

KANTAR

Looking Ahead

Preparing businesses for the future of work





Growth starts now

The past year was fraught with disruptions as the pandemic rippled across home, work, and social life. Worse yet, COVID-19 disproportionately affected minority groups and exacerbated gaps in equity, education, achievement, and opportunity. Even now, with the pandemic gradually coming under control, the future feels more uncomfortable than ever.

The shift to remote life has accelerated feelings of loneliness, mental strain, banality, and disheartenment—all sizeable concerns when exploring employee engagement in a hybrid work model while preparing to measure up to an evolving definition of productivity.

We've jumped decades ahead for virtual work situations but have yet to look beyond short-term solutions for accessibility, privacy, and security, much less understand the long-term effects of this rapid shift.

While these topics may seem unsolvable in the current environment, let's not forget that we've been here before. We know how disruptions work, so we can start planning for the future amidst these disturbances.

As you think about the future implications of the pandemic, consider the following.

Prioritizing People



Takeaway

Move beyond passive monitoring and management of working time, technology accessibility, or the ability to 'shut off.' Provide more tangible means of holistic support, such as reformatting development opportunities or putting more emphasis on alternative metrics that better align with changing views of success and accomplishment.

Has your business considered how employees are being impacted differently and do you have relief systems in place to offer meaningful assistance?

What's the story?

To better understand the impact of shifting to a work-from-home (WFH) environment, productivity has been widely discussed and tracked. For the most part, business leaders have found that employees are just as productive, if not more so, than they were pre-quarantine. Though results vary by industry, research shows that this holds true regardless of task—employees report similar productivity performance across both administrative and collaborative tasks.

Though these results are reassuring for businesses looking to reduce office footprint and provide greater flexibility, there remain distinct inequities that must be considered—especially for employees in single-income

households, in hard-hit urban environments, or among minorities, particularly women and people of color.

For instance, when asked about emotional responses to the current environment in which they work and live, people in vulnerable, typically diverse, communities share a common sense of confusion that is less true of White non-Hispanics. African Americans feel more uncertain and lonelier. Hispanics are more overwhelmed. Asians feel more fearful.

Burnout from mental, emotional, and physical fatigue due to prolonged periods of stress is a cause for concern. But there is now a new type of exhaustion born of apathy, demoralization, and dissatisfaction from feeling underappreciated and thus under-supported by employers.

46%

of urban residents say COVID-19 has had a negative impact on their mental health, versus 38% suburban residents and 28% rural residents.

AMA

33

year low

Drop in women's participation in the labor market over the past year, with another two million women considering leaving or downsizing their careers

Barrons & McKinsey

69%

of Latinos say they or someone in their household has had to take a pay cut or has lost their job due to COVID-19, versus 47% of all U.S. adults.

Pew

Enabling Flow

Takeaway

Facilitate better flow by providing ways of working, new tools or additional training that reduces pain points and friction and provides greater seamlessness throughout the workday.

This could mean leveraging behavioral trackers to help employees regulate their energy and focus, investing in more intuitive tools or anticipatory search solutions—e.g., within internal networks, chats, and emails— as well as investing in products that focus on risk mitigation.

Are leaders in your business confident teams have the skills and technologies to help them focus and cut out the noise, streamline their choices and keep their information safe?

What's the story?

There has long been a love-hate relationship between technology and humans. This has become heightened over the past year as employees feel the need to stay plugged-in to remain connected, which is paralleled by the worry that unwinding requires disconnecting. One of the few silver linings of the pandemic quarantine has been a growing feeling of an improved relationship with technology as employees have raised their skills and taken on troubleshooting themselves. However, this does not mean employees feel fully equipped to focus their attention, to make timely choices, or to handle security and privacy threats. The greater use of technology required by WFH has led to an increase in employee distractions. There has been a rise in both low-frequency noises—those that make up our daily soundscape—and intermittent noises—those that increase or decrease rapidly without warning.

Both are becoming more difficult to cancel out and both can hurt an employee's ability to focus.

The challenge of WFH technology also impinges on issues related to attaining information for autonomous decision-making. As individuals work to reduce distractions by turning off emails and chat functions or by flexing their schedules to find headspace, they are unable to share the critical knowledge and context for those looking to make timely decisions.

In addition to distractions and demands on attention, the security risks associated with remote working have grown rapidly over the past year, which has greatly impacted both employees, through lost time and energy, and businesses, through costs for correcting security breaches.

71%

of senior business leaders say intelligent automation is increasing employee satisfaction and 72% say it is decreasing stress levels in the workforce.

Pega 2020, Future of Work

57%

of Americans say they are concerned about their privacy when the use video-chat software like Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Google Meet, etc.

Deloitte Workforce Strategy

47%

of employees fell for a phishing scam due to at-home distractions

Tessian



Takeaway

Take a long-term view of balancing digital and human connections. Remote, hybrid, and on-site teams are likely to crave real-life experiences for things like collaboration, training, and socializing, especially in spaces that have meaning for local teams. However, online bonds formed across colleagues will remain important, particularly when in-person meet-ups are not possible. Agreeing on a proper cadence for real-life versus virtual meetings will help rebuild personal bonds and deepen a productive and satisfying work culture.

What is the business, from the top down and bottom up, doing to facilitate purposeful connections among teams?

What's the story?

Since remote working became the norm during the pandemic, feelings of isolation and loneliness have been creeping up. Video calls, virtual hangouts, and online forums lost their luster. They came to feel artificial or even forced. This leaves many employees—even those who have fully embraced a remote style of working—struggling to connect with colleagues and company culture.

This longing for belonging concept is not new. People have long sought communities that share their interests,

values, and beliefs. However, in today's world it's not just about belonging. It's about making meaningful connections that go beyond mere involvement and acceptance. The inability to feel connected in a meaningful way will have consequences for businesses in terms of retention and recruitment. If companies are unable to facilitate greater intimacy and more purposeful relationships, the long-term effects may be a significant decline in engagement, and thus in productivity as well.

35%

of Americans say their mental health has gotten worse since before the pandemic.

Kantar MONITOR

50%

of WFH employees say they are struggling to connect to company culture.

Cushman & Wakefield

45%

of Americans say that as a result of the pandemic they cherish intimate relationships more. Millennials are slightly higher at 50%.

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