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Establishing a Remote and Hybrid Workforce

Asia HR Research Team

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By Analysts [Asia HR Research Team](#)

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This research roundup contains insights, tools and benchmarks that help HR leaders forecast the impact of increased remote working as well as plan and implement a hybrid workforce model for the postpandemic era.

Analysis

The paradigm of in-office work has been shattered as a result of COVID-19. Remote work, once a consideration for many organizations but rarely a priority, became a health and safety imperative. But even as organizations plan their recovery strategies, remote work will remain a cornerstone of the postpandemic future of work.

This leaves HR leaders with a series of critical decisions to make around which parts of the workforce can work remotely, which should stay remote even after recovery and how their organizations should navigate follow-on changes, such as facilitating collaboration and building relationships. Organizations need a new framework, not to answer “How soon can our employees be back in the office?” but to answer “What touchpoints in our organization require in-person interaction?”

Expressed another way, HR leaders should resist simply charting the organization’s path back to the prepandemic status quo without exploring how their organizations’ ways of working should change in the “new normal.” This includes a switch from assessing the suitability of *roles* to be performed remotely to assessing suitability of *workflows* to be completed remotely. Then, HR leaders must understand the supporting processes and technology needed to enable employees to flow seamlessly between on-site and remote working modes.

Remote Work Trends, Expectations and Concerns

As a result of increased remote work during COVID-19, organizational plans and employee expectations around the future of remote work implementation shifted. Our analysis shows that 74% of employees have worked remotely (either fully or partially) during the pandemic. ¹ We project that **48% of employees will keep working remotely at least some of the time after COVID-19**, representing an 18% increase from the prepandemic number. ^{2,3,4} Nearly one in five employees will work remotely all the time.

Organizations are already implementing new policies and adopting new workflows to accommodate fully remote employees and the 29% of employees who will work remotely part of

the time. This transition to a permanently hybrid workforce provides an opportunity for a remarkable increase in flexibility.

As HR leaders explore the question “Is there a business rationale for bringing employees back into their pre-COVID-19 work environments?” it is first essential to arrive at a consensus on what a hybrid workforce is.

The Three E’s of a Hybrid Workforce

The **hybrid workforce** model ensures the workforce **can flow through** various work sites, ranging from remote solo locations to remote microsites of small populations, to traditional concentrated facilities (e.g., office, factory, retail). The hybrid workforce model is one of **flexibility, adaptability and shared ownership** on the part of employers and employees.

Providing the ability for employees to “flow through” work sites means employees and managers can switch locations and schedules dynamically where it makes the most sense to drive both productivity and engagement. As a result, HR leaders will need to lead their organizations in breaking down long-held beliefs and potential myths about where and how work gets done most effectively. Managers must trust employees to be effective and productive, while employees need to be flexible and comfortable being mobile.

Managing a hybrid workforce will be one of the key characteristics of the postpandemic work environment. The mandate for HR leaders today is to build the business case for a hybrid workforce (**economics**), adapt the employee life cycle for a hybrid workforce (**experience**), and ensure the hybrid workforce is fully supported (**enable**) (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: The Three E’s of a Hybrid Workforce



Source: Gartner

Research Highlights

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Economics

The economics phase of managing a hybrid workforce includes building a business case that demonstrates tangible benefits and mitigates potential concerns for expanding a hybrid workforce. In this phase, the HR leader must clearly define the components and expected outcomes of the organization's strategy and the degrees of flexibility for different sets of roles.

- [“Beyond Remote Work: The Hybrid Workforce Model”](#) (Webinar) — In this webinar, you will learn how HR can think about the business case for a hybrid workforce model and the key components of a strategy to support a hybrid workforce.
- [“Managing the Hybrid Workforce in the Postpandemic Era”](#) (Webinar) — This panel webinar covers key considerations and peer practices in managing a hybrid workforce.
- [“Remote Work After COVID-19”](#) — This research provides HR leaders with a framework for deciding how best to leverage remote work in their organizations and outlines emerging considerations for a hybrid workforce.
- [“How Organizations Are Supporting a Hybrid Workforce”](#) — HR leaders can use this research to benchmark the strategies they are putting in place to manage a hybrid workforce against the strategies of their peers.

Experience

The employee experience of hybrid workers will be significantly different and requires special consideration. HR leaders will need to consider the impact on employee goal setting and performance, communication and collaboration as well as core HR programs including recruiting, onboarding, total rewards and talent development.

- [“Measuring Performance of a Hybrid Workforce”](#) — This article outlines three key adaptations HR leaders can consider to measure the performance of a hybrid workforce fairly and effectively.
- [“Tool: 35 Ways to Virtualize Your HR Processes”](#) — This tool includes an assessment and 35 examples of HR process virtualization to help CHROs create effective virtual HR processes at speed.

Enable

The enable phase of managing a hybrid workforce includes determining how physical workspaces and facilities — as well as roles and workflows — will need to adapt to support a hybrid workforce. HR leaders must work with IT leaders to reconsider how technology can support virtual working

conditions, and with leaders and managers across the organization to refresh the culture and support new management capability development.

- [“Reevaluating Culture Strategies for Remote Work”](#) – HR leaders can read this research to learn how organizations are evaluating their culture strategies for remote or hybrid-remote work in the new normal.
- [“Building Skills for Remote to Hybrid Work”](#) – In hybrid work models that mix remote and site-based work, HR leaders find untapped value by sensing for skills built outside of the office and focusing on building soft skills that address the unique challenges of hybrid work. Four successful approaches for developing soft skills are described.
- [“Checklist of HR Technology to Enhance the Remote Employee Experience”](#) – This article suggests HR technology solutions for multiple employee touchpoints to help HR leaders enhance the employee experience of working virtually.

Evidence

¹ May 2020 Gartner ReimagineHR Employee Survey

² April 2020 Gartner COVID-19 Crisis Benchmarking Against Your Peers Webinar Poll

³ 2020 Gartner Cost-Cutting and Employee Experience Survey

⁴ March 2020 Gartner “COVID-19: How Finance Leaders Are Responding to the Emerging Situation” Webinar Poll

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