



Redefining the Rules of Remote Work

3 keys to succeeding with a post-pandemic remote work strategy



81%

OF REMOTE EMPLOYEES DON'T WANT TO GO BACK TO THE OFFICE OR WOULD PREFER A HYBRID SCHEDULE.¹

When the Covid-19 pandemic hit in early 2020, remote work exploded, as 54% of organizations around the world modified roles to be remote-capable². The number of employees working from home multiplied worldwide, and the amount of time Americans typically spent working at home surged from 5% to 60%³. This unexpected global health event permanently shifted the dynamics

of everyday workplace culture. At the time, nobody knew how long it would last.

Yet even before the pandemic hit, remote work was on the rise. In April 2020, O.C. Tanner's [Rise of the Remote Worker](#) webinar shared the statistic that work from home had experienced a 10% growth rate every year over the previous 10 years⁴. The difference in 2020 was that almost all organizations had to figure out how a large portion of their workforce could work remotely, yet somehow stay productive and connected to their coworkers until it was safe to return to regular office settings.

Going remote: A global experiment

Employers soon discovered that moving employees to off-site work was not as easy as flipping a switch. Practically speaking, only certain types of jobs could be performed away from a business office or work facility. Businesses worldwide had to identify which roles or teams could carry out their work from a distance, and then orchestrate a transition.

A study by McKinsey Global Institute found that only 20%-25% of the workforces in advanced economies could work from home, between three and five days a week. But even those numbers represented four to five times more remote work than before the pandemic⁵.

The increasing dynamic of work from home created new challenges, and organizations wrestled with how to work efficiently as some departments worked remotely and others—such as front-line employees, production workers, or warehouse staff—remained on site.

A study by McKinsey Global Institute found that only 20% - 25% of the workforces in advanced economies could work from home.⁵

Throughout 2020, HR leaders reacted to federal and state health guidelines, local business limitations, and social distancing requirements that could affect their workforce. They adapted their policies appropriately as guidelines changed.

A year later, as Covid-19 vaccinations were deployed and the number of cases started to decline, leaders began to create plans on how employees would continue to work remotely or return to the workplace once pandemic restrictions were lifted.

The result: Employees want remote work options

After more than a year of expanded remote work triggered by the pandemic, leaders wanted to know two things: “Did it work?” and “How will remote work change moving forward?” Working away from the office exposed many of the pros—and also a few cons—of working in an isolated setting.

First, employees proved that they could work from home, and they enjoyed many of the positive benefits such as no commute, more flexible hours, and using technology platforms to attend meetings virtually. They also experienced some of the negative effects such as being expected to be constantly available for work and experiencing symptoms of burnout and isolation.

After a survey of thousands of Americans, one research group concluded that the average employee would like to work from home nearly half the time as we near a post-pandemic workplace ³.

A Harvard Business School online survey¹ noted that while most employees miss their colleagues and other aspects of office life, they don't want to go back to “business as usual” because they want more flexibility. The survey also found that:

81%

**OF REMOTE EMPLOYEES
DON'T WANT TO GO BACK TO
THE OFFICE OR WOULD
PREFER A HYBRID
SCHEDULE.¹**

27%

**OF EMPLOYEES HOPE TO
WORK REMOTELY
FULL-TIME.¹**

61%

**WOULD LIKE TO WORK FROM
HOME TWO OR THREE DAYS
A WEEK.¹**

Leaders evaluate remote opportunities

HR executives seek to help their employees work in the ways that makes them happy and fulfilled. Yet they also want to build a workplace culture reinforced through collaboration and meaningful relationships—goals that are harder to accomplish when employees are working in isolation and only communicating through Zoom and email.

Even so, employers recognize the flexibility, work/life balance, and general positivity that remote work can generate. More than ever, leaders are buying into the idea of extending remote work opportunities of some kind to more of their employees.

In its study, McKinsey Global Institute found that companies are planning to shift to flexible workspaces after positive experiences with remote work during the pandemic.⁵ Likewise, CNBC reports that many large tech companies, including Microsoft, Twitter, and Amazon, are increasingly adopting extended work-from-home policies in 2021.⁶

As organizations scan the post-pandemic landscape, they understand the need to revamp pre-Covid policies and offer new direction around work-from-home opportunities.

Setting new rules for remote

The work-from-home experiment proved successful in many ways, permanently changing the way employers feel about remote work. This leaves organizations to make important decisions about how to handle the issue moving forward.

A Gartner CFO survey revealed that over two-thirds (74%) plan to permanently shift employees to remote work after the Covid-19 crisis ends⁷. Organizations are setting new policies, including which employees are eligible for remote work, whether they can choose to work a hybrid schedule, and other policies allowing employees more flexibility to do their jobs.

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Tech giant Google recently announced a new plan to move to a hybrid option, where most employees will work three days a week in the office, and two days wherever they work best. Another 20% of employees are anticipated to work remotely on a full-time basis.⁸

The politics of remote work are also changing. Countries around the world are adapting legislation to make it easier for employees to work from home. The Economist² reports that:

- Russia has closed the pay-remote-workers-less loophole
- Germany may give employees the right to work remotely for a set number of days a year
- Ireland is likely to follow Britain in creating a legal right to request working from home

3 keys to remote work success

As leaders consider how to adapt their remote work policies, three areas to address in order to provide employees with the best possible work-from-home experiences include the following:

1. Provide more work flexibility

Employees crave flexibility more than ever. SHRM reported that 83% of survey respondents plan to put more flexible work policies in place, such as allowing more people to work from home or letting them adjust their schedules, after the work crisis has passed.⁹

Large companies like Google and others have already released new plans to expand work from home. They have expanded the number of roles eligible to work in a remote setting and introduced new hybrid work options. Providing these

options affirms a greater commitment to remote work and shows employees that their well-being and work preferences matter.

Employers will need to provide flexibility on more than just where employees do their work. The next wave of flexibility will center around giving employees latitude on when they work, too. Instead of focusing on a set of hours, employers will focus on a set of outputs to achieve.

2. Connect with frequent one-to-ones

The [2021 Global Culture Report](#) identified that as we work remotely, we lose the easy opportunities to catch up with one another in the hallways or the break room. Because employees have to make more of an effort to stay connected virtually, organizations should actively foster those connections.



One remedy is to make an effort to make some kind of connection with employees daily. An effective way for leaders to check in on work and progress is through one-to-one connections. But for remote workers, they can be even more important for employee wellbeing and engagement.

Our research previously showed a meaningful impact when leaders had regular one-to-ones with their people. However, in our most recent report, we saw a statistically significant difference in the effectiveness of one-to-ones held weekly versus every other week (biweekly) and monthly.¹⁰

Effectiveness of one-to-ones held weekly versus biweekly or monthly.

OUTCOMES	WEEKLY ONE-TO-ONES COMPARED TO BIWEEKLY
Engagement	+58%
Fearfulness	-47%
Personal productivity	+31%
Purpose	+19%
Opportunity	+24%
Success	+15%
Appreciation	+24%
Wellbeing	+23%
Leadership	+36%
Burnout	-15%

2021 GLOBAL CULTURE STUDY, O.C. TANNER INSTITUTE

3. Use technology to offset isolation

Another finding in the [2021 Global Culture Report](#) was that bad experiences with technology can create or exacerbate disconnection, isolation, and burnout in the workplace—especially when the workplace is remote.¹¹

Organizations should fully leverage technology to improve the thousands of micro-experiences employees have at work. Conferencing tools such as Zoom or Microsoft Teams have flourished

during the pandemic as employees seek productive methods of communication and connection. Other tools help employees collaborate and share content and work progress.

O.C. Tanner researchers also found that on-site workers are four times more likely to feel that recognition is embedded in their culture.¹² This highlights how remote workers are too often separated from their company culture.

Tools like [Culture Cloud Recognition](#) can help ensure that remote employees receive the kinds of leader-driven and peer-to-peer recognition that boosts workplace culture. Here’s a recent example of this:

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, [Puget Sound Energy](#) knew they had to help their newly remote workers as well as their front-line employees to stay connected to the organization and one another. IT leaders recognized team members who played a pivotal role in transitioning employees to remote work and supporting their IT needs at home. Leaders also created special awards to reinforce and recognize employee safety. As a result, all employees—both remote and onsite—stayed connected to each other through ecards and formal recognition.

For more insights on crisis and other topics relating to workplace culture, read our [2021 Global Culture Report](#).

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