current state of the company, regular information sessions with top managers have been introduced, which are held quarterly. In addition, HR specialists were made available to promptly resolve employee issues, which helped to strengthen trust in the company.
- 3. Organization of psychological support for employees.** In response to the stress and uncertainty that arose during the transformation, the company has implemented a psychological support system. Employees got access to online consultations through a special platform, which allowed them to receive professional help at a convenient time for them. This decision helped restore trust in the company after a negative experience working with an internal psychologist.

## 03

### Training and skills development

In our company, 450 employees were trained at PACE training, which included the development of skills in change management, conflict resolution and stress management. The training was attended by employees of the central office, directors and managers of restaurants. After that, restaurant directors conducted similar training for other employees, thus ensuring their readiness for change. To reduce emotional stress and support employees during the period of changes, the following measures were implemented:

- **Conducting PACE training.** The training was aimed at preparing employees for change management, developing conflict resolution skills and reducing stress levels.
- **Open door policy.** We have implemented a policy that allows any employee to contact the CEO directly to discuss any issues or concerns.
- **The Personal Letter program.** For employees who prefer anonymity, a program was launched that allows them to ask questions or suggestions in writing, which also helped to reduce emotional stress and provide support in difficult moments.
- **The personnel reserve program.** To prevent the loss of important experience and knowledge, a personnel reserve program was created. As part of it, employees are trained in leading educational institutions such as KIMEP, EY Academy, PWC Academy, Skolkovo and Pritula Academy.
- **Adaptation of educational materials.** All educational materials have been adapted to the new realities, while maintaining all standards of service and food safety.

## 04

### Employee participation in the change process

During the rebranding, 15 employees of our company received an award from the head of the holding for special achievements. These employees demonstrated a high level of engagement and initiative, which helped to successfully implement the change process.

In the process of implementing the changes, we sought to actively involve employees in the development of a rebranding action plan. Instead of limiting their role to simply completing tasks, we gave them the opportunity to participate in decision-making, which significantly increased their responsibility and loyalty to the process.

To support employees at all stages of the rebranding, department heads were always available, providing transparency and prompt assistance. This created a sense of teamwork and avoided many problems related to misunderstandings and lack of information.



# 05

## Employee retention and motivation

For this purpose, a new motivation and loyalty program was developed and implemented, both in the central office and in restaurants.

### At the central office:

- **Improvement of working conditions.** New elements of the corporate Well-being program were introduced, including the exclusion of work conversations during lunch, the addition of an online psychotherapist and the creation of additional recreation areas. A remote work day was also introduced.
- **Social packages.** Existing elements were retained, such as an additional 4 days for vacation, a day off for a birthday, and payments for a VMI or fitness package. Additionally, a survey was conducted among employees, and based on it, payments for rehabilitation with the provision of documents were introduced.

### In restaurants:

- **The "Bring a friend" program.** To reduce staff turnover, a program was introduced that encouraged employees to recruit new employees.
- **Team-building activities.** Team building and corporate events were organized to strengthen the team spirit among the restaurant staff.
- **Technical improvements.** Projectors and speakers were installed in all restaurants for various events, such as late-night film screenings or visualized meetings, which improved communication and interaction in teams.
- **The program for the return of dismissed employees.** Previously, there was a rule not to take back employees who left the company. However, with the new loyalty program, those who left the company without disciplinary violations were now invited to return to work with bonuses.

Thus, a comprehensive and carefully thought-out plan allowed us to successfully rebrand and maintain a high level of professionalism and motivation among employees in the face of significant changes.

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## Time

6 months from the moment of the announcement of the brand's departure and before the opening of restaurants under a new name.

## Budget

About 5 million tenge ~ \$11,000. The funds were spent on organizing psychological assistance, organizing a marathon, automating the recruitment process, bonuses and indexing.

### Difficulties

- 1 The lack of a clear change management plan** has become one of the most serious problems. When the brand suddenly left the country, the company did not have a pre-prepared plan for the transition to a new brand or to manage this transition period. Instead of a pre-thought-out strategy, the team was forced to develop and implement new solutions in real time, which led to significant workload and stress. Employees were simultaneously engaged in a variety of tasks, including risk management, labor dispute resolution and adaptation to new conditions, which complicated the process of change.
- 2 The transition to the Kazakh language in communication and education.** Previously, all internal communication and training were conducted exclusively in Russian. This transition required the translation of all training materials and the adaptation of training, which added complexity to the management of the learning process and interaction with employees and customers.
- 3 The implementation of the HR bot** has proved difficult for employees who are used to conducting interviews live or over the phone. Adapting to new workflows and new types of reporting required significant efforts. Employees had to learn a new tool, which caused some difficulties and stress.

### Results

As a result, for the entire duration of the project, we received:

- we provided 100% staffing
- reduced turnover from 92% to 79%
- the percentage of employee satisfaction according to opinion polls increased by 15%, and for managers — by 12%, reaching 93% and 95%, respectively
- The conversion rate according to employee opinion polls after the introduction of automation also increased from 82% to 97%
- we managed to attract over 4,000 applications for a desire to work with us, which indicates the growing attractiveness of the company as an employer

### Implementing a similar case a second time, what would you do in a different way?

We also plan to rapidly develop a mobile application for employees, add safety blocks, checklists for restaurant visits, and convert electronic learning modules into a game format. Using the application will allow you to abandon the use of paper and cartridges, which will significantly reduce costs and make a feasible contribution to the environment.



## What are non-obvious things that companies need to pay attention to when repeating your case?

It is important to pay attention to the need to involve more employees in the change process. Instead of putting the entire burden of change on the shoulders of one or more people, it is important to distribute responsibilities and tasks among the broader team. This will not only effectively cope with challenges, but also increase employee loyalty, as they will have a deeper understanding of the essence of the changes taking place and the problems that the company faces.

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# How to build a continuing education system that meets business requirements?

## Case leader:

**Anastasia Kruch** – Director of the Talent Management Department



## Short description

Eurasian Resources Group (ERG) is one of the world's leading and most diversified companies in the field of extraction and processing of natural resources. The Group is represented on four continents and is one of the largest employers in the industry, and in Kazakhstan ERG is a third of the mining and metallurgical complex. Such important enterprises of the group as TNK Kazchrome, Sokolovsko-Sarbayaskoye Mining and Processing Production Association (SSGPO), Aluminum of Kazakhstan, Kazakhstan Electrolysis Plant (KES), Eurasian Energy Corporation (EEC), Shubarkol Komir, TransCom Transport Group, "3-Energoortalyk" and ERG Service are located in Kazakhstan/

One of the main problems faced by ERG is the problem of **providing businesses with qualified personnel**, since the requirements for employee competencies have been changing rapidly recently due to the introduction of new technologies and the transformation of technological processes. Colleges, as the main sources of qualified personnel required for the industry, often work according to old educational programs, the process of updating programs takes considerable time, and teachers often do not have practical experience. Businesses need significant efforts to additionally educate and prepare college graduates for independent work.

To solve these problems, **a comprehensive strategy** is needed, including the modernization of educational programs, support for the professional development of existing personnel, encouraging young people to choose a career in the industry, as well as strengthening cooperation between educational institutions, mining and metallurgical industry companies and the state.

For today, ERG has already invested **\$23 million** and continues to invest in the state education system, so that the training of specialists is focused on business tasks and prepares the necessary personnel for the target order.



### Detailed description

ERG, like a whole mining and metallurgical industry of Kazakhstan, faces a number of problems and difficulties related to the timely provision of business with personnel of the required qualifications:

- 1. A lack of qualified specialists.** One of the main challenges is the shortage of highly qualified specialists with knowledge and experience in the field of mining and metallurgy.
- 2. The leaving of experienced workers.** The aging of the personnel base, migration and retirement of experienced specialists, including under the early retirement program "55/7", implemented by the state since the beginning of 2024.
- 3. The need for constant updating of knowledge.** Technologies in the mining and metallurgical industry are constantly evolving, and employees must constantly update their knowledge and skills, which requires investments from both companies and the state in the system of continuing education, as well as close cooperation between business and the education system.
- 4. Problems with attracting young people.** The lack of attractiveness of the industry for young people due to difficult working conditions, the location of assets in remote settlements (single-industry towns, villages) with a high proportion of migration sentiment, especially among young people, as well as the lack of up-to-date and promising career opportunities.
- 5. The need for environmental adaptation.** In the context of increasing attention to environmental issues, training of specialists capable of implementing environmentally friendly technologies and production methods is required.
- 6. Regional aspects.** Uneven distribution of qualified personnel across the country's regions, which complicates the uniform development and balance of the mining and metallurgical industry.

### Solution

To solve these problems, we have developed a comprehensive strategy for the development of a continuous training system for the MM industry.

The system includes work in the following areas:

- 1 School:** career guidance, construction and modernization of schools, strengthening the STEAM direction.
- 2 College:** updating educational programs, paid internship, new equipment, ERG Skills professional skill contests, employment/
- 3 UNIVERSITY:** opening of departments at enterprises and branches/faculties in single-industry towns, joint professional development programs, a training program for ERG employees and their children at universities, paid internships and student practice.
- 4 ERG:** manufacturing practice, mentoring for young professionals, **Jastar ligasy** – youth movement, **ERG SU** (Corporate University).

## How to build a continuing education system that meets business requirements?

In support of the development of the school education system in the regions and cities of its presence, ORG, in partnership with local executive bodies, implements projects for the construction, modernization and equipping of schools:

- In 2023, 2 small schools were built in the Pavlodar region.
- In 2024, the construction of a school for 1,200 students in Rudny began, as well as the modernization of Gymnasium No. 5 in Khromtau.
- 10 schools are equipped with STEM laboratories.

### Much attention is paid to the professional orientation of schoolchildren:

- 300 career guidance teachers have been trained;
- the edu navigator platform has been developed;
- More than 27,000 students have completed career guidance;
- 4,744 teachers from 208 schools in three regions (Aktobe, Kostanay, Pavlodar) have completed advanced training in new methods in education.

In 2022, to strengthen systematic work with colleges, the "**Alliance of Colleges and ERG**" was created, which included 14 colleges. In 2023, 2 universities joined the Alliance and in 2024 – 1 university and 10 colleges.

The Alliance is a platform for implementing systemic changes in the training of personnel for MMI, uniting the employer, the education system and the supervising state and executive bodies into a single ecosystem.

### The main goals of the Alliance:

- **improvement of educational programs** taking into account the needs of the mining and metallurgical industry of Kazakhstan;
- **development of the practical component of training:** dual education, paid practice, equipment of the material and technical base;
- **formation of a pool of masters of industrial training**, experts from among the former employees of the Group ("Silver Age");
- **regular research** on the needs of prospective students in the industry.

To adapt and involve young people in the company, there is a comprehensive program aimed at attracting, adapting and engaging in corporate life in the company. Work with youth is built through the youth movement – **Jastar Ligasy**, which includes the following areas:

- 1 Corporate life and development.** Involving young people in corporate events, sports activities and opportunities for self-expression, which helps to create a full-fledged and interesting work environment.
- 2 Financial literacy.** Launching a financial literacy program to help young people manage their personal finances. (According to internal research, 80% of young people have consumer loans, and this reduces their quality of life).



- 3 An open dialogue.** Providing young people with a platform for open communication with the company's top management, which facilitates discussion of their problems and suggestions for improving working conditions, interaction, and development.
- 4 Support and interaction.** Organizing meetings and interaction with management, including with the CEO company, to solve problems and maintain feedback.

Throughout their career path in the company, employees undergo regular professional development at the ERG Corporate University. The Corporate University offers development programs not only in soft skills and management skills, but also MMI qualification improvement programs, which in turn provide businesses with all the necessary skills to achieve goals in accordance with the principle of continuous learning.

### Instructions for small and medium-sized businesses to train competent personnel:

#### 01 **Build business processes in the company to understand the target task.**

It is important that when working with colleges, it is necessary to predict the need for personnel in the context of 2-3 years.

#### 02 **Build a mentoring system in the workplace.**

- a) invest in the development of pedagogical skills;
- b) provide material or non-material motivation (title "Honorary mentor", additional training, additional payments, etc.);
- c) build a feedback system on the quality of mentoring.

#### 03 **Develop the HR brand of the company.**

- a) identify the target audience;
- b) show what benefits employees who work in your company (EVP) have;
- c) show production (field trips / open days, etc.);
- d) visit educational institutions and job fairs to form and strengthen the HR brand;
- e) work in the public field (through communication channels and social networks).

## How to build a continuing education system that meets business requirements?

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### Time

2022-2024

### Budget

\$23 million (including the construction of schools in the regions of presence).

### Difficulties

- 1) Implementation of changes in system processes requires **significant resources and investments** from the company.
- 2) **The education system is not flexible enough.** The system is centralized and does not have the ability to quickly adapt to the unique needs of enterprises, including that ones on a regional basis.
- 3) **Gig economy is our main competitor.** Now young people have the opportunity to choose from a huge number of new professions: marketer, SMM, account manager, work in delivery, in a taxi (so-called platform freelancers), etc.

### Results

- 1) A system of interaction with educational institutions has been built;
- 2) The speed of decision-making has increased due to the high level of trust in the company;
- 3) The opportunity to choose and employ the best students;
- 4) Recognition from other MMI companies and interest in cooperation.

### Implementing a similar case a second time, what would you do in a different way?

As a large company, we immediately started working with a large number of educational institutions and a large internal target audience (more than 60 thousand people), without focusing the project on the specific needs of individual enterprises. This is the next stage for us.



### Which companies can benefit from your case?

Our case can be useful for almost any company, regardless of size and industry. In our practice, we have developed many approaches that can be adapted and used by other organizations. For example:

- **Companies that want to attract and retain young people.** We have developed effective programs of interaction with students through the possibility of paid practices, internships, and summer work, which helps to establish a closer relationship with young professionals. These methods can be easily implemented in any company, especially if your goal is to attract young people and make them part of your team.
- **Companies with limited resources.** ERG allocates sufficient resources for these projects, being a socially responsible business. However, it is possible to implement similar projects for small and medium-sized businesses with the support of the state and public industry associations. For example, the mentoring program is supported by the National Chamber of Entrepreneurs of the Republic of Kazakhstan "Atameken".
- **Companies with difficult working conditions.** The MM industry is not the most popular industry today, especially for young people. But the employer's brand allows you to attract young professionals even at the stage of their education in educational institutions.

### What are non-obvious things that companies need to pay attention to when repeating your case?

It is important to pay attention to one non-obvious, but critically important aspect: **engagement at all levels of management.**

Firstly, it is important to involve both line managers and HR and TOP management. Secondly, cooperation is necessary. To implement our projects, we work closely with ministries, "Republican Association of Mining and Metallurgical Enterprises", National Chamber of Entrepreneurs of the Republic of Kazakhstan "Atameken", and other industry participants for mutual success.

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# How to retain and motivate employees when old tools no longer work?

**Case Leader:**

**Raykhan Abdrasilova – HRD CNPC-Kazakhstan**



## Short description

CNPC is a Chinese oil and gas corporation operating in 33 countries around the world. Within the framework of joint Kazakh-Chinese projects, more than 30 thousand employees work at enterprises with the participation of CNPC. The company has been operating in the oil and gas market of Kazakhstan since 1997. The CNPC management company employs about 150 people.

An annual assessment of the company's staff performance showed that over time, employee stimulation mechanisms such as salary increase, one-time payments, education programs and training, diplomas and letters of thanks have become less effective. The decrease in demand for such incentive tools is due to the fact that it is increasingly necessary to work with a generation of zoomers, who are quite difficult to motivate with established and generally accepted methods.

In this regard, the company has compiled a motivation map, within the framework of which the project "Work and tourist trip to China" has been developed in order to encourage the best employees who have made a significant contribution to the development of the company.

**As a result, following the implementation of the first pilot project, employees received additional motivation and loyalty. The company, in turn, received a new and effective tool for retaining talented employees in the company, thereby inspiring young ambitious employees to see new opportunities for development and maintaining work & life balance.**

## Detailed description

Employee motivation is an essential component of successful management. Ultimately, motivated employees not only increase productivity, but also improve the atmosphere in the organization, contributing to business growth. The use of various motivation methods inspires and supports the team in achieving the overall goals of the company.

Taking into account the fact that the current motivational tools require constant improvement and the introduction of new approaches, it became necessary to study this issue in detail.



## How to retain and motivate employees when old tools no longer work?

**1** We had a number of discussions and discussions with line managers of departments and employees of the company. As a result, the employees were interested in creating various interest clubs:

- club for the study and improvement of knowledge of foreign languages;
- field trips to nature in groups;
- development of cross-cultural communications through visits to historical monuments and attractions, both in Kazakhstan and abroad, understanding the traditions and culture of other peoples.

**2** The analytical analysis of the proposals led to a unified position, it became clear that employees need high-quality communication not only in the office, but also outside it:

- they were united by the desire to spend time traveling, excursions, etc.;
- At the same time, it was clear that the format of field team building (corporate events), the employees were definitely no longer interested.

**Taking into account the opinions of the employees, and at the same time, the capabilities of the company, a project was developed called a "Work-study tour".**

As part of the project, employees traveled in small groups outside Kazakhstan in order to:

- establishing business contacts
- visits to cultural and historical centers.

We assumed that the project would become an effective and efficient motivation tool **for retaining talented employees**, as well as a platform **for strengthening team spirit**, tolerance for traditions and culture of other nationalities, establishing friendly relations based on the principles of mutual understanding and mutual respect, and **developing cross-cultural communications within the team**.

## Difficulties

We developed a project plan and put it up for discussion back in the early 2020s, but the pandemic has made its own adjustments. The project has been frozen for an uncertain period. It was only in 2023, when the situation in the world returned to normal, that work on revising the project was resumed, and, as a result, the budget for implementation was laid down in the same year.

In May 2024, the project was successfully implemented. According to the results of the assessment of the staff's activities for 2023, 6 of the best employees of the company went on a foreign tour.

## How was the staff assessment conducted?

Employees in the company are evaluated based on the results of completing the tasks set for the year. Rating scale: A, B+, B, B-, C. Employees who completed all tasks on time, as well as made a significant contribution to the development of the company, receive A (these are our "stars").

## Distribution of employees after evaluation for work in 2023:

- 1 5% of employees
- 2 "B+" - 10%
- 3 "B" - 70%
- 4 "B-" - 10%
- 5 "C" - 5%

At the same time, additional selection criteria were developed for participation in the project.

## Criteria for selecting employees for a trip:

- 1) the employee has worked in the company for more than 3 years;
- 2) made a significant contribution to the development of the company;
- 3) completed all the tasks on time.

## Based on the results of the trip:

- Each employee returned not only rested, but also motivated and grateful enough for such an opportunity.
- Colleagues note that the relations between the project participants have become warmer and more friendly.
- Meeting with top managers of the CNPC head office, familiarization with the company's activities gave each participant inspiration. The excellent conditions created for the employees of the head office made it possible to understand how to improve the working environment and working conditions in our Kazakhstan office.
- Future project participants are looking forward to the upcoming tours.

## Time

During 2023-2024, technical details of the project were discussed: budget calculation and approval, development of tour directions – country and cities, program of events, as well as the choice of a company to implement the project in the host country.

## Budget

13,000,000 tenge/year (~ \$30,000: \$5,000 per 1 employee). Group: 6 people.  
Duration – 6 calendar days / 1 week with flights.



### Results

1. The study tour has become a new tool for employee motivation and retention, which will be carried out on an annual basis.
2. The project has become a competitive advantage in hiring employees (even now, when interviewing candidates, we are talking about this project).
3. The project participants have improved communication not only among themselves, but also with foreign colleagues, which contributes to improving work efficiency.

**Definitely, such projects are an incentive for the development of employees, their motivation in achieving their goals and objectives, improving standards of behavior, tolerance and mutual understanding in a cross-cultural environment, showing respect for the culture, traditions and values of other peoples.**

Undoubtedly, for the generation of zoomers, who are difficult to motivate, this project has become one of the most attractive. The meeting of the project participants with colleagues, conversations and presentations, emotions, inspired colleagues and motivated them. Every employee has a thought: "I want it that way too!" and waits for his opportunity to participate in the next rounds.

As for business metrics, today, the company's employees recognize that this project is one of the most attractive and best motivational tools.

Following the results of the pilot project-2024, the company's management decided to maintain outbound tours on a permanent annual basis, as one of the main effective and efficient tools for encouraging, motivating and retaining talented and valuable employees of the company.

### Implementing a similar case a second time, what would you do in a different way?

Taking into account the geography of the CNPC's presence and its representation in 33 countries of the world, when implementing the project in the coming years, we plan:

- 1) Visit large enterprises of the corporation in order to study the activities of enterprises in the field of human capital development.
- 2) Visit large deposits to consider the organization of work and recreation in the field; safety and health protection.
- 3) Expand the geography of the countries of the far and near abroad to visit enterprises operating within the framework of the international corporation CNPC.

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# ForteSensei: how the transfer and retention of expertise helps to ensure the continuity of business processes



## Case leaders:

**Anar Akhmetova** – HRD,

**Altynai Tashetova** – Senior Talent Expert

## Short description

ForteBank is one of the largest private banks in Kazakhstan, one of the top 5 banks in the country. The head office is located in Astana, and the branch network covers 20 branches and 100 branches in 34 cities and towns throughout Kazakhstan.

**Ensuring the continuity of business processes** is a strategically important issue for the banking sector and it has not been without difficulties. Some key operations were not systematized, which created the risk of losing critical information and expertise in the case if a narrowly focused specialist leaves, which could cause malfunctions.

To solve this issue, **the Forte Sensei expertise transfer program** was developed and implemented. The main goal of the program is to preserve and transfer knowledge within the bank in order to minimize dependence on a particular employee and ensure the continuity of business processes. As a result, **in 4 months, instructions for business processes were digitized, more than 100 mentors and over 160 successors were trained.**

## Detailed description

The following risk was identified in the bank: **critical business processes and knowledge that previously existed only among individual specialists were not documented and systematized.** The lack of structured storage and transfer of knowledge meant that the loss of one of these specialists could lead to serious reputational and financial consequences for the bank.



## **Solution**

We initiated the Forte Sensei project, in which we attracted 105 sensei mentors, each of whom was responsible for the transfer of knowledge and processes in their field.

The main task of the project is to systematize and digitize critical business processes that previously existed only by individual employees. This made it possible to create a structured knowledge base that ensures the continuity and stability of the bank's operation, even in the event of leaving of key specialists.

## **The process of program development and implementation:**

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01

### **Identification of processes**

We have identified unregulated processes without which the bank could not function effectively. These processes covered various areas of activity, such as IT, HR, management, legal support and other highly specialized areas.

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02

### **Identification of employees**

Together with the heads of departments, we identified employees with unique expertise in these processes. These employees received the title of “sensei”, and their task was to transfer their knowledge and experience.

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03

### **Determining the successors**

The heads of each division of the bank chose “successors” — employees who were supposed to adopt and assimilate the knowledge transmitted by the sensei.

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04

### **Motivation of mentors**

To support the motivation of the sensei, the project provided training, the presentation of branded gifts in the form of backpacks with the project logo as an incentive. At the end of the project, the sensei and their successors received badges with the individual project logo, and the successors were awarded certificates confirming their expertise in the operational role. .

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05

### **Learning key skills**

We have organized a training for sensei called “Adult Learning Features” so that they can effectively transfer their knowledge. The training took place in the format of a two-module program, lasting 4 days.

The main elements of the training included:

- **Adult learning skills.** Sensei were taught how to effectively transmit information and teach adults, taking into account the peculiarities of perception and assimilation of knowledge in adulthood. They were told how to structure the training so that it was understandable and accessible to their successors. The program also included training in the managerial aspects of the knowledge transfer process so that sensei could confidently and effectively perform their tasks as mentors within the framework of the project.
- **Writing instructions.** As part of the program, sensei learned how to properly prepare instructions and documents to be used by their successors. This included the development of clear and detailed plans that would facilitate the transfer of expertise.

## 06

### **Development of knowledge transfer and assessment tools.**

We have created forms for drawing up a plan for the transfer of expertise and assessing the readiness of successors. These forms made it possible to structure the process of knowledge transfer and make sure that the expertise was really transferred and assimilated.

**A multi-level assessment process** has been developed to track and monitor the quality of the transfer of competencies and expertise from sensei to successors:

- 1 The plan for the transfer of expertise.** Sensei (the expert) developed a detailed knowledge transfer plan, which clearly spelled out the deadlines and stages for completing the transfer of competencies.
- 2 Assessment by Sensei.** Sensei assessed his successor's progress on several criteria, including completing homework, test assignments, and participating in training. Sensei recorded how actively and successfully the successor mastered the transferred knowledge.
- 3 The role of the leader.** The final assessment of the transfer of expertise was given by the head of the department. He conducted a final interview with the successor, asking point-by-point questions about specific processes and tasks that were the subject of knowledge transfer. This made it possible to make sure that the successor really absorbed all the necessary information.
- 4 The responsibility of the head.** The head, as a third party, was responsible for making a decision on the completion of the transfer of expertise. If the supervisor believed that the successor had successfully mastered all the necessary knowledge, he accepted the evaluation results, thereby confirming that the expertise had been fully transferred.



## Time

The Forte Sensei project was implemented as a one-time program that lasted 4 months. During this period, all the key elements of the program were developed and implemented: sensei training, the process of transferring knowledge and evaluating the progress of successors. The project covered all stages – from initial planning to final evaluation of the results, which allowed a comprehensive approach to solving the problem and ensuring effective systematization of critical business processes.

## Budget

The training was conducted by the bank's internal trainers and did not require any expenses. The costs mainly related to the cost of purchasing branded products, gifts, which amounted to no more than **9,000 tenge per 1 person (\$20)**.

## Difficulties

During the course of the project, there was a problem with **insufficient motivation of the successors**. At the beginning of the project, attention was focused on the sensei, who received gifts, received training and were actively involved in the process. As a result, the successors receiving knowledge from the sensei found themselves in the shadows.

**Less attention was paid to the successors.** Despite the fact that the training was conducted during working hours and they were interested in receiving new expertise, they expressed a desire to receive more attention from the bank, for example, in the form of additional gifts, mentions in materials or participation in podcasts.

## Results

The Forte Sensei project achieved significant results by the end of the fourth month of implementation:

- 1. Systematization and documentation.** Key business processes have been successfully systematized and documented. This ensured the continuity and stability of the bank's operation, minimizing the risk of loss of critical information.
- 2. Transfer of expertise.** All sensei, with the exception of one, have successfully passed on their knowledge and experience to their successors. As a result, a significant part of the knowledge was effectively transferred and assimilated, which contributed to the improvement of processes within the bank.
- 3. Assessment and motivation.** A comprehensive assessment of knowledge transfer was carried out, including planning, interim and final assessments, which made it possible to verify the success of the transfer of expertise.
- 4. 104 mentors and 162 successors have been trained.**

## **Implementing a similar case a second time, what would you do in a different way?**

During the course of the project, we realized that we pay little attention to the successors. The focus was mainly on the sensei. Gifts were prepared for them, podcasts were held, and we did everything to fully involve them in the project. However, the successors to some extent remained out of our field of attention. By implementing a similar case, we would take into account the interests and needs of all participants, including the successors.

## **Which companies can benefit from your case?**

Our case will be useful for organizations with extensive operational processes, such as banks and large manufacturing enterprises. It is especially relevant for companies where the loss of specialized knowledge can lead to serious disruptions. This solution is also suitable for organizations where experienced employees must transfer their knowledge to young colleagues, thereby ensuring continuity and stability of work.

## **What are non-obvious things that companies need to pay attention to when repeating your case?**

It is necessary to clearly understand which business processes or employees will be included in the project, as well as what requirements are imposed on them. Well-formulated criteria determine the success of the project and will help to avoid uncertainty and problems in the process of knowledge transfer.

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