

FORWARD STRATEGIES

Rethinking Your Operating Strategy

How flexwork and distance collaboration are reshaping work.

With recovery from the pandemic top of mind, businesses are asking: Should employees be allowed to continue working remotely? Two thirds of professionals are concerned about returning to the office, while nearly half only want to work part-time onsite, according to a survey by workplace safety tool maker Envoy. What's more, roughly one in three say they will quit if they can't work remotely, per job search service LiveCareer.



Ironically, with virtual roles having quickly become the standard, and rising flexibility in scheduling, work assignments and management models now established as operating reality, it may be a moot question. With many of the world's largest firms having shifted to at-home operations and embraced the idea of flexwork (flexible working) and its more malleable workweeks and workplans, hybrid and remote options are here to stay.

Companies must fundamentally rethink their operating models to accommodate unexpected events and give employees greater latitude in how they perform their work. Firms also must place priority on employee satisfaction, and offer more flexibility in terms of individual perks, professional development, training and benefits, and HR policies to attract and retain top talent. There are several key areas of flexwork that organizations are embracing. Among them are:

Workplace Solutions

To promote safety and social distancing, many employers are bringing fewer employees into the office and staggering workers' schedules to minimize the employees that are physically onsite. They are offering more choices in terms of days, times and hours during which work can be performed. Many are rethinking the role of the traditional office in driving productivity and communication, and reserving physical gatherings for collaboration, cross-functional meetings or teamwork activities. Workspaces are being redesigned with greater spacing between individuals, more contactless and

touchless solutions, and more frequent cleaning. Many employers are also letting their employees work from home offices and furnishing workers with laptops, videocameras and high-speed Wi-Fi routers to facilitate remote connections.

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To promote greater speed and convenience as well as safety, many firms are employing cost-affordable tech tools and structural redesigns to reimagine interpersonal exchanges, meetings, and everyday business exchanges. For example: Many tech retailers are using online apps and curbside pickups to facilitate transactions; hospitality providers are implementing solutions such as app-based tickets and registrations in lieu of manual check-ins; and videoconferencing and live streaming tools. Organizations are rethinking basic business processes to include more connected and virtual solutions.

Professional Development

To keep up with changes in working models, companies are providing staff with more training and professional development. They are finding new ways to upskill their workforces and provide more opportunities for employees to

connect, communicate, and boost distance leadership and management capabilities as well as regularly briefing teams on emerging events. More personalized mentoring and professional development paths tailored to the needs of the individual worker are becoming common. Customizable and on-demand educational platforms let workers retrieve learning modules when they desire.

Job Perks

Flexwork-friendly employers are also offering more accommodating benefits programs such as a financial allowance that an employee can spend on a menu of benefit choices that best suit their individual scenario. Perks can range from babysitting and tutoring to gym memberships. These perks help to promote well-being and professional development and give staffers the custom support required to give their best efforts at work.

The traditional 9-to-5 workday and one-size-fits-all approach to business is outdated. Ongoing concerns related to COVID-19, fundamental shifts in the marketplace, and sociocultural changes are putting pressure on companies to rethink their operating models. New shifts in the workplace — more flexible, remote and virtualized working models (like personalized perks and scheduling) are here to stay, and in an age of digital transformation, will soon be the new norm. ■

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