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Highlights

The Future of Work after Covid-19 | Aparna Sharma | Senior HR Professional & Certified Corporate Director | Editor's Collection

Determining how the workplace will be reconfigured due to COVID-19 is a daunting task.

Here is some advice from a research company based on analysis which it places into three specific categories: accelerating trends, new impacts that were not previously part of the future of work discussion, and pendulum swings – temporary shorter-term reactions.

“It is critical for business leaders to understand the large-scale shifts that are changing how people work and how business gets done,” said Chief of research for the company’s HR practice. “Then, they must apply this knowledge to their specific organization so they can alter their strategy accordingly.”



Accelerating Trends

1. Increase in remote work

Analysis shows that globally 48% of employees will most likely work remotely at least part of the time after the COVID-19 pandemic, compared to 30% pre-pandemic.

In fact, 74% of CFOs intend to increase remote work at their organization after the outbreak.

To succeed in a world of increased remote work, hiring managers should prioritize digital dexterity and digital collaboration skills. HR must consider how the context of remote work shifts performance management, particularly how goals are set and how employees are evaluated.

2. Expanded data collection

Organizations have increased their passive tracking of employees as their workforce has become remote. According to an April Gartner survey, 16% of organizations are passively tracking employees via methods like virtual clocking in and out, tracking work computer usage, and monitoring employee emails or internal communications/chat. In addition, employers are likely to have significantly more access to the health data of their employees.

For example, employers will want to know if any of their employees have the COVID 19 antibodies.

“HR leaders should weigh-in on the ethics of using employee data, but also on how to utilize employee monitoring to understand employee engagement across an increasingly dispersed workforce,” said the chief of research.

3. Employer as a social safety net

Employers will expand their involvement in the lives of their employees by increasing mental health support, expanding health care coverage, and providing financial health support during and after the pandemic.

Organizations are also considering the question of maintaining compensation for employees, even for those who are unable to work remotely or have been furloughed/laid off throughout and after the COVID-19 crisis.

4. Expansion of contingent workers

A recent Gartner survey revealed that 32% of organizations are replacing full-time employees with contingent workers as a cost-saving measure.

Utilizing more gig workers provides employers with greater workforce management flexibility. However, HR will also need to consider how performance management systems apply to contingent workers as well as questions around whether contingent workers will be eligible for the same benefits as their full-time peers.

New Impacts

1. Separation of critical skills and critical roles

Leaders are redefining what critical means to include: employees in critical strategic roles, employees with critical skills and employees in critical workflow roles.

Separating critical skills from critical roles shifts the focus to coaching employees to develop skills that potentially open multiple avenues for them, rather than focusing on preparing for a specific next role.

Organizations should re-evaluate their succession plans and may expand the range of roles considered as part of the development path for a given role's potential future successors.

2. Humanization (and dehumanization) of workers

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, some employees have formed more connected relationships, while others have moved into roles that are increasingly task-oriented.

Understanding how to engage task workers in the team culture and creating a culture of inclusiveness is now even more important.

To deliver on employee experience, HR will need to facilitate partnerships across the organization while working with managers to help employees navigate the different norms and expectations associated with these shifts.

3. Emergence of new top-tier employers

As the labor market starts to return to normalcy, candidates will want to know how companies treated their workforce during the COVID-19 outbreak. Organizations must balance the decisions made today to address immediate concerns during the pandemic with the long-term impact on their employment brand that will span the next several years.

Pendulum Swings

1. Shift from designing for efficiency to designing for resilience

Prior to the COVID-19 crisis, 55% of organizational redesigns were focused on streamlining roles, supply chains, and workflows to increase efficiency. Unfortunately, this path has created fragile systems, prompting organizations to prioritize resilience as equally important as efficiency.

Providing more varied, adaptive and flexible careers helps employees gain the cross-functional knowledge and training necessary for more flexible organizations.

Additionally, organizations should shift from trying to “predict” (targeting a specific set of future skills) to “responding” (structuring such that you can quickly course-correct with change).

2. Increase in organizational complexity



Across the next several months, there will be an acceleration of M&A, nationalization of companies, and bigger companies becoming even bigger. This rise in complexity will create challenges for leaders as operating models evolve. HR will need to take the lead on shifting to more agile operating models and helping leaders manage greater complexity.

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