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Over the past 10 years, the discussion on the future of work has predominantly been linked to job automation. However, while this trend and its ramifications will undoubtedly remain a relevant strand of the discussion, the rapidly evolving nature of our economies and societies – accelerated by the COVID-19 crisis – has brought about a broader range of shifts in how and where we work, the ways in which work, workplaces and workforces are organized, and the employee-employer relationship.

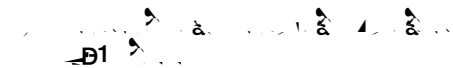
The COVID-19 pandemic will have profound, long-term consequences for our economies and societies, including for the future of work.¹ As part of [The Great Reset](#) needed to support the transition to a fairer, more sustainable post-COVID world, companies have a responsibility, and a rare opportunity, to rethink their organizational and workplace structures to invest in their workforces as core drivers of long-term resilience and future success. Having recognized the COVID-19 crisis as a defining leadership and transformation moment,² chief people officers and other human resources (HR) and business leaders are now called on to build on what they have learned from the immediate crisis response to reset their organizations' future of work agendas and lead the way towards better and more human-centric work, workplaces and workforces.

This report, developed in collaboration with Mercer, brings together key insights and lessons from the COVID-19 crisis response of the World Economic Forum's broader industry community to imagine and set out an updated future of work company action agenda for a post-COVID world. In particular, the report brings together the perspectives on COVID-19 workforce-related best practices of more than 60 chief human resources officers (CHROs) from leading global employers as well as a broad range of insights into how organizations are preparing for the post-pandemic shape of work

from the Forum's network of Preparing for the Future of Work Industry Accelerators,³ comprising more than 200 senior HR leaders, education technology and learning providers, academia and government stakeholders in nine industries.

Furthermore, this report is intended to complement the Forum's existing set of actionable research and guidance on the future of work, including its *Workforce Principles for the COVID-19 Pandemic: Stakeholder Capitalism in a Time of Crisis*,⁴ white papers on *HR4.0: Shaping People Strategies in the Fourth Industrial Revolution*⁵ and *Towards a Reskilling Revolution: Industry-Led Action for the Future of Work*,⁶ and bi-annual *Future of Jobs Report*.

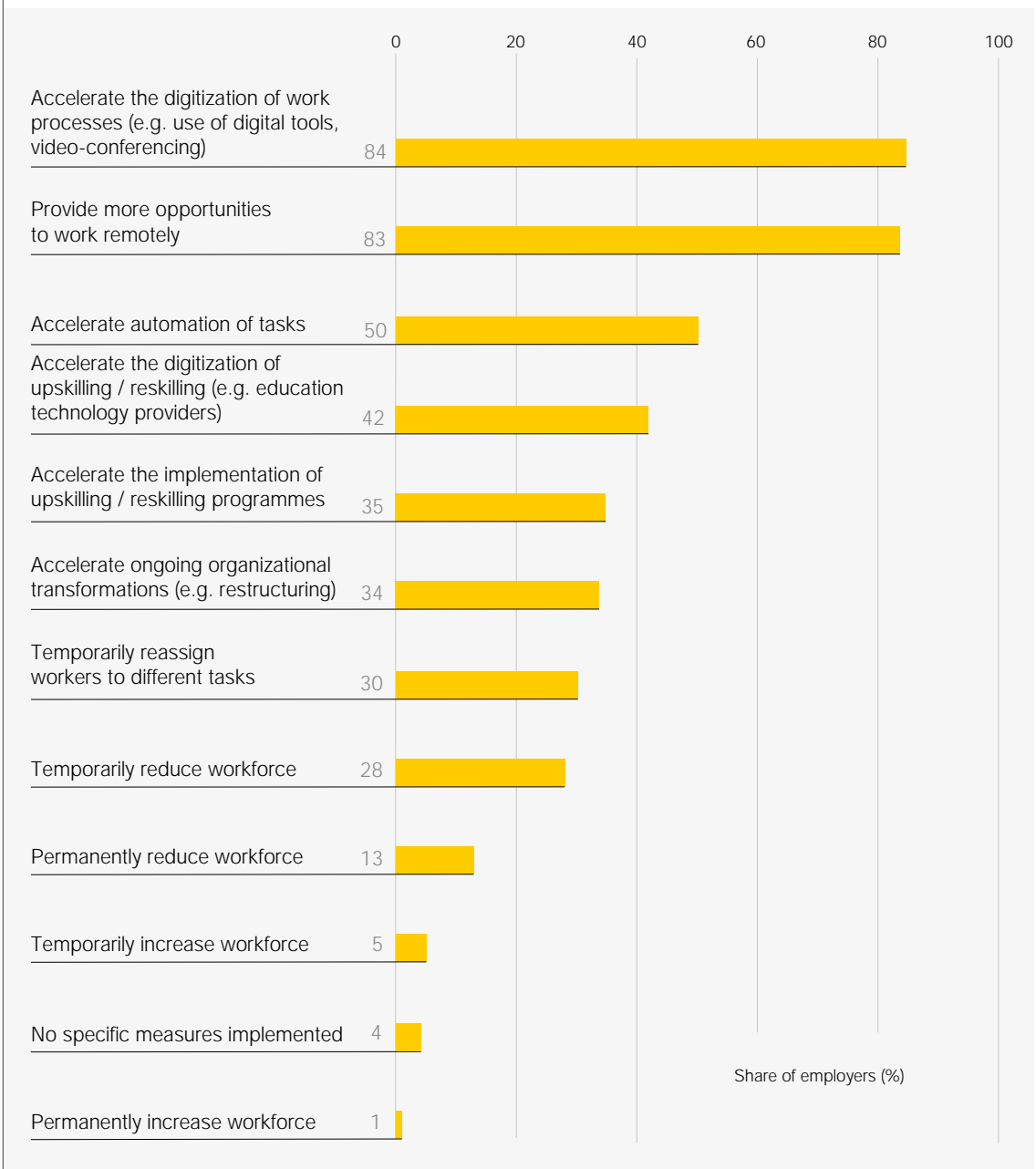
Building on this wealth of insights and experience from the Forum's broader industry community, this report is intended as a call to action for companies and organizations globally to update and reset their future of work preparedness agendas for a more relevant and inclusive post-pandemic "new" future of work for all. Importantly, these are not just questions for after the crisis. Forward-thinking CHROs point to a need to consider early on how work, the workplace and the workforce will look in the medium to long term to begin making the necessary investments today.



As of mid-2020, 93% of the world's workers resided in countries with some form of workplace closure measure in place to prevent the spread of coronavirus.⁷ Businesses providing essential services, such as healthcare, logistics, food and retail, continued to operate with new health and safety measures in place. Where jobs could be performed remotely, companies pivoted rapidly to the largest experiment in mass remote-working in history, comprising 39% of workers in OECD

countries on average.⁸ Businesses deemed non-essential and those impossible to perform remotely, including in industries such as travel and tourism, were suspended during lockdowns, leading to millions of workers being furloughed or laid off.

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As the pandemic is fundamentally a crisis with immediate and direct impacts on workforces and workplaces, CHROs and other senior HR leaders have been at the heart of companies' responses.¹¹ Organizations have had to learn to think and act fast. In doing so, insights and experiences from across the Forum's CHRO and future of work industry communities highlight that addressing employee health and safety has been a primary focus, along with ensuring business continuity and managing the shift to remote working. Having adapted quickly to the crisis, companies have now increasingly begun assessing what good practices need to be institutionalized and what approaches need to be adapted for disruptions that are likely to persist for months if not years – "a marathon, not a sprint", as one CHRO put it.

However, the challenge and opportunity of the current moment goes beyond either managing disruption or returning to some "old" or "new" normal. For HR, there is a real opportunity to move away from prescriptive and standardized approaches to become more relevant to each employee. More broadly, for company boards and senior leaders there is the potential for considerations on well-being, purpose and new ways of working to come together to create a "new deal" for what being a worker in the organization means, and to reshape work, workplaces and workforces for ongoing success in the future.

Based on insights and lessons learned from the Forum's broader future of work industry community, we identify five imperatives for resetting the future of work agenda (Figure 2).

1





Enabling organizations to transform rapidly to a more efficient, simplified structure

Organizations that operate in complex, multilayered, matrix structures are likely to have experienced challenges to operating effectively during the pandemic due to an ongoing introduction of new regulations and guidelines requiring businesses and employees to frequently align operations with little time to spare. In pursuit of quicker response times and more agile operating practices, a shift from a traditional matrix structure to one that is nimbler by bringing together employees from different functions with varying skillsets and experience may provide

a boost for organizations to transform rapidly to a more efficient, simplified structure. The trend toward such ‘vertical restructuring’—eliminating functions and departments to streamline decision-making, bringing it closer to where companies’ future value will be created—is accelerating. The newly simplified set-up can empower teams to collaborate across functions and geographies and improve decision-making speed by empowering those closest to customers and projects (see box).

BOX 1

Enabling organizations to transform rapidly to a more efficient, simplified structure

Moving from a multilayered matrix structure to a network structure requires a number of fundamental shifts in the organization:

1. **Individuals**

Moving beyond “boxing” individuals based on their current jobs/designations to a model that encompasses the employee holistically – shifting focus to collating and tracking employees’ career history (both inside and outside of the organization), associated skillsets and experience beyond their day-to-day professional job (e.g. volunteering, board memberships) – will help in developing this new structure. While organizations tend to place less emphasis on skills and experiences, these traits are more likely to have the greatest impact and importance when activated in network teams. As companies seek to build more flexibility into business models, having data on people’s skills means companies can deploy talent in a faster, more agile way, enabling both short-term and long-term adaptability.

2. **Infrastructure**

Actively understanding the appropriate type of infrastructure to share and redeploy talent in the organization will help make the transition

more seamless. With the evolving nature of sharing talent within the organization, there is a rising prevalence of implementing talent marketplace programmes, which enables optimal matching of teams and employees for projects/roles within the organization based on skillset compatibility rather than the employees’ current designation or seat in the organization.

3. **Culture**


Developing a culture that is aligned and embodies the very nature of the newly agile organization is vital to ensuring that employees feel empowered to continue doing their jobs while being proud to work at the organization. Managers and employees will experience varying level of changes as the organization moves into a network structure – managers having less authority due to the easing of reporting lines; employees adapting in a more fluid environment with less structure or stability in their roles. Being transparent and clearly articulating the future organization’s vision and values is key and it is important to provide transitional support to ease employees’ concerns during this phase.

Nestlé: A global framework to support

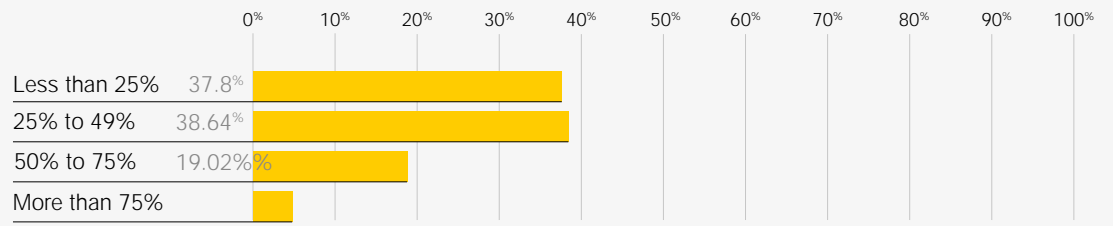
Guided by three priorities outlined at the very beginning of the pandemic, namely keeping employees healthy, safe and supported; ensuring business continuity; and helping the communities around the company, Nestlé teams came together across functions and businesses to respond to the COVID-19 outbreak in a quick, responsible and entrepreneurial way. As soon as it became clear that COVID-19 was a global phenomenon, Nestlé, a company that sells in 187 countries and has factories in 84 countries, introduced new health and safety measures across the world. The company also rapidly developed and published global guidelines. These efforts avoided a “one size fits all” approach – every market had to find the right balance between global guidelines and local authorities’ regulations. A framework to support

employees was elaborated, including measures such as sick leave arrangements, cash loans or advances, full wages for staff affected by temporary stoppages, free meals and transport, flexibility for parents.

The pandemic is far from over. Existing measures must be monitored and adapted, and new ones developed, including further strengthening physical and mental health support schemes for the long-run. In the end, as the provider of an essential good, Nestlé was able, through the strong engagement of employees and workers in its supply chain and factories, to deliver on its responsibility and continue meeting the nutritional needs of families around the world.


With the arrival of COVID-19, Saudi Aramco saw an immediate need for a more robust human data centre. It created the HR Intelligent Solutions Centre (HRISC), a dedicated physical and supercomputing space to provide real-time workforce insights with scenario planning and benchmarking to leaders across the company. The HRISC gave Saudi Aramco a holistic overview of the organization's HR, diving deep into the internal and external supply and demand of workforce to support evidence-based decision-making during the COVID-19 crisis. As a result of the synergies created by this system, the company was able to track employees impacted by the pandemic, including employees in different curfew locations, out-of-country employees, dependents, students and employees working from home. In addition, the HRISC displayed potential lockdown scenarios in different cities, their business implications and recommended mitigations, as well as other predictive models. These provided the necessary insights for leaders to proactively capitalize on the information and ensure business continuity during the height of the pandemic. Building the HRISC has pushed the HR function to the core of business planning and opened an array of options to model data and decisions virtually before committing funds or staff time. Instead of trying to manually align databases and results from disparate sources, outside surveys

Anticipated future state, once regulations are lifted:





Remote Work

Companies have quickly pivoted to remote working during lockdowns. This has involved introducing new digital tools, clarifying remote-work policies, fostering employee engagement and mental health, and providing equipment for home working to counter issues such as increased musculoskeletal strain. Workday, for instance, provided each employee with a \$500 stipend for their home office. However, CHROs have quickly realized that as remote working persists, some of the routines established early in the crisis to promote engagement, such as daily huddles and evening gatherings, are placing excessive demands on employees' time, leading to exhaustion. In the UK, 48% of people working remotely reported long and irregular hours during

the initial weeks of lockdown, and 60% said they were showing increased symptoms of fatigue.¹³ Solutions include nudging managers to think afresh about what works, even weekly, and making sure that balance and boundaries are respected. In addition to these themes, remote working also prompts considerations around building a more inclusive and cohesive workforce – such as fostering collaboration between remote and on-site employees, providing managers with sensitivity training and embedding the sense of an open workplace in the organization's culture. Some organizations have begun leveraging technology in support of this, for example by analysing social networks via email and calendar activities.

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The impact of COVID-19 has led companies worldwide to a sudden reassessment of the role of the office. Traditional purposes for dedicated company space include fostering team engagement, creating a sense of community, doing certain types of work where material and equipment are not portable, and providing a workspace for those who do not have the infrastructure at home or the ability to work effectively remotely. Looking ahead, however, offices may not be an essential component for all employees. Facebook, for example, expects half of its staff to work remotely in future.¹⁴ Other companies now envision a hybrid office/remote future for employees. This opens the door to reconsidering the importance of premium office space and revisiting location strategy. One

approach is to focus on working from anywhere so that people can leverage a combination of local workspaces, office hubs and homes. Long leases may prevent companies from closing offices immediately. However, offices can be remodelled to encourage creative and activity-based working. The sooner some of these decisions can be made, the better. Many companies are currently experiencing the paradox of trying to bring people back into the old office arrangement while actively planning to move away from it in the medium term. For the longer term, many CHROs have begun examining site selection data such as local skills availability across talent hubs to make informed decisions on location strategy.

JLL has re-opened more than 300 offices around the globe following closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic, using an approach that balances safety with the human experience. Being back in the office looks different and requires new behaviours, and the company has worked thoughtfully to ensure that its people are returning to warm, inviting spaces where they can collaborate and innovate in a safe way. Taking the view that it only had one chance to make a first impression, the company's HR department partnered with JLL's leadership and facilities management, corporate real estate and marketing teams to not only re-imagine the company's spaces and implement safety protocols, but to reduce employees' anxiety about returning to the office. It did this by providing videos and other visual experiences to help employees prepare for changes to expect, while also inspiring and engaging them in the new office experience. Notably, in its US offices it implemented a "Step Forward" campaign, signifying that the journey to re-entry begins with a single, physical step. This campaign includes engaging signage in lobbies, elevators and on office floors to guide employees so they feel comfortable navigating the space in a new way. It is intended to evoke positiveness and provide a consistent re-entry experience for all employees.

After mobilizing incident management teams to ensure employee safety and client service continuity in the early stage of the COVID-19 pandemic, Willis Towers Watson's CEO brought C-suite focus to the company's response as the pandemic revealed its scope and scale. The company moved from 10% to 95% remote working in a few short weeks – making it work with quick technology enhancements, full access to its flexible work-life arrangements and open communication. It also chartered a multi-faceted team to develop a structured approach to the 'new normal.' In under four weeks, the team addressed well-being ideas, travel guidance, remote office equipment provisioning, collaboration tools and manager resources – all to help colleagues adapt. The company also set policies to guide future return-to-office approaches for 45,000 colleagues in 140 countries. Recognizing colleagues' varied situations, their feedback was sought on these efforts. The June pulse survey, with high participation, showed strong support for the company's efforts, with over 90% of staff feeling connected to their teams, getting access to their managers and appreciating the flexibility. Work has since shifted to 'reimagining the workplace', using lessons from the crisis to define the evolving role offices will play in how the company's work is done.

As a large health IT provider, Cerner works at the intersection of healthcare and technology, helping the medical community manage through the pandemic. The company saw the crisis as a defining moment and understood that surviving will come from defeating the virus—but thriving will come from how it shapes the future. Cerner quickly shifted to a remote work environment and established a taskforce to manage and communicate decisions about its response to employees and clients. It deployed websites to share guidance, field questions and promote well-being. Some 92% of employees responding to a survey were highly satisfied with the approach. To support clients and front-line healthcare workers, the company redeployed resources to focus on tools that monitor COVID trends, enable tele-health visits and provide data to track those at risk. The pandemic highlighted opportunities to improve the healthcare ecosystem and reinforced Cerner's strategy of delivering a connected, interoperable global health network that enables the sharing of health information across multiple systems. This crisis also led to innovation in the company's workplace and workforce models. The changes will increase employee engagement and enable a more inclusive culture, supporting Cerner's vision of a seamless and connected world where everyone thrives.



E

According to the Forum's *Future of Jobs Report 2020*, more than 80% of global employers have accelerated the digitization of work processes in response to the COVID-19 crisis.¹⁵ Technology has been, and will continue to be, a key enabler for businesses to enhance new offerings or to simplify existing procedures, thus disrupting the underlying structural nature of the current tasks and job design within an organization. While the implementation of a digital strategy can be a cost/time-savings strategy, as well as helping employees to make better decisions, it will also cause some job profiles to cease to exist and new ones to emerge, as current tasks will be reorganized or automated.

Insights and experiences from the Forum's CHRO and future of work industry communities highlight that companies which were already exploring digital transformation before COVID-19 have been more resilient during the pandemic, and digitalization is highly likely to remain an integral part of plans to deal with the continued threat from the virus as well

as for the transition into the "new" future of work. Companies are taking advantage of digital tools to reconfigure their production lines and office spaces in a way that enables greater social distancing, and redesigning engagement, communication and operations for remote work. One global company, for example, has trained digital guides who educate people across the organization on digital skills and deployed virtual learning portals, with high uptake. In addition, to capturing the lessons from the crisis response and converting them into guidelines for how to go forward, the company set up an "Agile to the Next Normal" team, which is led by its People and Organization department, but also includes its Chief Digital Officer.

The success of technology adoption depends heavily on organizations holistically reviewing their entire value chain, processes, tasks, jobs and skills to understand the impact of technology on each of these components in an effort to equip employees with new skillsets and enable them to transition effectively into the newly digitized environment.



With the onset of the COVID-19 crisis and the unprecedented requirement for nearly all staff globally to work remotely, UBS developed a platform, 'UBS Ways of Working' (UBS WoW), to support all employees and line managers in navigating the new working environment. The broad-ranging implications of the decreasing boundaries between home and work prompted UBS to enhance its focus on line manager training, mental health, physical health, and employee engagement. UBS WoW offers leadership and supervisory training, mental and physical wellbeing resources, best practice sharing, and a forum to foster community whilst staying connected to each other as staff work remotely. Its core features include:

- Setting a direction: The concept of the 'new normal' and the introduction of agility, featuring opportunities to learn about new skills and the need to adapt.
- Employee support: Promote health and wellbeing, managing work and family, and leading remote teams, further enabling and developing employees.
- Emphasizing culture: Reiterating core UBS values and strategy in everything the company does, the significance of resilience, and its plan to emerge from the crisis as a winner.

Dynamic content was delivered on a regular basis through varying interventions, including pictorial overviews, online learning modules, live webinars and engagement sessions with senior management. The campaign was rolled out with a variety of topics and weekly features strengthening connectivity and engagement whilst also ensuring fun along the way, with games, photo sharing and staff challenges. The platform has had over 180,000 employee visits since the launch in March 2020.



With the spread of COVID-19, Agility acted to safeguard employees, gather operational information required by customers and provide free logistics services and expertise to protect vulnerable populations. To boost internal resilience, Agility set up rapid response teams from HR, quality, operations, health and safety, finance and communications in over 100 countries. The company also shared information using a data visualization tool that showed the status of its workforce, offices and warehouses around the world. It tracked the number and status of local COVID-19 cases, IT readiness, availability of PPE, implementation of social distancing, and temperature monitoring at offices able to reopen. For customers, Agility's COVID-19 website provided comprehensive reporting on air, ocean and road freight; customs clearance; border conditions; warehouse and consolidation availability; and COVID-related restrictions. Today, the website

covers over 60 countries, providing real-time updates and interactive maps showing capacity for air, ocean and road freight. Agility initiated a social media campaign, #keepcargomoving, showcasing [case studies](#) in which commercial and humanitarian stakeholders were able to continue moving vital cargo. In addition, Agility designed strategic food stockpiling plans for governments, secured urgent PPE, delivered supplies to quarantined or isolated populations, provided warehouse space, trucking and other services.

Agility's Digital Transformation Journey

Zurich adapted to the new working reality created by the pandemic with a dramatic acceleration to digitizing its relationship with the "heartbeat" of its business – its employees. The company's state-of-the-art COVID-19 communication microsite enabled an increase in effortless employee interactions, creating a sense of purpose and the company being safe, agile, virtual and in this together to serve its customers and communities. Workloads changed as consumer behaviours changed and the company responded to the crisis internally. With people at the core, staffing needs were impacted, sometimes resulting in an imbalance of resource allocation (i.e., claims, retail distribution, operations). Business areas reallocated resources with a preference to aligning internal (rather than external) talent to where it is needed most to guarantee business continuity. North America, Asia Pacific and select European countries prioritized work and filled vacant positions, while some functions built their own talent marketplace solutions. Zurich's ability to recognize and proactively equip its teams with not only physical and communication resources but also with skills, mindsets, behaviours and values enabled it to reallocate staff to where customers needed it most.¹⁶

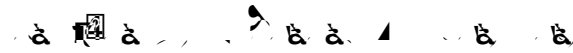
Agility's Digital Transformation Journey

Adopting a growth mindset continues to be the foundation of Coursera's COVID-19 response.

As the pandemic unfolded and Coursera's 650 employees began working remotely, it quickly became clear that work at the company would change permanently. As an online learning platform, it was logical to embrace this as a learning opportunity. Coursera gathered direct feedback from its teams by sending out a remote work survey, which more than 80% of employees filled out. Using that data, it was able to set a plan to better support its employees during this time. This included curating a collection of Coursera courses that teach skills like resilience and well-being, including popular courses like Yale University's Science of Well-Being. This led to a 47% increase in employees taking courses on the platform during May, for example. Embracing the unknown is also key to following a growth mindset. To gather as much knowledge as it could in real time, the company developed a COVID-19 task force with representation from all global offices. This allowed it to check in on local conditions, plan office closures, postpone events, adjust new hire onboarding, and identify logistical support for employees like home internet stipends and reimbursements for home office setups.

As a result of COVID-19, territories across the PwC network of member firms have had to further reimagine how learning content is delivered, particularly for sessions that would normally be held in-person, such as onboarding, induction and leadership training.

This shift to virtual delivery has taken place in an environment where people are experiencing screen fatigue, speed-to-delivery is critical, budgets are limited, new metrics are being established and the future of work is ever-evolving. Many territories have cancelled all in-person classroom learning through to December 2020 and some have cancelled in-person sessions through 2021 as well. While this set of circumstances is not unique, PwC's network of firms is approaching the changes as an opportunity to set the foundation for the future. It is working to define new blueprints for learning such that the world becomes the new classroom. They are doubling down on digital upskilling. They are utilizing multiple technologies and tools simultaneously to create engaging experiences and using this opportunity as a catalyst to drive and accelerate culture change related to perpetual learning and protected development time. These moves have allowed PwC firms to respond in an agile manner to the current crisis, while putting them on a positive trajectory for the future.



In terms of workers' physical health, insights and experiences from the Forum's CHRO and future of work industry communities highlight that immediate priorities during the pandemic have been to ensure safe working environments and comply with evolving public health directives, including consideration for the needs of vulnerable employees, such as those with underlying health conditions. Mental health has also increasingly become a priority as a result of the crisis, with two-thirds of companies offering behavioural health services, such as employee assistance programmes, reporting that they have seen their use increase¹⁷ (see box). In designing a comprehensive approach to these issues, it is important to have in place health and well-being programmes that can be customized to the needs of each employee and to use data, including from employee surveys and self-reporting tools, to support programme design and provide a comprehensive picture of workforce health and well-being throughout the company.

The disruptions created by the pandemic – such as the large-scale shift to remote working – have demanded new approaches to the employee experience, engagement and motivation, from the onboarding of new talent onward. Many CHROs feel that the level of engagement both between colleagues and between leaders and employees has become much deeper during the crisis. According to one study, before COVID-19, only half of workers globally said their company mostly cared or cared a great deal about employee well-being.¹⁸ During the crisis, by contrast, 80% of employees in the United States felt that their leaders had acted proactively to protect their health and safety and 78% thought that their organization had responded to the crisis appropriately.¹⁹ The challenge now will be how to maintain this level of support and engagement as the pandemic continues. Companies have begun reconsidering some of the approaches put in place early in the crisis and are looking at uptake behaviour to ensure that they are sustainable for different employee groups moving forward.

Working remotely increases the risk of isolation and of mental health problems. Accordingly, CHROs are increasingly focused on how to promote mental well-being. In the US, 88% of workers said they were moderately to extremely stressed during the pandemic and over two-thirds said it was the most stressful time in their careers.²⁰

Mental health remains a stigma in many organizations and it is useful to have senior leaders speaking out about their personal experiences. There is a business case for mental health, beyond the duty of care to employees; people who are mentally healthy will be more engaged, think better and communicate better. The UK's [Stevenson/Farmer review](#) provides one useful framework for companies to act on mental health.

Best practices include: providing appropriate metrics, services and accessible information;

[Deloitte Global Mental Health Podcast Series](#)

A globally produced podcast series for Deloitte professionals on the topic of mental health features leaders

implemented a COVID-19 leave programme offering 100% of pay for up to eight weeks, and then 60% for an additional 18 weeks. Employees with a COVID-19 diagnosis are eligible for 26 weeks paid leave and can access a nurse-led care management programme. For those juggling realities at home, the company expanded back4ont pran addi, VM % a n e y a s

- Installed thermal temperature scanners at large campuses
- Prepared Employee Care Kits with cloth face coverings, a thermometer and hand sanitizer for all employees returning to the office

In a June 2020 employee survey to gauge how employees were feeling about Centene's response, results showed 89% in favour in categories such as Care for People, Communications and Leadership.



HCL invoked its Pandemic Response plan for COVID-19 in January 2020. Given the humanitarian dimension of this crisis, the firm-wide unified response was led by the chief human resources officer, in conjunction with the CEO and chief risk officer. This placed employee welfare at the core while ensuring business continuity. Very early in the outbreak, 150,000 employees were seamlessly enabled to work remotely. As lockdowns eased, the transition back to office was made voluntary and implemented in a secure, staggered way. A 24/7 Global Helpline provided free well-being services for employees and their families. An empathetic and bespoke communication plan, #TakeCareHCL, reinforced the company's commitment to people. A COVID-19 resource hub on the intranet kept employees advised on safety, remote working risks and policies and strengthened communal bonds to restore confidence. Virtual events and well-being programmes fostered meaningful connections between leaders and teams, employees and families in the era of social distancing. Predictive analytics on the impact of COVID-19 by way of a "virtual situation room" helped leaders make real-time decisions. The company's proactive, inclusive and simple crisis management approach helped it respond to a complex issue like COVID-19 in a timely and effective manner. Over 90% of employees said they were "very satisfied" with the company's initiatives to care for them. HCL's employees enabled 3.5 million client employees to work remotely and 99% of clients polled across over 600 accounts rated HCL's COVID-19 response as "very effective" or "effective".



Changes to the workplace environment and within organizations pose additional challenges to local leaders and managers to effectively lead their teams. On top of day-to-day managerial tasks, leaders are responsible for establishing the new direction of the organization, driving new changes and managing internal and external stakeholders in an uncertain economic environment. Adding to the surmounting pressure of these activities, leaders are now also expected to fulfil these responsibilities both physically and virtually. The absence of a physical work environment where the entire team is present, sharing similar physical and social context such as visual, auditory and informal information exchange, requires more effort from leaders to align and integrate perspectives within and across teams. Leaders will need to redefine, explore and iterate new ways to manage the business, teams and morale by actively developing empathy, trust and collaboration.

Good leadership has been critical during the crisis. It is important for employees to see leaders “live”; this might include weekly global town halls alongside smaller group meetings. Transparency and authenticity from leaders resonate. Choosing to err on the side of over-communicating rather than under-communicating while providing timely, transparent and clear information about the business, teams and individuals will often be appropriate in these circumstances. It is good for employees to know that managers are also having to balance responsibilities such as family and children and that there is not a simple answer to those challenges. A dynamic leadership assessment is required, beyond the normal structured annual or quarterly cycle, to assess how leaders are performing in the crisis – including pulse surveys to assess employees’ views – and provide the necessary support.

At the height of the pandemic, Heidrick & Struggles’ leadership focused on three core priorities. First and foremost, to ensure the health and safety of employees, including supporting psychological safety and well-being. The firm launched a global employee assistance programme, with confidential counseling for employees and family members, and online resources focused on new parent support, caring for elderly parents, nutrition and more. Second, to prioritize learning as a way to maintain professional development and boost employee morale with an eye toward emerging from the crisis stronger. Senior partners hosted a series of virtual webinars to help consultants develop new strategies for working remotely with clients, prospects, and their teams. The firm also converted in-person programmes into 45+ virtual sessions. Third, to foster connection and help ensure the culture and fabric of the firm remained strong. To do this, the company relied heavily on its network of local ‘culture champions’, across 40 offices, focused on creating connections at the local office level and coordinating participation in global initiatives, such as a global talent competition to raise funds for charities supporting COVID-19 relief, planning a virtual Global Day of Service to give back to communities, and other grassroots activities, such as virtual fitness competitions, Zoom happy hours and parenting support forums.

- Integration of leadership expectations across people practices, such as performance enablement, recognition, and recruitment.

The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the company's culture transformation. There was record-breaking participation in the latest engagement survey (May/June 2020) where 93% of employees responded. Of those respondents, 93% said leadership communication was effective.

HP A

HP focused on managing the unprecedented COVID-19 situation with urgency and a deep sense of care. From the onset, the company defined the safety of its employees as top priority as it continued delivering for customers. HP quickly pivoted its HR team to create a new engagement approach, termed "HP Spirit". It assigned a different theme to each day of the week to: Motivational Mondays, Training Tuesdays, Wellness Wednesdays, Thoughtful Thursdays and Family Fridays. Every week the company creates daily offerings—from stress relief sessions and home-schooling activities to office hours with the company's medical director, a global dance party hosted by a DJ, and more. When the team sees a need, it is filled. HP Spirit has garnered more than 75,000 views since March and helped drive a 16% increase in employees' belief in the future of the company. In addition to its engagement activities, HP has hosted Mobility Manager Trainings to help managers support their teams, practise self-compassion and create a sense of belonging

these areas. This ongoing effort has already paid dividends, resulting in a pipeline of ideas that Upwork will implement in its evolving “back to better” plan.

DSM's Culture, Leadership, and Values

DSM's culture has underpinned its response to COVID-19 in the past months. The company learned that the more dispersed, remote or virtual its teams were, the more critical its leadership, culture and values became in providing both direction and a sense of belonging. DSM's co-CEOs emphasized its longstanding value of responsibility and its commitment to being caring, courageous and collaborative. These “three Cs” drove the firm's decision-making and how it engaged with its employees, increasing listening and connecting. The way DSM has made that connection, in the most personal way possible, made its employees feel engaged, safe and secure, as evidenced by measurable increases in its inclusion and engagement indexes. DSM's commitment to being caring, courageous and collaborative as cornerstones of its culture is reflected in its policies and practices, reinforcing the integrity of its culture and, with that, further strengthening employee commitment.



Structural and Social Inequalities

The COVID-19 crisis has aggravated pre-existing structural and social inequalities, in particular:

- Women have been disproportionately affected by the crisis, threatening to reverse gains made in recent years and exacerbate gender inequalities
- Young people are especially exposed to the economic effects of the crisis and to some of the downsides of remote working
- Black, Indigenous and people of colour (BIPOC) communities have often suffered disproportionately from the impacts of the pandemic, and at the same time a social crisis has emerged over the urgent need to address racial justice²⁵

Companies need to ensure they take steps to mitigate negative impacts of the crisis on at-risk groups, as well as to ensure that equity and inclusion in all forms of human diversity define the “new normal” in the workplace. CHROs note that the crisis has provided companies with a lesson on inclusion, since the experience of lockdown has been quite different for certain employee groups – particularly impacting caregivers and people who do not have good surroundings for home-working. The current moment for work, workplace and workforce reset and redesign, and the way that technology can scale diversity, equity and inclusion efforts, create new opportunities for solutions. For example, the Forum has created a dedicated *Diversity, Equity and Inclusion 4.0 Toolkit*,²⁶ focused on technology which may be leveraged in support of an inclusive workplace.

PayPal's Priority Stakeholder Group

Employees were PayPal's priority stakeholder group even prior to the global pandemic, so when the pandemic began the company knew that it was critical to take an inside-out approach, ensuring the health

Companies face difficult decisions on workforce numbers in response to the economic slump created by measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19, particularly as the pandemic persists. However, an overarching theme of the crisis response should be an equitable sharing of risks and rewards between workers, senior executives, companies and shareholders. Many companies are making significant efforts to minimize the need for lay-offs; for example, implementing measures such as mandatory personal time off, unpaid leave and furloughs, helped in some cases by government wage subsidies, and accompanying commitments to no redundancies with support for accelerated reskilling of employees. This partly reflects a recognition that lay-offs do not just have a lasting impact on those laid off, they also significantly affect those who remain and can have a devastating impact on communities. In addition, with increasing

trade union agreement. Following a legal agreement with GM, so far 15 GM employees have been deployed in Unilever's operations. Unilever benefits from the fast learning curve of GM operators, who are experienced in factory processes with high health and safety standards. GM benefits from the opportunity for suspended employees. And both companies benefit from innovation via diversified approaches.

Unilever also recently signed a talent alliance partnership with Ctrip, China's biggest tourism company, whose business was heavily affected by the crisis. Unilever needed highly skilled digital workers and the travel industry, having pioneered e-commerce, has many employees skilled in digital. In 2 months, 18 people started their 6-month rotation in Unilever, supporting, e-commerce and sales operations, with plans to redeploy 20 more people in the near future. Unilever is now developing a framework for deploying alliances and employee sharing globally.

BOX 3

People + Work Connect

CHROs from Accenture, Verizon, ServiceNow and Lincoln Financial Group have worked with Accenture Technology to launch [People + Work Connect](#), a global B2B analytics-based platform that facilitates continued employment. The platform connects companies laying off or furloughing

workers with companies that have hiring needs. This allows the participating companies to look in aggregate for where there are roles or talent supply in particular geographies, allowing CHROs to use their expertise to make a difference for the economy and society.



Supporting employees during layoffs

To the extent that internal workforce supports and B2B talent transfers are exhausted, companies can help employees turn being laid off into a positive launchpad for their careers through financial support and "outskilling". For example, Airbnb, which saw its business collapse during the crisis, laid off 1,900 people, one-quarter of its workforce, in May, but those laid off received 14 weeks of pay,

equity stakes in the company, an Airbnb laptop, healthcare insurance for a year and assistance with their job search.²⁸ In addition, in keeping with the principles of stakeholder capitalism, a company's responsibility in such a situation should extend beyond its full-time employees to also encompass appropriate support to its contingent workers.

Given COVID-19's impact on the global labour market environment,²⁹ hiring sentiments are currently in cautious mode as companies navigate the economic uncertainty brought on by the pandemic. Global executive surveys find that pivoting to a gig workforce strategy is a top selection when considering how to move the organization forward following an economic downturn

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Senior Vice-President; Head, Group Human Resources, Kudelski Group

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Chief Human Resources Officer, Manulife

Executive Vice President, People & Human Resources Officer, McKesson Corporation

Global Practices Leader, Mercer (MMC)

Chief Human Resources Officer, Mercer (MMC)

Head, Group Human Resources and Business Services, Nestlé

Executive Vice President and Head, People & Organisation, Novo Nordisk A/S

Chief Business Affairs & Legal Officer, PayPal

Member of the Executive Board; Secretary-General, Publicis Groupe

Global Human Capital Leader, PwC

Global Leader, People and Organizations Practice, PwC

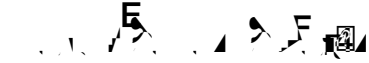
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Resetting the Future of Work Agenda: Disruption and Renewal in a Post-COVID World is an insight report published by the World Economic Forum's Platform for Shaping the Future of the New Economy and Society, in collaboration with Mercer (MMC).



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A special thank you to our colleagues in the Platform for Shaping the Future of the New Economy and Society and at Mercer for their collaboration, help and efforts, as well as to the World Economic Forum's editing, publishing and layout teams for their excellent copy-editing and graphic design work and unfailing support.

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