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HR Edge

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The Hybrid Work Model

Hybrid workforce strategies will factor into HR planning this year and beyond. The pandemic has resulted in thousands of employees working from their kitchen tables or living rooms rather than the office or other workplace. If that's the case, organizations are likely in or will be in the process of deciding how much remote work will continue to play into the workplace. Furthermore, a hybrid model is becoming a growing standard for many organizations in some capacity—and might even be a common long-term option.

What is the Hybrid Workplace?

In a hybrid workplace, some employees are on-site at a workplace facility, while others join remotely. This flexible work model is specifically designed to support a distributed workforce. In some form, a majority of workplaces are opting for either all-remote or hybrid remote arrangements.

One of the most common hybrid models may be “flex remote,” in which employees are on-site on set days. “Core hours” is another hybrid arrangement, in which employees are available during designated times. In both of those workplace models, employees are allowed to make their workday flexible outside of those set days or hours. Additionally, there are other considerations, such as whether certain departments or roles need to work on-site or can be just as effective working remotely.

Hybrid workplaces can look very different based on the organization's priority of the following factors:

- Talent access
- Individual Productivity
- Team Productivity
- Cost of real estate

Advantages of Hybrid Workplaces

Despite remote work being forced upon some organizations during the pandemic, a long-term approach for a hybrid workplace offers several benefits to both remote workforces and employers. Advantages of hybrid workplaces include the following:

- Access to wide talent pools
- Increased employee productivity
- Stronger employee engagement
- Better collaboration
- Greater flexibility
- Healthy work-life balance

Challenges of Hybrid Workplaces

Like any new initiative or strategy, a hybrid workplace also has its shortcomings. Challenges of hybrid workplaces include the following:

- Potential for different time zones due to geographically
- dispersed teams
- Communication understanding due to availability of visual cues
- Lack of real-time collaboration
- Shortage of team-building opportunities and events
- Cybersecurity and reliance on IT infrastructure

If office locations or expenses are redundant or underutilized, employers may find a hybrid work model more costly than before. Employers can reduce the prevalence or impact of such challenges by being intentional about decisions and trade-offs. It's crucial for employers to be empathic and listen to individual employee needs while also being creative when developing connected and effective workplace solutions.

Thinking Ahead

Most organizations have norms in place for on-site employees and now need to adapt to a mirroring set of standards for those working remotely. To best accommodate all employees, consider the following tips:

- **Create an open chat** — Chat tools can facilitate dialogue for both remote and on-site employees. Channels can be created for efficient work-related communication—or even as a way to replace water cooler conversations and help build camaraderie within teams.
- **Plan meetings to be friendly to all employees** — Remote employees attending a meeting via a conference line or video platform can be just as active as those sitting in the conference room chairs. At the beginning of a meeting, leaders should introduce participants joining remotely, and ensure that all participants have a chance to share their thoughts or ideas.
- **Be transparent about remote work expectations and decisions** — There are a variety of reasons why some employees may be expected to work on-site while others are granted the opportunity to work remotely. By being transparent about decisions, employers can facilitate a friendly and open environment for distant teams to effectively collaborate.

Hybrid work models will look different for every organization. But as your organization puts return-to-work plans to action, it may be time to start thinking about what the future will look like for your workplace, and create a strategy that works for all employees—regardless of their locations.

Consider the following statistics from a Mercer survey of U.S. employers:

83%

Are considering flexible work arrangements at a greater scale than they did prior to the pandemic.

73%

Plan to implement a hybrid work environment.

42%

Plan to focus managerial and employee training on leading and working in a virtual or blended environment.

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Strategic Employee Communication

Employee communication refers to how organizations communicate with their employees—and conversely, how employees communicate with organizational leadership. While dialogue takes place in every workplace to some capacity, organizations that think and act strategically when communicating with employees may be able to realize benefits.

Why is Employee Communication Important?

The way an organization communicates with its employees has a tremendous impact on employee productivity, collaboration, engagement and overall workplace experience. Effective communication is important because it:

- Keeps employees informed
- Gives employees a holistic and transparent view of the company
- Keeps employees engaged in the workplace
- Boosts organizational morale
- Increases collaboration and workplace efficiencies
- Gives employees a voice for feedback, debate and discussion

Poor communication can be a costly mistake for both small and large organizations. Business experts from PProvoke reported that large companies (those with more than 100,000 employees) cited an average loss of \$62.4 million each year in lost productivity as a result of inadequate or irrelevant employee communication. Wasted time due to clarification, poor direction and bad listening translates to reduced productivity. Furthermore, miscommunication costs smaller companies (those with 100 or fewer employees) an average of \$420,000 each year.

It's essential to strategically link employee communication to overall organizational strategy to ensure effective and consistent business operations. An employee communication plan or strategy can help organizations communicate consistent messages, establish a recognizable and positive employer brand and deliver information or messages from leadership that are consistent with the organization's mission, vision and culture. Poor communication may suggest indifference to employees' performance and result in lower productivity. To that end, a lack of communication can make a workforce feel underappreciated, fostering discontentment and low morale.

Gallup research shows that there's work to be done to improve employee communication.

74%

Of employees feel they are missing out on company information and news.

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Preparing for Future Health Crises

The COVID-19 pandemic was a wake-up call for HR departments in 2020. Suddenly, employees were looking to HR teams for guidance in areas not typically considered their responsibility. This was a turning point for many workplaces—now, HR is expected to understand public health challenges swiftly and manage them efficiently. Now is the time for organizations to develop a long-term plan for the ongoing impact of COVID-19 and prepare to make agile responses during any future pandemics.

Consider the following three ways HR teams can prepare for future public health crises:

1. **Assess the risk.** One of the first steps during a public health crisis is to assess the risk of the organization. To do this, employers must educate themselves about the crisis in general and stay updated. While workplace risk assessments will vary during a health crisis, all employers will need to consider the impact on workers.
2. **Adapt quickly.** Based on the risk assessment, employers must be prepared to adapt quickly to the health crisis. For instance, if employees are at high risk due to their working conditions, perhaps requiring them to work remotely would be the best solution.
3. **Communicate thoroughly.** At every stage, employers should keep employees in the loop. This means sharing the outcome of the risk assessment and clearly communicating any new workplace protocols.

Keep in mind that employees should never have to wonder how their workplace is handling a crisis. Responding to a health crisis will be much easier when an employer plans for such an event ahead of time.

Many factors play into how a public health crisis can impact a workplace. The following factors influence health in the workplace and may be considered when assessing risks:

- **Individual Factors** include elements of an employee's health behaviors, health risk factors and current health status.
- **Interpersonal factors** include elements of an employee's social network, such as relationships with managers, co-workers and family who provide support.
- **Organizational factors** include elements of the workplace, culture and policies — in addition to leadership and management support for health and safety initiatives.
- **Environmental factors** include elements of physical workplace, along with community health access and opportunities.

Source: CDC

Contact Brady, Chapman, Holland & Associates for more human resources trends, industry insights and proactive strategies to maintain a competitive edge in today's workplace.

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