

The more digital we become the more human we have to be

bpost is a company undergoing a digital transformation. The letter makes way for online services. Artificial intelligence, robots and analytics seem to be fundamentally changing one of the oldest and most recognizable services in the world. Is there still a future for people at bpost?

For 40 years, management gurus have been predicting the end of the organization and the career as we know it. But nobody can predict the future. And researchers Osborne and Frey, who made world headlines in 2013 with their research stating that 47 percent of all jobs were threatened, now indicate that they were misunderstood. More recent research by Frey confirms that technology also creates new and different jobs.

This is the essence: what future jobs will look like is difficult to predict, but services will always be a people business. After all, jobs change as new technology presents itself. That change is continuous. We may be talking about AI, robots and analytics with awe today, but 30 years from now we might very well be looking back on it with a smile.

Because whoever believes that we are now experiencing a profound revolution, should imagine how people felt when they sent letters with the first ships to the new world in America or Australia. How world leaders gave a message to humanity on a silicon disc when landing on the moon. How a postal war between West and East Berlin made sending letters impossible during the Cold War.

We do not live in a unique time of major transformation. That would imply that after this time of major change there will once again be a moment of calm, of business as usual. That will not happen. Because each of us can only participate in a limited part of history, it always seems like we are living in the most unique of times. Because technological changes seem to be succeeding each other faster today, the biggest challenge is to ensure that people keep on learning.

How do you organize work so people can keep on learning? The recipe is the same recipe that you use to organize motivational work, namely the three C's: Career, Connection and Cause.



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business psychologist

Career means that you design careers in which people have a long-term perspective, in which they feel they are making progress and they are getting somewhere. People need psychological safety before they take risks to experiment and learn. They must be given the opportunity to build an identity; if you do not know who you can be in the future, you will not be willing to invest in learning.

Connection means that learning is not an individual process, but is embedded in the environment and driven by others. Man is a social



47%

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animal. Therefore, as an organization, you have to invest in a rich feedback environment, where not only managers give feedback. People need to be encouraged to reach beyond the limits of their position, their team and their company to develop social networks. Leaders challenge people by making a real connection, by listening, asking questions and coaching. Learning is only possible in a team where people feel psychologically safe to experiment with new ways of working, where they can discuss matters and where they can occasionally fail.

Cause means that people know why they learn, how they can transcend themselves. How does their job make a difference for others? That does not have to be a higher purpose, set by the organization. People can find meaning in their work in all sorts of ways. But without meaning and the chance to determine for themselves how they contribute to this world, there is little motivation to keep on learning.

There is no simple formula for lifelong learning. It requires an organization that focuses on people with their own identity, wishes and dreams. That means that the more digital the company becomes, the more human we have to be.

Frederik Anseel,
business psychologist

Since November 2019, Frederik Anseel has been Professor of Management & Associate Dean Research at the University of New South Wales Sydney (Australia).

“Short-schooled or not, at bpost everyone is given opportunities”

How attractive is bpost as an employer? How does bpost find talented people? And especially: how does bpost deal with a tight labour market, in a sector that is transforming at the speed of light? We ask Lien Ardies, project manager for employer branding at bpost.

How would you describe bpost as an employer?

“We are an inclusive employer and encourage diversity. At bpost everyone who wants it is given opportunities and the space to grow, everyone has a place. In addition,

As one of the Belgium’s largest employers, bpost plays an important role in society. Is that an important attraction factor for candidates?

“Absolutely. Our postmen - literally - bring the news. But we also deliver added value in sorting centres, post offices and head office - from the smallest stamp to the largest parcel. That impact appeals to our candidates.”



“My job is so much more than a paycheck”

Mohammed Mezyan has been living in Belgium since 2017. He started working at bpost through an Individual Vocational Training (IVT). Team leader Tom Tulfers: “Mohammed went to the post school for a month and accompanied an experienced post-

man. Now he still gets help every week from a language consultant who helps him with Dutch.”

After his IVT, Mohammed Mezyan was offered an open-ended contract. “We are very pleased with Mohammed,” says Tom. “He is independent and always comes to work with a smile.”

An IVT often means that you have to process a lot of information in a short time. Today, Mohammed is happy that he didn't give up: “All beginnings are difficult. But if you enjoy doing something, you do your best for it. The supervisors explain everything with clarity and they constantly motivate us. We are a close team: we help each other out.”

His job at bpost means a lot to Mohammed: “I get so much more out of it than just a paycheck. I was welcomed here with open arms and wanted to give something back. Now I can make a contribution to this country and I enjoy a better life.”





Thanks to my traineeship I found my place here at Sales & Marketing”



After studying Applied Economics and Strategic Management, Emily Decloedt started a traineeship at bpost. “Why bpost? It is a Belgian company with international opportunities and exciting courses. Everything I was looking for in a job, I found at bpost.”

“bpost offers you a lot of opportunities, as long as you are assertive enough to seize them. I really wanted to organize the trainees’ graduation event, and I was allowed to do so. Undertaking things yourself is really encouraged. That’s what I find so great at bpost.”

During her traineeship, Emily had to change position every eight months. “I worked at Finance, Operations and Sales & Marketing. At the last department I really felt at home. I would never have ended up in that department if it wasn’t for the traineeship.”

“I also had the opportunity to teach for a week at the pop-up university of WeLoveBXL. We introduced disadvantaged young people from Molenbeek to the business world. Being able to do something like that as a young employee is a real treat.”

in 2019 we focused on our values as an employer. More than ever, the employee is key. We want our employees to remain enthusiastic and show that together we play a major role in society.”

How does bpost express that in its employer branding?

“Our story is a we-story, because bpost is a brand we are all proud of. Moreover, we notice that our external reputation as an employer is growing stronger. We distinguish four important target groups on the labour market: starters and trainees, specialists for our head office, people who ensure behind the scenes that all shipments arrive in the right place on time and people who are closer to customers such as the postman or the post office employee. Every group has specific needs. That is why we align our approach with the target public.”

What does that mean in concrete terms?

“We look for the preferred channels of potential employees and only deliver messages that interest them. Experience and research thought us what drives them to apply for a job and stay with bpost. We build our segmented approach based on that. We appeal to a potential postman with assets such as freedom and working outside, a young starter with innovation and the opportunity to do great things. There is one common thread: we all go for a positive impact on society.”

Do bpost’s employees contribute to the its employer brand?

“They certainly do. Our employees are even our most important target group. We only succeed if we get them to believe in our story and if they want to tell their own story. We have around 26,000 employees in Belgium, and they are all bpost ambassadors in their own way. If only by sharing their experiences with friends and family.”

What kind of opportunities are given at bpost employees?

“We are the first employer for short-schooled people. That applies to 75 percent

of our employees. And people who have missed opportunities get the chance to give shape to their ambitions. We are very innovative in that field: employees can obtain their high school diploma through us, give a completely new turn to their career, try new things and refine their talents. All of it through on-the-job coaching, self-study and training.”

What kind of initiatives have you created?

“We offer traineeships to our office starters. Graduates can participate in different projects in different departments during a two year period. They learn quickly, discover the diversity of our company and improve their language skills. We created a solid package of growth initiatives for every target group.”

Also for employees without a diploma?

“Indeed. With FutureMe, we give them a chance to grow. It’s a two-, two-and-a-half-year with a mix of general and specific subjects. Employees study in their free time, both online and in the classroom. We look for the best school and pay all costs. This can be quite intensive for those employees. We give them the key. It’s up to them to open the door.”



“We are convinced that we will all win if our employees can show the best version of themselves.”

Lien Ardies,
projectmanager employer branding at bpost



“The best decision I have ever made”

Shara Nijs started her career in the hospitality business. But when her parents' pub closed, she looked for a new challenge: “I didn't have a secondary education diploma and wanted to rectify it. So I started looking for a job that I could combine with my studies. bpost's FutureMe programme proved to be the ideal solution.”

In addition to their job, employees take online classes via FutureMe so they can still obtain their diploma. “During the week I worked as a postwoman, in the evenings and the weekends, my study books were my closest companions,” says Shara. “It was intense, but after two years I had my secondary education diploma.”

Shara's diploma paved the way for further education in graphic design: “That really is my thing. I took a one-year career break to study full-time. With my second diploma I started my own small

graphic company as a secondary occupation, while I was still working half-time as a postwoman.” Then Shara had the opportunity to follow a tra-

jectory to become a team leader: “In the meantime, I have been working in that position for a year, and it's the best decision I have ever made.”



“bpost is an employer with a heart”

James Stafford was a postman in Bruges when he got a cyst and an infection in his leg. And what did the doctors say? They said he needed surgery, followed by an intense rehabilitation. And after that came a very bad surprise: he could forget about riding a bike for the rest of his life.

“Fortunately I found another job at bpost,” says James Stafford. “I entered a reintegration programme and immediately received a lot of support from my superiors. They actively looked for a solution that fitted my situation.”

After a training period, James became a truck driver in Ghent. “I learned all the tricks of the trade - while being paid by bpost - and obtained my category C driver's license. I now work the night shift. A very different regime than before, but I feel happy. Moreover, I have more contact with colleagues.”

“For me, bpost is an employer with a heart. My mother's health is deteriorating and I want to be there for her. That is why I chose to work part-time over the coming period. And I am very grateful for the fact that bpost was so very understanding about my decision.”

Are there also people without a diploma who want to continue growing?

“Yes! They can sign an IVT contract (an individual vocational training contract). It is ideal for learning the business. When you sign an IVT with us, you always have a supervisor who will guide you. The focus is on learning and mastering the language, to limit the uncertainty factor at the start of your career.”

Why are all these options so important for bpost?

“We are convinced that we will all win if our employees can show the best version of themselves. This includes many opportunities, contemporary employment conditions, and strong internal mobility to grow in all possible directions. The world and our sector may be changing fast but we give our employees a certain peace of mind: bpost is there for you, your job happiness and your well-being.”

Sustainable procurement: yes, we can!

With its exemplary function in mind, bpost focuses on making its corporate culture and processes more sustainable. In its procurement policy too, people and the environment play an increasingly important role.

As one of the largest employers in Belgium, bpost plays an important social role. Its ecological choices regarding buildings, energy and waste management clearly show it. But in its procurement policy too, the sustainable reflex is never far away. "We are, for example, strongly committed in making our fleet more sustainable by purchasing e-bikes, alternative means of transportation, double-deck truck trailers and electric vehicles, and we are examining alternative fuels," explains CoE Manager Procurement Joyce Drooghmans. "That is not unimportant, because together with the increasing number of parcels, volume is also increasing and we can absorb the growth."

Code of Conduct

"bpost strives to establish a sustainable code of conduct that is supported by our suppliers. To determine whether they actually respect this, they are assessed by an external and independent partner. An example: local control agencies see to it that our uniforms in Bangladesh are produced in accordance with the applicable legislation and the bpost code of conduct. Compliance with this code of conduct will increasingly play a significant role in identifying and collaborating with potential suppliers.

Our purchasing policy also aims to meet the changing needs of consumers. For example, we will review the procurement strategy of the packaging (for example envelopes and boxes) sold by bpost, specifically with regard to quality, innovation and sustainability. The packaging market is constantly evolving and we want to capture existing innovations in order to purchase packaging that meets both the consumers' wishes and our sustainability strategy."



"Compliance with the code of conduct on sustainability will increasingly play a significant role in identifying and collaborating with potential suppliers."

Joyce Drooghmans,
CoE manager
procurement at bpost

Achieve results together

"Every sustainability project has an impact on multiple departments at bpost. That is why we always work in cross-functional teams. It is important to involve all employees closely in the plans. We try to increase their level of expertise through training and education. We also open these training courses to all our stakeholders, including our suppliers and partners."

"The procurement department of bpost is linked to relevant networks with regard to sustainability such as Circular Flanders, Green Deal Achats Circulaires Wallonie and Procura+. "Procura+ is an initiative of European government agencies that focuses on sustainable and innovative procurement," says Joyce Drooghmans. "It encourages companies to work together. We ourselves encourage our employees and other stakeholders to participate in events and projects of these supporting networks."



Jean-Marc, the hero of everybody's tour

In November 2019, Tom Boonen was the voice behind a campaign video called the 'Champion of everybody's tour'. It was an ode to the postman, who, rain or shine, delivers his letters and parcels just like a cycling champion aiming for the finish line. We followed such a champion. For eighteen years now, Jean-Marc is doing his daily round, his Tour of Rèves.

It is Wednesday. At 8 o'clock we arrive at the bpost sorting centre in Fleurus, near Charleroi. Between the snowflakes we already saw the huge building from the motorway. Inside, our two pairs of eyes are not enough to absorb all the activity: parcels fall into trays, scanners are squeaking frantically, postmen come and go. The smell of paper and cardboard tickles our nostrils. We truly are in the backstage of mail delivery.

Team leader Yves Jordens greets us. Despite the hard work, there is an atmosphere of camaraderie in the Mail Center. The employees laugh and joke. They even joke about cranky postmen. About 90 people work here in Fleurus. Jean-Marc is one of them. He is 45 and has been with bpost for 24 years. He approaches us with a broad smile. He always starts his day - at half past seven - by greeting all his colleagues. "A habit that only makes him more popular," says his chief. "He has a good word for everybody and an eternal sincere smile."

Jean-Marc became a postman more or less by coincidence. On May 2, 1996, he was deployed as a replacement at the Frasnes-lez-Gosselies post office. He has remained loyal to his postal uniform ever since. "Being a Frasnes citizen myself, I began in the neighbourhood where I lived.

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"A good postman is versatile, sympathetic and has respect for his customers. Of course, a good sense of direction is a bonus."

After just two days I started my rounds. In the end I stayed in Frasnes for six years, after which I went to Les Bons Villers, where I have been delivering mail for eighteen years now in the borough of Rèves. In my opinion, a good postman is versatile, sympathetic and has respect for his customers. Of course, a good sense of direction is also indispensable."

Jean-Marc's workspace is no larger than three square meters, just enough space to turn around his own axis. "In the early days, a postman still had to sort the mail



“Over time, some residents have entrusted me with the key to their gate or garage. If they are not at home, I can leave their parcel in a safe place.”

by street and then by house. Now my colleagues have already sorted the mail before my arrival. All I have to do is pick it up and put it in the bins before I leave on round. It is a great advantage that you only have to perform one single action.” Jean-Marc’s movements are fast, precise and it all seems to be automatic. “We work with a colour code. Red indicates the streets, while yellow represents the place where I stop my van to distribute the mail.”

In his early days, Jean-Marc delivered four to five parcels a day. He put advertisements in all mailboxes once a month. “We delivered the mail on foot or by bicycle, sometimes by moped. We used a van to deliver large volumes. Nowadays we do everything by car and you need racks to store the parcels. This morning is not too bad: 25 parcels is very little. During the

Holiday Season it can mount up to three containers a day. The great evolution of our profession lies undoubtedly in the increasing number of parcels.”

The big clock in the depot indicates just after 9 o’clock when Jean-Marc is about to load his van. He puts on a sweater, jacket and cap and takes a striking bunch of keys. “Rèves is a wealthy municipality with 90 percent villas. I’m lucky to have been doing the same round for almost twenty years now. In time, some residents have entrusted me with the key to their gate or garage. If they are not at home, I can leave their parcel in a safe place. I always leave a note: Attention, parcel. Signed, Jean-Marc. With a smiling face. That is a habit of mine.”

With his fully loaded van, Jean-Marc takes to the country roads for a tour that ends around 4 PM. The bond he managed to forge with ‘his’ inhabitants earned him - rightly - the nickname ‘Mayor of Bons Villers’. Everywhere the faces of the inhabitants light up when they see ‘their’ postman arriving. Also at Nelly’s place, where Jean-Marc stops every Wednesday for a cup of coffee. “A tradition that started about four or five years ago,” Jean-Marc recalls.

Being a postman means hard work. Fortunately, there are still people who, like Jean-Marc, give meaning and a human dimension to this beautiful profession.

