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Post-Pandemic Guide for People Leaders

Practical steps to deliver exceptional employee experience in the new normal

Executive Summary

There's no going back to the old ways

The Big Picture

As COVID-19 ebbs, restrictions loosen, and companies start to think about returning to old ways of doing business. But there's no going back. The changes pandemic brought—such as hybrid work, people-centric HR processes, and an increased role of technology—are here to stay. This ebook will provide actionable advice on transitioning to the new normal without sacrificing culture, productivity, and competitive advantage.

On New Year's Day in 2020, nobody had a clue that the year would prove to be the most challenging of their lives. By February, a coronavirus had infected thousands of people in China. The virus then spread quickly to other countries, and on March 11, WHO declared it a pandemic.

The outbreak shook the world. Entire countries went into lockdown. Millions of people lost jobs. Gallup estimates the toll to be fourteen times larger than the financial crisis. Businesses scrambled to stay operating with employees working from home. But thanks to technology, employers soon found a footing.

Fast forward to today, we've got high-quality vaccines, and almost half of the US population fully vaccinated. Local governments have eased restrictions and vaccinated people don't have to wear masks outside. As a result, some employees have started returning to the office, giving rise to hybrid work. Still, many of the changes that the largest experiment in the way we work have brought will stay with us.

COVID-19 crisis worsened an existing mental health problem. Financial hardship, anxiety, increased workloads, and closed schools took a toll on employees' mental well-being. 42% of them said having experienced mental health issues since the remote work began. HR leaders need to recognize the importance of employees' mental well-being and provide the necessary support.
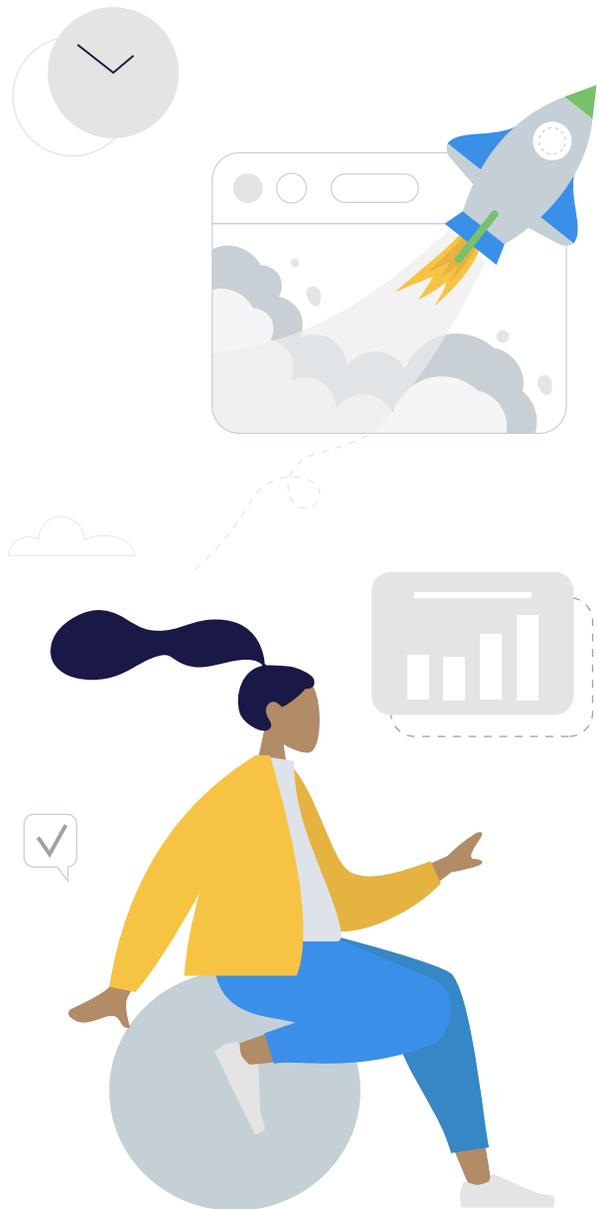
The pandemic has made speed a priority. Companies have flattened hierarchies to make fast decisions. These flat teams have involved employees in goal-setting and freed them to make independent decisions. As a result, employee development has taken center stage in talent management. Managers have started seeing employees as more than workers and taken on a coach's role rather than supervisors.

In the remote work experiment, employees have gone through a lot. But they've also liked the flexibility of working from home. As a result, their expectations from work are now different from pre-pandemic times. Today, employees expect flexibility, work-life balance, supportive managers, and a sense of purpose at work.

As more people get vaccinated and offices reopen, it's become clear that the future of work is hybrid. But it won't happen on its own. HR leaders need to create hybrid-friendly policies that deliver performance without diluting the company's culture. Companies may need to recruit for different skills such as resilience, proactive behavior, and effective communication. Even more important than hiring great talent will be to provide such an excellent employee experience that they stay with you.

On the performance front, productivity has stayed the same, but employee engagement remains low. To engage their employees better, HR leaders need to take a "people-first" first approach to performance management. They need to recognize that most employees are not working at their one hundred percent and develop new KPIs and metrics to assess performance better.

The COVID-19 crisis has underscored the need for replacing old talent management with more dynamic and responsive processes. The processes companies create today will shape the future of work. HR leaders have a critical role to play in taking care of purpose, culture, and values. This guide will help you, as an HR leader, understand the changing dynamics of talent management and prepare for success in the new normal.

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Everything's changed

How the pandemic has changed the work, worker, and workplace

The Big Picture

The pandemic has had a profound impact on the way we live and work. On the one hand, it has brought some welcome changes such as flexible work hours and flat team structures. On the other hand, it has blurred the lines between life and work and affected employees' mental well-being. HR leaders can better prepare for the future of work by understanding the new world of work, worker, and the workplace.

Over a year into the pandemic, the changes in the way we live and work have been profound. The shift to remote work in early 2020 has blurred the lines between personal life and work. Lack of social connections has increased workloads. Uncertainty about the future has left employees feeling overwhelmed, stressed, and burned out. Companies have been facing their set of struggles: adapting to the new reality in real-time, makeshift tech solutions, and persuading employees to stay.

The dust is yet to settle, and yet another shift looms. Hybrid work, a blend of remote and office work, is already here. As more people get vaccinated and COVID-19 restrictions almost gone, some employees are heading back to the office. Now, HR leaders have to manage two sets of people: in-office and remote. Leaders can make this transition less bumpy than the one in 2020 if they have a clear picture of how the pandemic changed the work, worker, and workplace.

Work

Flexibility
Remote work has provided employees with the flexibility of location and time. And 73% of them would like the flexible work options to continue.

Speed is a priority
The breakneck pace of change in the past year has made speed a priority. As a result, companies have flattened the hierarchies and empowered leaders to make quick decisions.

Need for skills rather than roles
In rapidly evolving environments, skills needed to deliver business performance change at an equal pace. This new reality has led managers to identify and develop talent for the required skills rather than roles.

Performance reimagined
When the work has changed, the ways to measure it must also change. Performance management in the new normal goes beyond the transactional nature of ratings and focuses more on recognition, development, and culture.
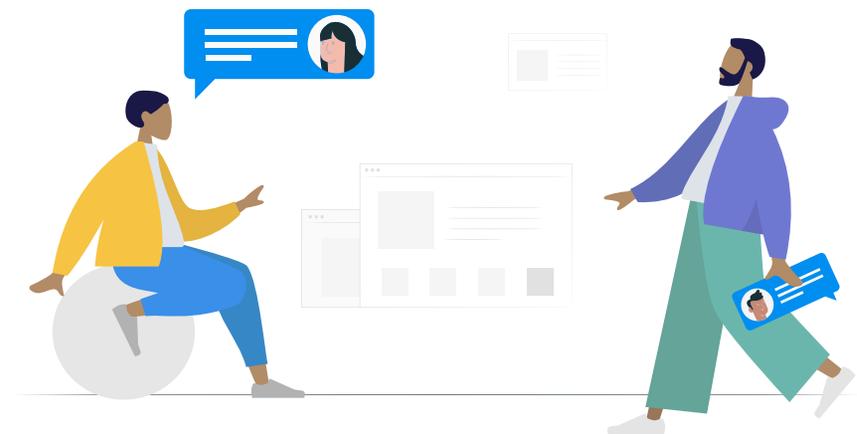
Worker

Mental health
One of the most significant impacts of the pandemic is an increased awareness of mental health issues that employees had been facing for a long time: Stress, anxiety, and feeling isolated.

Hopes and fears
Since the pandemic began, employees have been concerned about the future of work, their jobs, and financial stability. They also hope that companies will provide more flexibility, better pay, and health support in the new normal.

More opportunities
Remote work has unchained the location requirement for jobs and helped employees from distant places get new jobs. Purpose-driven people are now joining companies that share their vision–regardless of where the physical offices are.

Growth mindset
Job losses across industries have caused people to train and reskill for in-demand and better-paying positions. Even the people with jobs have started reskilling to adapt to changing requirements.

Workplace

Remote to hybrid
In 2020, remote work helped companies keep operating during lockdowns. As the world reopens, they will move to a hybrid model that gives them the best of both worlds.

Office as a connection hub
The pre-pandemic office is a thing of the past. Today's office serves more as a hub for connections and collaboration than a place where work gets done.

Culture first
Companies with solid cultures were more successful in attracting, engaging, and retaining employees during the pandemic. 69% of C-suite executives believe that culture will play a critical role in achieving business goals in the new normal.

Increased role of HR tech
HR tech helped make remote work possible and will play an even extensive role in the hybrid model. Hybrid-ready recruiting, continuous feedback, and manager 1:1s will be critical to employee engagement in the new normal.
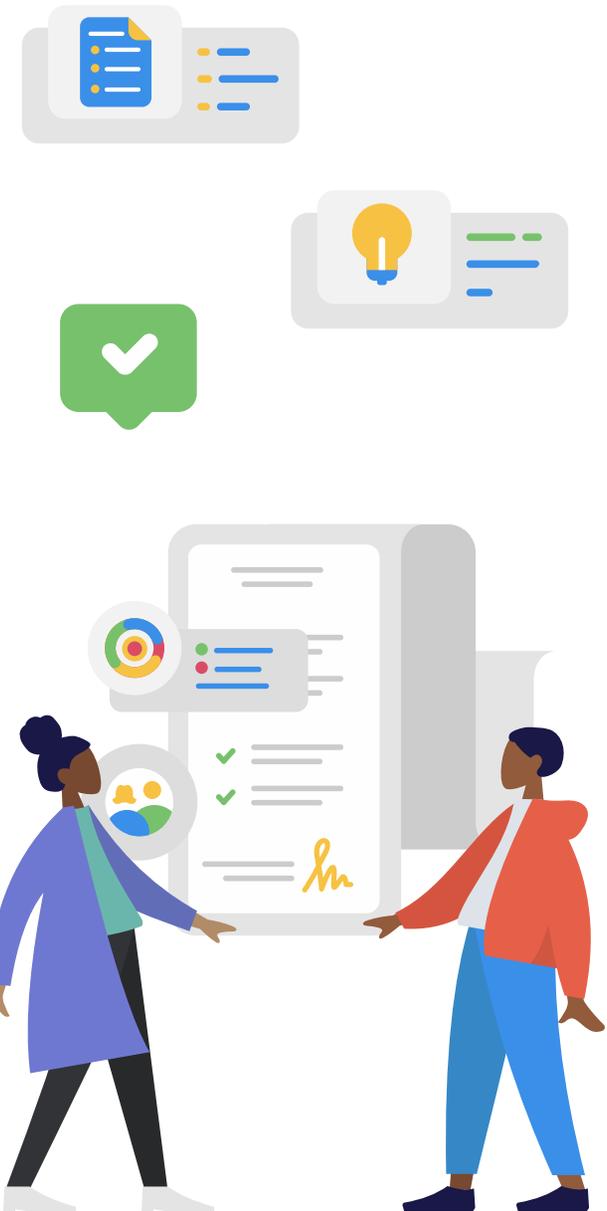
What to do

Communicate more
The most effective way to ease employee anxiety and earn their trust is to communicate more. Transparency in sharing information leads to engaged and high-performing employees that stay with your company longer.

Invest in employee development
Job losses and sudden shifts in responsibilities demand skills-based hiring and ongoing upskilling for employees. You need to provide learning time and rewards for learning and support new career paths for your employees.

Support employee well-being
In the past year, mental health has emerged as a second pandemic. You should make supporting employee's mental well-being their number one priority.

Update performance metrics
86% of people want companies to measure performance based on the value they deliver, not the volume. As a result, you need to update the way you measure performance to reflect this new reality.

Employees' List of Preference

- Adoption of efficient tools
- Good mental and physical health
- Good team collaboration
- Trust in manager
- Employer's effort to motivate
- Flexibility in determining work hours
- Introducing innovations
- Home office set up
- Time saved on travel
- Better ability to concentrate
- Less supervision

Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic

LIFE IMPACT

45%
of people say their own life has been affected "a lot" by the coronavirus situation.

As a result of the coronavirus situation:

50%
of workers received less money than usual of workers temporarily stopped working at from their employer or business

53%
of workers temporarily stopped working at from their job or business

49%
of workers worked fewer hours at their job or business

32%
of workers lost their job or business

People-first mindset

In a world of intense competition for talent, it pays to be people-first

The Big Picture

We are in the middle of a work revolution. The pandemic and resulting upheaval have brought the power back to people from processes. HR leaders are now creating new policies and procedures with a "people-first" mindset—from recruiting to compensation. This shift will help companies attract, engage, and retain employees amid intense competition and uncertain times.

Before the pandemic, human resources teams serviced other business departments by taking care of human capital. For example, they recruited people, enforced compliance, and helped companies cut costs with workforce optimization. They also developed processes for advancing the company's culture, employee development, and performance management.

COVID-19 crisis has uprooted decades of established HR processes in one fell swoop. It has spurred HR leaders to find new creative ways for hiring, development, and performance management. Employees, who had been mere workers in the pre-pandemic times, are now at the heart of the business. The need for speed has flattened the hierarchies, put decision-making power in the hands of the employees, and encouraged managers to become collaborators rather than bosses.

This new "people-first mindset" has caused the top-line managers to depend more on the HR leaders for everyday operations and long-term human capital planning. As offices reopen and companies transition to hybrid work in the new normal, HR leaders will be responsible for creating flexible work policies, engaging employees with transparency, and staying on top of emerging trends. Here's how you, as an HR leader, can do that.

Create people-first policies

Now that companies and employees both know flexible work doesn't hurt productivity, there's no going back to the old ways. As a result, you will need to craft "people-first" policies that let employees work from anywhere.

Address employees' mental well-being

45% of the employees say that the COVID-19 crisis has impacted their lives by "a lot." Job losses, financial strain, and increased workloads have caused stress, anxiety, and a lack of motivation. You can address this "second pandemic" by providing necessary support.

Empower your employees

The pandemic accelerated companies' shift to the agile model, flattening hierarchies and empowering front-line employees to make quick decisions. You can play a critical role in developing employees for skills that help the company succeed in the dynamic work environment of the post-pandemic world.

Communicate across levels

In the pre-pandemic times, employee self-service systems and traditional performance management had kept managers away from building direct relationships with reports. Now, they have an opportunity to engage with workers to coach, recognize, and develop them. And you should encourage that by having regular conversations with managers.

See more than workers

Since the beginning of the industrial era, employees have been a little more than workers. But today, employees want companies to see them as human beings again. They want human resources to go beyond transactional talent management and take care of the person, not just the worker. You can do that by providing coaching, emotional support, and building deeper relationships with the workers.

Appreciate the outcomes

Creating moments of appreciation and recognition is crucial to employee experience, development, and performance. HR leaders should encourage managers, team leaders, and coworkers to have more check-ins and 1:1s with employees. Use Mesh's Social Recognition feature to celebrate progress and drive behavior.

COVID-19 crisis has separated workers from the workplace, people from processes, and outcomes from the output. As technology automates away more transactional aspects of HR, leaders can now focus on essentials:

- Employee well-being
- Coaching to drive growth
- Fostering deeper connections among coworkers
- Creating growth opportunities with development

7 in 10 employees
are struggling or suffering in their lives.

80%
are not engaged at work.

$8.1 trillion:
The global costs of lack of engagement each year.

Recruiting in the new normal

How to hire, onboard, and help newcomers adapt to a hybrid work environment

The Big Picture

COVID-19 crisis accelerated recruiting trends that were already underway before the pandemic. As a result, remote hiring and onboarding have become the norm today. In addition, skills have taken over roles in response to the increased pace of business change. That means HR leaders need to rewrite their playbooks to help their companies hire the best talent in the new normal.

HR leaders were struggling to attract and retain employees. And this was before the pandemic. After COVID-19 erupted, hiring new employees got even more challenging. Virtual recruitment and onboarding remote employees put new demands on HR teams that were already stretched thin. As a result, leaders developed new ways to recruit, refined existing processes, and learned a lot along the way.

HR leaders can use these learnings from the past year to develop new recruitment processes. As with other things in business, most of the changes that took place during COVID-19 are here to stay. Trends such as virtual recruiting, more remote employees, and a renewed focus on DEI will continue. There's also a larger talent pool of unemployed people to tap into.

Companies have to rethink their purpose, employee value proposition (EVP), and performance management to attract and retain quality talent. Pre-pandemic perks such as free meals, ping-pong tables, and office gyms don't cut anymore because employees want to work from anywhere. Employee expectations have changed drastically, and your recruiting strategy must reflect this new reality.

Provide hybrid recruiting with video

As hybrid work becomes the norm, recruiting needs to follow suit by switching to a blend of online and in-person processes. Video is the best format for remote interviews as it is the closest thing possible to a face-to-face meeting. Recruiters should have as many team members as possible in the video interviews. They can also give candidates a project to work on together with the internal team. That will help recruiters see their skills, behavior, and problem-solving in action.

Attract candidates with transparency

COVID-19 crisis caused millions of people to lose their jobs, take pay cuts, and switch to companies that allow work from home. As a result, people have become more careful about where they work. They want transparency about work, culture, and pay. HR leaders need to recognize candidates' concerns and be authentic in communication.

Hunt for skills, not experience

The first thing hiring managers used to look for in a resume was the experience: What role did the candidate play in past jobs, how many years, which industry, etc. However, in today's rapidly evolving world, skills and the ability to learn new ones have become more important than static roles. This new reality requires HR leaders to hire for skills–not positions, experience, or degrees.

Look beyond traditional talent pools

Before 2020, HR teams looked for talent in the nearby pools. Recruiters had become accustomed to getting "Yes" when they asked candidates, "Will you relocate?" All that worked back then. Today, remote work means more people can now join companies anywhere in the world. HR leaders should tap into this new extensive talent pool. They also need to reduce bias from the interview process to recruit more people from diverse backgrounds, such as women, blacks, Latinos, and LGBTQ.

Give them an offer they can't refuse

The pandemic has had a dramatic effect on employee expectations. Before COVID-19, pay, compensation, and benefits were essential factors in deciding whether to join a company or not. Today's candidates expect that plus flexible work hours, better employee experience, and more development opportunities. HR leaders need to have those in their offers to make them attractive enough and emerge as employers of choice.

Welcome the "whole" person, not just the worker

COVID-19 has untethered workers from the workplace and took them back to their homes—a trend that is likely to continue. At home, they are with their families. HR leaders should see the employee in this new context and support both the employees and their families. Companies can help them do that by providing benefits for children, development opportunities for families, etc.

While the coronavirus crisis has disrupted many HR processes, it's also given the leaders time to pause, reflect on existing processes, and recognize areas that need improvement. We also recommend HR teams learn virtual interviewing, onboarding, and understanding new ways of measuring performance to better serve employees in the new normal.

Opening borders to free up talent would result in a $78 trillion increase in global GDP.

Source: The Economist

## Areas where HR leaders want to focus
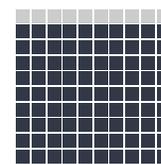
McKinsey

90%
Communicate more with employees
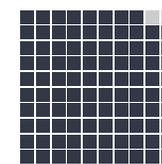
98%
Let employees bring their whole self to work
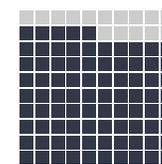
85%
Flatten hierarchies for faster decisions

Transparency from the onset

Communicate your purpose, clear goals, and progress

The Big Picture

People today look for more than pay in their jobs. It's clear from the recent data on people leaving their jobs. They want to be a part of a company with a mission and culture aligned with their purpose in life. Managers can play a vital role in that by creating a culture of transparency.

About 4 million people left their jobs in April month alone despite record unemployment. What are these people looking for in their careers? What are the companies doing wrong?

Today's employees are more thoughtful, purpose-driven, and aware of their work's impact on the world. After going through the challenges of COVID-19, they now want stability and work-life balance more than a raise. Here's where transparency comes into play. When HR leaders are transparent in their communication, they nurture a sense of stability and security.

Your employees need this sense of stability and security to engage and perform at their best. Apart from being inherently better, transparency helps you earn your employees' trust by making them feel safe. That sense of feeling safe in their jobs is critical to employee engagement, and as a result, performance. Here are five ways you can be transparent with your employees.

Transparency in knowledge-sharing

HR leaders can help create a sense of stability among their employees by encouraging equal company information and data sharing to every employee. Remote workers shouldn't feel left out of the company's data pool because they can't work with managers at the office.

Transparency on culture

Research finds no connection between companies' values and employees' assessment of how they reflect them. You can not expect high performance from teams when the employees don't share a common purpose. Communicating your vision, mission, and values in clear terms helps your employees align their purpose with the company's and drives performance.

Transparency in goal-setting

Involve your employees in the company's goal-setting. Discuss your company's plans with them. Ask them which direction they think the company should be moving in and what role they can play. Involving your employees in this way will help them feel connected to the company's purpose and engaged at work.
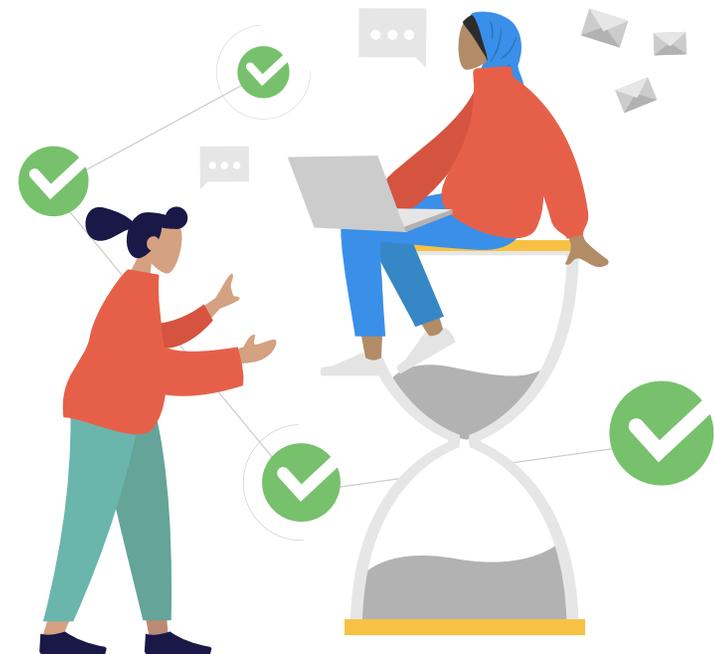
Transparency in communication

Transparency should be universal. HR leaders need to share everything except sensitive material. Whether the news is good or bad, employees feel valued when leaders are open with them. Getting only bits and pieces of the information breeds suspicion and speculation. Employees start assuming the worst and become disengaged with the work. Avoid that by being transparent in your communication.

Transparency on progress

Most of your front-line employees haven't got an MBA and don't travel in management circles. So, when it comes to their work's impact or promises made by their managers, they are more likely to believe the numbers. Being transparent with your employees on the progress you've made will strengthen your connection with them. It will also help you get their buy-in for future projects.

Employees today are more curious, reflective, and value-driven. Whether they are working at the office or remotely, they want clear, spin-free information to decide their future direction better. Being transparent empowers you to keep them on the same page, earn their trust, and drive performance.
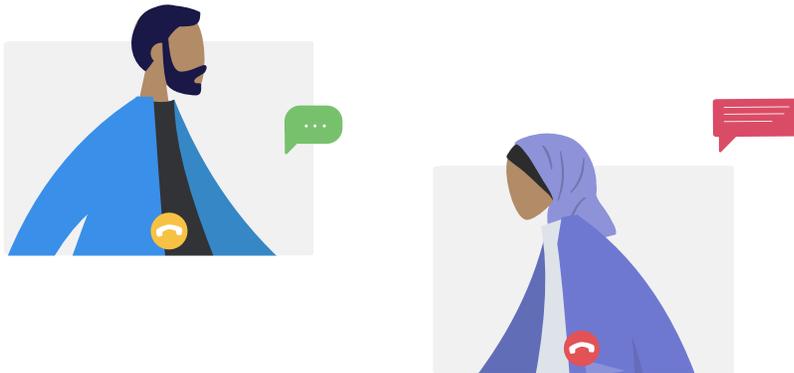
JOB SECURITY

51%

of employees say stability and job security are "very important."

Source: Gallup

Questions to ask:

What has made me feel secure about the company's future that I can share with my employees?

What can I tell my employees to help them feel more secure given the rapidly evolving work environment?

What could I say to help my employees feel like a part of the company?

How can I make sure that employees' and the company's mission align?

Hybrid-ready people processes

How to take care of your office and remote employees in the new normal

The Big Picture

Even as companies welcome some employees back to the office, most of them will still work remotely for a long time. Business success in a post-pandemic world will require responsive work policies that support both office and remote employees. HR leaders should make sure that those policies reflect today's realities of work, not established practices from the pre-pandemic era.

The future of work is hybrid. Almost all HR leaders agree on that. As governments worldwide relax pandemic restrictions, they must create policies to support hybrid work in their companies. Unlike sudden shifts when COVID-19 erupted, today, they have time to analyze what worked to inform better how to go ahead in the new normal.

Remote work worked. The productivity stayed the same or even increased. Employees liked the flexibility work from home gave them. All that good things are likely to stay. However, experts are not sure about the balance between remote and office work. For most of the companies that can't be fully back-to-office or remote, there could be three models:

- **Social hub:** The office serves as a hub helping people meet, collaborate, and spend some time together.

- **The freewheel:** A deskless office where people can freely move from place to place.

- **Hub and spoke:** Instead of commuting to a large office, employees work from smaller, scattered offices closer to their homes.

The reality is that COVID-19 is far from over. A model that blends office with some remote work is more practical for most companies. Whatever the model your company selects, you will need responsive work policies that cover all employees. Here are some things that you need to consider.

Culture

Most HR leaders fear that hybrid work will dilute the company culture. It won't if you refine and reinforce it. Communicating company norms, values, and desired behaviors will help maintain a strong company culture. You can do that with virtual get-togethers and by encouraging managers to have more 1:1s with reports. You can also use eNPS pulse surveys to check whether employees share the company's values or not.

Recruiting

As discussed earlier, recruiting in the new normal has to focus on skills rather than experience or roles. You need to draft policies that require qualities that give candidates an edge in hybrid work environments: Proactivity, self-motivation, and virtual communication skills.
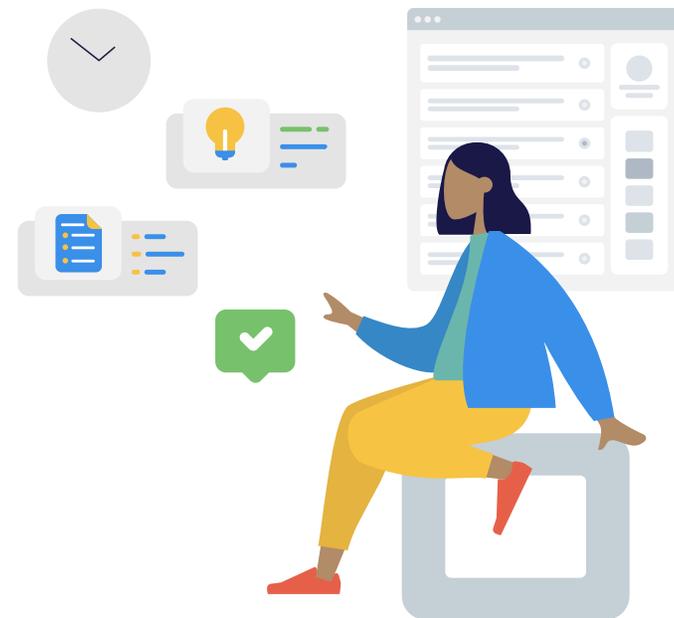
Employee engagement

Engaging employees at work will be one of the most challenging tasks for HR leaders in the new normal. The three most important factors for employee engagement are psychological safety, high-quality social interactions, and more opportunities for collaboration. Mandate these in your policies.

Work-life balance

Unlike at the start of the pandemic, you are now in control and can create policies to support employees' work-life balance. You can include boundaries in new work policies such as length of the workday, when colleagues can reach out, and video call durations.

Remote specific policies

Remote work is what kept companies going while the pandemic shut down the world. It was an unexpected success and made both companies and employees realize that remote works. Now, as some employees choose to work remotely post-pandemic, HR leaders will need to create policies to support them.

And the most important of all: Trust. After a bruising encounter with COVID-19, employees are more skeptical, thoughtful, and long-term focused. HR leaders need to regain employee trust by creating "people-first" policies, being transparent, and communicating more. HR tech tools such as continuous feedback and manager 1:1s can help.
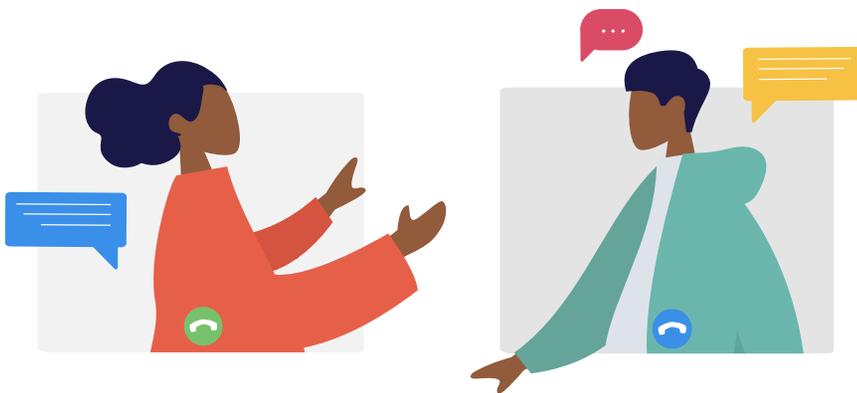
44%
of employees would take 10% pay cut to keep working remotely.
Source: @jowyang

64%
of executives plan to invest in training leaders to manage a virtual workforce.
Source: PwCT
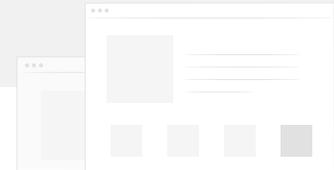
Promote mental health

Deploy empathy, train your employees, and measure progress

The Big Picture

COVID-19 has had a significant impact on people's mental health. Research has found widespread anxiety, chronic stress, and burnout among employees. The problem is even more severe among women employees. Fixing this will take more than intentions. HR leaders need to embed health policies in their company's values, counter the stigma, and increase communication about mental health.

Remote work has been a lifesaver for companies during the peak COVID-19 crisis. But it also had a significant impact on people's personal lives.

The blurring of lines between work and life has had its benefits and drawbacks. It gave employees financial security, flexible work hours, and commute-free workdays. It also made it challenging to collaborate, build work relationships, and have a work-life balance.

As a result, we face another epidemic: The rise of mental health problems such as burnout, anxiety, and chronic stress. Even before COVID-19, mental health was a significant issue facing HR leaders. After the shift to remote work, the work became more siloed and people more isolated. Reduced social interaction made it harder for managers and coworkers to detect emerging issues.

HR leaders can address these issues by taking a holistic view of employee health and providing support systems that work in a hybrid work environment. They can start with embedding physical and mental well-being into their company's policies, taking away the stigma from talking about mental health, and be willing to go the distance to provide work-life balance.

Embed health in your company values

COVID-19 has not only changed the way we work but also how we live and what we value. Companies must realign their existing values to keep up with these social changes. Before the pandemic, companies didn't put much emphasis on employee health in their value statements. Today, they need to embed health in the soul of the company.

Counter the stigma with empathy

One of the most significant barriers to employees' mental well-being is the social stigma they fear when speaking out. No one wants that label fearing social consequences. HR leaders can encourage people to speak up by setting an example and being honest about their own mental health struggles. Empathy is also important to earn employees' trust and encourage them to have conversations about their issues.

Monitor and manage workloads

Most employees are shouldering more workload than before the pandemic. Add responsibilities at homes such as child care or elder care, and it becomes too heavy for most people to carry on. HR leaders need to monitor employees' workload and reallocate tasks if necessary.

Limit hours worked per day

Employees like the flexibility that the remote work gave them. HR leaders should not try to take that away by enforcing work hours. Instead, they can limit the total hours worked per day. It will keep the pressure to perform in check without sacrificing flexibility.

Build a connection culture with check-ins

40% of global employees say that no one at their company had asked them if they were doing okay. This lack of connection has played a significant role in declining mental health. Manager 1:1s can uplift employee experience for both remote and office workers by helping bosses notice when someone is struggling and providing necessary support before it becomes a severe issue.

Invest in training

Training employees to be proactive and preventive about mental health will be crucial in the new normal. HR leaders can organize workshops to reduce stigma, debunk common myths, and teach employees about having mental health conversations at work.

Measure progress

As with everything else in business, leaders have to take responsibility for employee health, measure the progress, and update work policies accordingly. And it doesn't have to be complicated. Modern HR tech tools such as eNPS pulse surveys can help managers measure employees' current state and needs.

HR leaders have always understood the importance of employee mental well-being but struggled to make it a priority. Now's the time to do it. As offices reopen, mental health issues won't just go away. A healthy workforce requires leaders to rethink their companies' work policies to support physical and mental well-being.

Employees say that 2020 was the most stressful year they've experienced in working lives.

Source: Oracle Workplace Intelligence

78% of employees say that the pandemic has negatively affected their mental health

76% say that companies should be doing more to protect employees' mental health

85% say that COVID-19 caused work-related stress is affecting their home lives

Source: Oracle Workplace Intelligence

What employees think will improve their health:

- Flexibility in hours worked

- Better work environment

- Home office subsidies

- Autonomy to decide when and where work gets done

- Health checks

- Creating workout opportunities

Source: BCG

Factors involved in holistic health

Mental

- Emotional well-being
- Cognitive performance
- Mindfulness
- Coping skills
- Resilience

Physical

- Nutrition and smoking
- Active movement
- Medical benefits
- Disease management
- Relaxation and sleep

Source: BCG

Gallup has identified 5 elements that make up overall wellbeing:

Career Wellbeing — You like what you do everyday.

Community Wellbeing — You like where you live.

Physical Wellbeing — You have energy to get things done.

Financial Wellbeing — You manage your money well.

Social Wellbeing — You have meaningful friendships in your life.

Performance management in the new normal

Embrace continuous feedback

The Big Picture

As the business world and employee expectations evolve, performance management needs to put its transactional aspects on the back burner and focus more on employee development and support. HR leaders should look beyond traditional metrics and adopt new, better ways to measure employee performance.

Before the pandemic, companies saw performance management as an optimization and cost-cutting tool. The crisis in 2020 led leaders to expand its scope to include other people and cultural functions. As a result, performance management has now become critical to employee experience, engagement, and development. And it keeps evolving with the overall business environment.

Now, as the world reopens, companies may see an opportunity to get back to the pre-pandemic comfort zones of traditional performance management. But it won't be practical. Pre-2020 processes are no longer fit for the new hybrid work environments. Under pressure to do more with less, employees today have different priorities, needs, and challenges. HR leaders must recognize this new reality and build on remote-focused performance management practices to support the coming hybrid work.

The new performance management should help leaders set agile goals, decouple compensation from development, and empower people to outperform. It also needs to support continuous feedback to help managers monitor and improve employees' mental health, which is in decline because of anxiety and burnout. Here are some other factors that HR leaders should consider while reinventing their performance management system for a post-pandemic world.

Separate development and compensation

Before COVID-19, companies used to fare worse in both development and performance reviews. The research found the reason behind that to be mixing development with compensation conversations. HR leaders need to have performance policies with clear lines drawn between the two in the new normal.

Update your KPIs for the new normal

People are living in unprecedented times. They are uncertain, anxious, and overwhelmed with responsibilities. That means they are not working at their one hundred percent. HR leaders must recognize this and update their performance KPIs and metrics to align them with employees' current state.
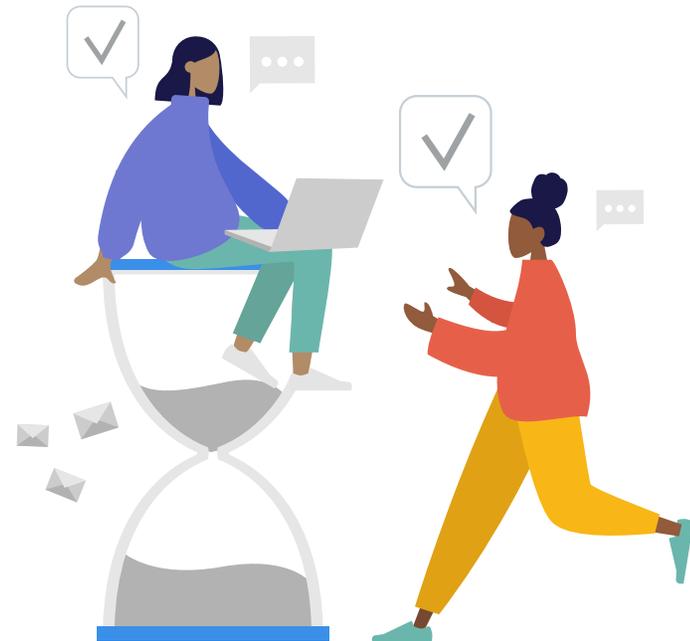
Switch to continuous feedback

In the rapidly evolving work environments, traditional quarterly and annual feedback will limit employees' progress, growth, and development opportunities. HR leaders will need continuous feedback to better support employee development going forward.

Provide psychological safety

Research has found that high-performing teams have one thing in common: Psychological safety. It gives employees the confidence to speak their minds, take risks, and be more creative. HR leaders need to make fostering psychological safety a core part of their performance management strategy.

Be transparent

For a long time now, performance reviews had been among the things employees hated the most at work. Opaque goal-setting, outdated methods to measure performance, and lack of trust contributed to that. HR leaders can overcome these issues by being transparent. Seeing their work contributing, or not, to the company's goals can be a powerful motivating force.

Employees are not machines. They are people who work according to human nature, driven by ideas and creativity. Pre-pandemic performance management's focus on mechanic ratings will not work in the new normal. HR leaders need to update how they measure employees' performance, adopt modern development processes, and support employees in their career journeys.
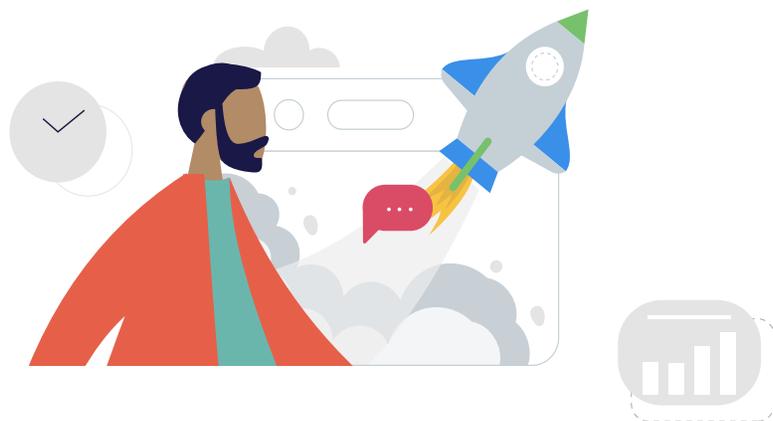
Global employee engagement remains dismal at just 20%.
Source: Gallup

"

Covid-19 may be the best thing that ever happened to employee engagement.

"

Josh Bersin, a leading HR analyst

88%
employees

84%
managers

reported productivity had stayed the same or increased

Source: SHRM

Revamp your HR tech

Support ongoing recognition and development

The Big Picture

Technology has been the key to HR operations and social connection during the pandemic. It will play an even more extensive role in the future of work. HR leaders should ensure that they have the right solutions, their teams are well-trained, and every employee has access to the technology—whether working remotely or at the office.

HR tech helped companies more than anything else to stay operating during the COVID-19 crisis. Back then, technology played a role in survival. But post-pandemic, it will be a competitive advantage. As more people get vaccinated and restrictions ease, technology will help HR teams recruit remotely, support employee's mental health, and improve work productivity.

The future of work is hybrid. It's now time HR leaders reevaluate and refine their existing remote-focused technologies for the demands of the coming shift. The focus will be on the ability to adapt, scale, and automate. So, HR and IT teams must work hand in hand to customize, deploy, and maintain hybrid-ready digital systems.

Many companies that had adopted modern technologies—such as manager 1:1s and eNPS surveys—before the pandemic can now focus on making existing processes better. Those who didn't will now need to deploy these solutions and train employees to get up and running. HR leaders also have to ensure that everyone has equal access to the solutions, whether working at the office or remote. We've assembled a list of essential HR tech tools to support hybrid work at your company.

Virtual recruiting systems

After the first wave of lockdowns, most recruiters shifted to virtual recruiting systems to source, assess, interview, and onboard candidates. This trend will continue even as offices reopen and in-person interviews rise. We recommend having an all-digital recruiting system and training HR teams to make the most of it.

OKR-based goal-setting

One of the silver linings of the COVID-19 crisis has been the flattening of corporate hierarchies. The need to make decisions faster has broken down silos, removed slow-moving bureaucracies, and empowered front-line workers. As a result, goal-cascading has become irrelevant, and OKRs are now the default goal-setting framework. Your performance management system must support OKRs if you want agility in the new normal.

Manager 1:1s

A high-performance workforce requires high-quality feedback. Manager 1:1s provide that by driving real-time feedback and coaching. Your HR tech tools list should include an intelligent Manager 1:1s system that is easy to use, expansive, and able to generate high-quality communication data.

Recognition and feedback

Research has found regular recognition to be one of the most influential drivers of employee happiness, development, and performance. HR leaders can increase recognition by adopting an HR tech system with continuous feedback.

eNPS and pulse surveys

eNPS, or employee net promoter score, is one of the leading measures of employee engagement. By adding eNPS in the pulse surveys, HR leaders can listen to the voice of employees, collect feedback, and measure their programs' impact in real-time. Having an HR tech system with this tool is indispensable.

Virtual communication tools

Many studies have recognized communication as the single most influential factor in employee engagement. Remote work-era tools such as Slack, Microsoft Teams, and Zoom will continue to help employees communicate post-pandemic with each new update making them even better. In the new normal, HR leaders can foster quality communication among employees by making the best out of these tools.

HR tech supported business operations throughout the pandemic. And it will continue to give us even better ways to manage human capital with AI and automation. But HR leaders should also address tech-caused problems such as Zoom fatigue, overwork, and bias amplification. Technology should serve the business purpose by helping employees work to their full potential. It's HR leaders' responsibility to make sure of that.

Only
30%
of employees say they are truly satisfied with the HR technology solutions available to them.

Source: Gartner

88%
of companies use technology in their hiring process.

Source: Mercer

79%
employees say that well-being isn't designed or integrated into the modern workplace.

Source: Deloitte

Putting the "human" back in HR

Help employees grow as people, not just workers

The Big Picture

COVID-19 will eventually fade, but the transformation it brought will stay with us in the new normal. The future of work will be hybrid and people-first. And HR leaders will play a crucial role in that by putting the "human" back in human resources.

Now more than a year into the pandemic, HR leaders have an opportunity to reflect and build on lessons learned to make the future of work better for everyone. They also need to listen to employees' experiences to craft effective return-to-work policies.

Every company is unique with its own vision, mission, goals, and challenges. As a result, leading into the future of work will require tailored, evolving approaches. One common theme will be the people-first mindset. Companies can rewrite better playbooks for the future of work by looking at employees' needs and expectations.

As they had during the pandemic, HR leaders will play a critical role in the new normal. They will continue to connect talent to business strategy and deliver on the company's goals. And they already have their work cut for the future of work: creating and reinforcing clear policies, embracing the hybrid way of working, and empowering HR teams with modern HR tech to serve employees better.