



# Fuel50 Global Talent Mobility Best Practice Research

Understanding the Impact of COVID on Organizations  
and their People Practices

Part 1/6



Fuel50 conducted best practices research on current talent mobility experiences, best-in-class talent mobility, and the imperatives for talent mobility in the future across high-performing organizations around the world.

This report is the first of a six-part series detailing the key findings from our research study and extensive analysis of workforce and talent mobility trends.

The goals of the study were as follows:

- To understand current trends in internal talent mobility and workforce reskilling across the globe
- To learn what best-in-class career growth and talent mobility looks like today
- To ascertain the key imperatives for talent mobility in the coming decade

Read more about our research design and audience [here](#).



# Understanding the Impact of COVID on Organizations and their People Practices

The global pandemic meant that organizations everywhere had to adjust to rapid and unprecedented changes. A whole new set of business concepts that had been simmering on the back burner for many companies - things like flexibility, agility, mobility, and resilience - were now important elements that organizations everywhere suddenly had to embrace if they wanted to survive and grow.

## The Overnight Pivot to Remote Work

Organizations were forced to transition to remote working practices virtually overnight. Teams, functions, service delivery models, and supply chain logistics had to be transformed to ensure that organizations could keep their doors open and continue delivering to customers.

## The Collective People Challenge

Collectively, HR and business leaders faced increased and unprecedented challenges because of operating in the pandemic era.

As technology CEO Marylene Delbourg-Delphis told the Workology Podcast,<sup>1</sup> Chief People Officers had the most important job in the business, maybe even more important than that of many Chief Financial Officers.

The top challenges included:

- **Remote working.** There was a dramatic shift from people working in the office to working remotely.
- **Digital leadership.** Managers and leaders had to drive engagement, organizational culture, and connection to the overall business remotely.
- **Increased uncertainty.** There was widespread uncertainty for organizations and the workforce financially, economically, and also health-wise.
- **Reduced employee interaction and connection.** People lost opportunities to interact in person with their leaders, business unit, fellow employees, and the larger organization.





# Top Findings on the Impact of COVID

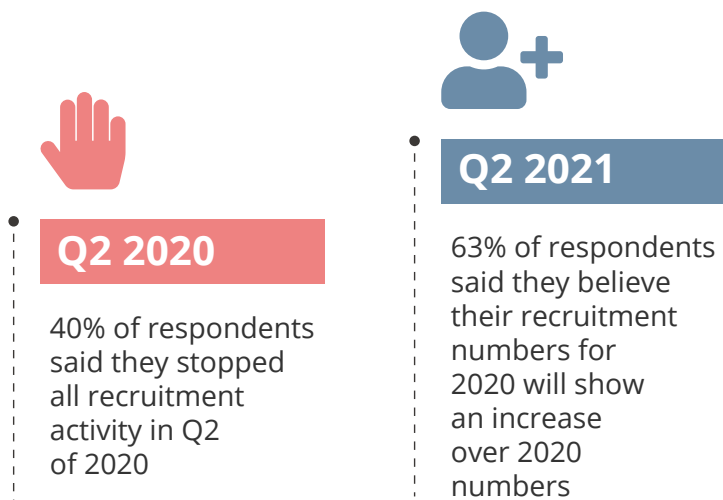
The Fuel50 Global Talent Mobility Benchmarking Study asked HR Leaders and Employees from over 200 organizations across the globe a series of questions to explore the impact of the global pandemic on organizations and people practices. In this report, we present three key findings from our analysis.

## **The Big Freeze is behind us, but we are now facing “The Great Escape”**

When Fuel50 asked HR leaders how their organization responded initially to the pandemic, almost all said they reacted to COVID by instituting a recruitment freeze at some stage in 2020, and 40% of respondents said they stopped all recruitment activity in Q2 of 2020.

However, our findings show that the big freeze is now behind us as recruitment numbers are predicted to be equal, if not higher, than before the pandemic. Our research found that 63% of respondents said they believe their recruitment numbers will show an increase over 2020 numbers (n=66). Despite the widespread recruitment freezes in 2020, there now seems to be a returned business confidence demonstrated by the fact that the recruitment numbers have increased.

## Recruitment Activities



Source: Fuel50, Talent Mobility Benchmarking Study 2021

**Talent mobility programs have had a proven positive impact on employee retention with a 60% reduction in attrition where a talent marketplace is used by employees.**

According to Forbes,<sup>2</sup> talent mobility programs have had a proven positive impact on employee retention with a 60% reduction in attrition where a talent marketplace is used by employees, as predicted in Fuel50's [Career Engagement Benchmarking Research](#)<sup>3</sup> conducted in 2015.

## Productivity and Quality of Work Both Trended Up During the Pandemic

Despite the stress and uncertainty of the pandemic and the challenges of remote working, our research found 90% of HR respondents either saw productivity remain the same or increase, with nearly 40% seeing productivity gains. A quarter of respondents even said they saw an increase in the quality of work over the 2020 – 2021 period.

In line with our finding of increased productivity, a survey by Airtasker<sup>4</sup> found that flexible workers on average work 1.4 more days every month than traditional office workers. That's 16.8 more days per year.

But there are some common reasons why organizations generally have resisted moving to remote working, which an article published by Forbes titled “Remote Reservations”<sup>5</sup> cites. These include loss of organizational credibility from not having an office space for client meetings, reduced access to employees for urgent tasks and conversations, and reduced productivity from employees distracted by chores and children.

## Changes to Employee Productivity



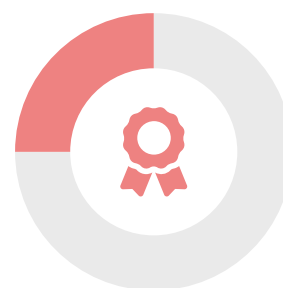
**38%**

of respondents said they saw an increase in employee productivity with no notable impact or disruption to the quality of work



**52%**

of respondents said that the quality of work stayed the same over the 2020 - 2021 period



**25%**

of respondents said they saw an increase in the quality of work over the 2020 - 2021 period

Source: Fuel50, Talent Mobility Benchmarking Study 2021

## The Return-to-Work Debate Continues to Intensify

Our research found that over three-quarters (76%) of respondents said they would implement a ‘hybrid working’ environment, allowing employees to work from home and the office. However, only 37% of respondents said they would offer this to ‘all employees,’ with half (54%) of respondents saying they would only offer hybrid working to ‘some employees.’

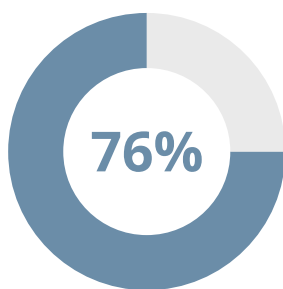
Of course, some roles and industries are unable to offer remote working practices. As McKinsey Global Institute highlights,<sup>6</sup> “More than half the workforce, however, has little or no opportunity for remote work. Some of their jobs require collaborating with others

or using specialized machinery; other jobs, such as conducting CT scans, must be done on location; and some, such as making deliveries, are performed while out and about.”

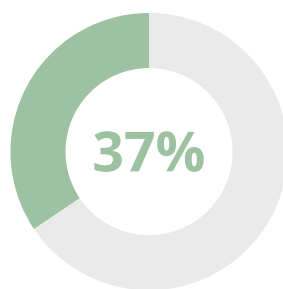
But overall, organizations across the globe are receiving strong resistance from employees when asked to come back into the office full time. As Forbes highlights,<sup>7</sup> Apple employees launched a campaign against the company’s plan to return to the office. Similarly, the findings of a study of over 10,000 office workers,<sup>8</sup> released by identity firm Okta and Censuswide in June 2021, found that 79% of UK workers want laws to stop them from being forced back into the office. And although office workers outside of the UK did not express the same sentiment around introducing such laws, it is clear employees globally want the freedom to work on their terms, whether that means returning to the office, working remotely, or a mix of both.

Hybrid work should not be something that organizations resist. Research has shown<sup>9</sup> organizations that promote and have embedded flexible working practices have benefitted from reduced absenteeism, attracting and retaining top talent, improved diversity and inclusion, increased job satisfaction, energy, and creativity.

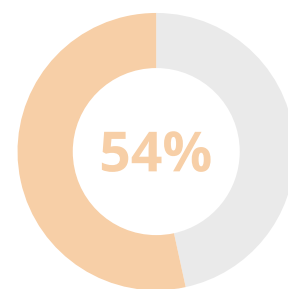
## The Introduction of Hybrid Working



76% of respondents said they would implement a 'hybrid working' environment, allowing employees to work from home and the office



37% of respondents said they would offer 'hybrid working' to 'all employees'



54% of respondents said they would offer 'hybrid working' to 'some employees'

Source: Fuel50, Talent Mobility Benchmarking Study 2021

## Gains in Productivity Came at a Cost with Employee Wellbeing Taking a Big Hit

From a business perspective, it is good that so many organizations experienced increased employee productivity with no noticeable impact on work quality. However, our research suggests this came at a cost.

Nearly half (47%) of all respondents said that their employee wellbeing decreased during the pandemic. This finding is hardly surprising when we consider the stressful environmental factors faced by employees globally. There has been considerable uncertainty around job security, fear surrounding health concerns, social isolation, economic instability, and other related factors.

Wellbeing is becoming a huge focus and concern for organizations everywhere. An article published by Stat News states<sup>10</sup> that we should be “anticipating a long-term impact on people’s mental health. ... Experts have also highlighted increases in sleeping problems and alcohol and other substance misuse, and point to clear causes: Uncertainty and fear about the coronavirus itself; job loss and housing and food insecurity; juggling working from home while dealing with cooped-up kids; grief and a loss of social cohesion as a result of restrictions.”

### The State of Employee Wellbeing



Nearly half (47%) of all respondents said that their employee wellbeing decreased during the pandemic

A global Harvard Business Review study<sup>11</sup> found that 89% of workers said their work life was getting worse, 85% said that their wellbeing declined, and 56% said that their job demands had increased.

Source: Fuel50, Talent Mobility Benchmarking Study 2021



## How Organizations Can Increase Wellbeing

In our recent [Fuel50 Capability Trends Report™](#),<sup>12</sup> we examined wellness in the workplace and identified 15 of the latest globally trending capabilities associated with driving a wellness culture.

As the Fuel50 Capability Trends Report™ notes:

*“The global pandemic has elevated [wellness] to a critical strategic priority for organizations globally. Governments, communities, and workplaces all need to do their bit to ensure people have support and resources to safeguard their wellness.*

*... research has shown that those organizations that invest in wellness have healthy employees who are more productive and less likely to be absent. In return, organizations gain on their health and wellness investments and keep healthcare costs to a minimum.*

*Offering a range of wellness programs is one tactic for lifting levels of employee wellbeing in an organization. However, we know that to create a culture with employee wellness at its heart, you need to consider and elevate specific employee capabilities and skills.”*

Deloitte’s 2020 Human Capital Trends Survey<sup>13</sup> introduced the concept of ‘Belonging.’ This is about employees craving a sense of belonging to something greater in these testing times.

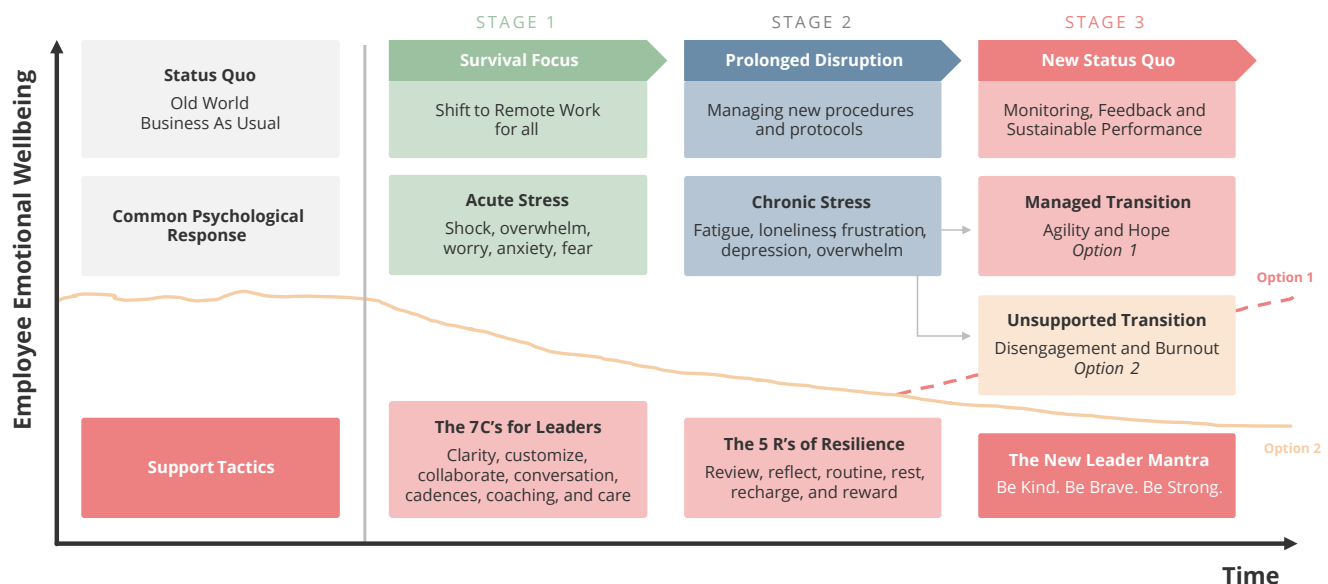


Deloitte's research found that to drive organizational success, 79% of respondents said creating a sense of belonging within the workplace was critical. To achieve this, organizations need to optimize the power of individuals by connecting them through their purpose at work.

Open, transparent communication will help organizations and their people thrive. "There is a greater need for communication, collaboration, openness, and trust than ever before," says Fuel50 CEO Anne Fulton, "which is why we have seen demand for digital employee experience solutions surge in demand in the last year. The more chaos and change there is, the more people crave clarity and communication."

Fuel50's [Work-Fit Handbook for thriving in the Pandemic Era](#)<sup>14</sup> has tips and suggestions for both employees and their leaders to help people move more quickly through the change cycle that we have been experiencing.

## Our Crisis Change Response Journey



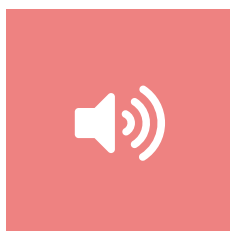
Source: Fuel50, Work-Fit Handbook 2020

Research by Deloitte<sup>15</sup> also highlights the benefits of organizations creating an environment that ‘puts sleep first.’ With our ‘always on’ culture, people’s ability to learn, concentrate and retain information is compromised because so many people are not well-rested at work. Deloitte states that those organizations that devote resources to upskilling their employees on the benefits of sleep are reporting increased employee wellbeing, productivity, creativity, and innovation.

## Actions to encourage a well-rested workforce and sleep-first culture

### Behavioral Nudges

- Commitment devices (e.g., sleep pledge)
  - Reminders
  - Social proof
  - Storytelling

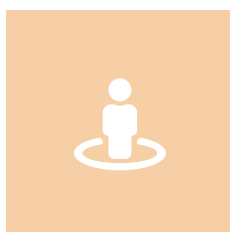


### Rewards & Incentives

- Educational/developmental training
- Create programs that incentivize sleep

### Environmental

- Natural light
- Nap rooms
- Beverage and food availability/accessibility



### Technology/Policy

- Limit or disable after-hours emails
- Discourage or disable after-hours video calls

Source: Deloitte Analysis

## The bottom line: it's about encouraging a supportive culture

Everyone has experienced unique challenges during the pandemic. But while each story is different, the outcome seems to be universal. There is a groundswell for organizations to provide a supportive environment, where personal or professional challenges are acknowledged and support offered if needed.

It appears that the pendulum has swung, and organizations are doing what they can to encourage more supportive workplace cultures. And when that has happened, it has come by leaders pivoting and changing their organizational practices to provide employees what they want - increased levels of workplace communication, transparency, authenticity, resilience, and humanistic qualities.

## Our Top Seven Tips for Leaders to Help their People Through Change



### **Communicate** communicate communicate.

You cannot over-communicate right now, even if it is to say I have no update yet.

During times of change, people hunger for clarity.



### **Customize** your approach.

Every team member has a different challenge right now.

Empathize with theirs and tailor your tactics to meet their challenges.



### **Collaboration** will be different.

Handshakes have been replaced with elbow bumps but we need to be creative and find solutions to allow for collaboration and input creatively right now.



### **Cadences** are more important.

With remote work and hybrid work becoming the new normal, increase your regular cadences to check in with your team.

Keeping everyone in the loop will help them to stay motivated!



### **Conversations**

While some people might be in overload, others might have time to think more strategically about their future.

Ask what their learning goals are now and encourage them to use the time strategically.



### **Coaching**

Hone your coaching skills to maximize your impact. Even simple questions can be powerful:

*What are you working on?*

*How can we progress this?*

*What roadblocks can we remove?*

*How else can I support you to progress this?*



### **Care Packages**

Think across your team who might be in need, or into your community and create a solution that makes a difference. Find others with energy to do something and rally them. Make individual contributions small so it's manageable but powerfully aligning and engaging too!

Source: Fuel50, Work-Fit Handbook 2020

## About the Authors



### Anne Fulton

Founder & CEO of Fuel50

*Master of Social Sciences - Industrial/Organizational Psychology  
(First Class Honours)*

Anne Fulton the author of *The Career Engagement Game* (a blueprint for workforce agility), worked 20 years as an Organizational Psychologist, and is currently founder and CEO of Fuel50. Josh Bersin, Global HR Industry Analyst, describes Fuel50 as the leader in its thinking, conceptualization, and execution of the Talent Marketplace. Anne is recognized as a talent futurist, with her team supporting some of the world's leading organizations and brands like United Nations, Verizon, HPE, Coca-Cola and CVS, and many more who are innovating on the employee career experience. Anne is a true thought-leader in the HR space – and has been described by SIOP as “one of the best keynotes I have heard over the last three decades of attending conferences in our field.”



### Marija Potter

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*Master of Arts - Industrial/Organizational Psychology (Honours)  
Industrial & Organizational Psychologist, New Zealand Psychologists Board*

Marija is an Industrial/Organizational Psychologist and leads Fuel50's team of Workforce Architects. Marija is responsible for Fuel50's career architecture design approaches, and ensuring they drive business outcomes. Marija supports across Fuel50's clients, leading the design and delivery of career architecture. Marija's experience spans over 15 years of high impact consulting working in organizations such as IBM (London & Auckland), Kenexa, Imperial Tobacco and more. Marija is a sought-after speaker in the well-being, career management and organizational change space.



## Research Design

Fuel50's Global Talent Mobility Best Practice Research was conducted to understand current talent mobility practices, best-in-class talent mobility, and the imperatives for talent mobility in the future across high-performing organizations around the world. We invited both HR Leaders and Employees to complete the survey via social media posts, direct email reach outs to Fuel50's valued community of clients and thought leaders, and by asking attendees at our virtual FuelX Conference in April 2021 to respond.

Within the sample of HR Leader respondents, the largest proportion worked for organizations within the industries of Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services (25%), followed by Finance & Insurance (9%). 37% of the HR Leaders were from organizations with over 10,000 employees. The majority of respondents organizations had a presence in North America (74%), followed by Europe (44%) and Asia (42%).

Within the sample of Employee respondents, 41% have been in paid, full-time employment for over 20 years, with 35% identifying as being in an Individual Contributor/Specialist role and 29% as a Senior Specialist. Most respondents (41%) worked in the industries of Professionals, Scientific, and Technical Services.

More than half (53%) of the sample were in North America, with the remainder located in Australasia (Australia and New Zealand) 17%, Europe 11%, Asia 11%, and the rest of the world 9%. [Click here for more details on the research design.](#)



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## Thank You

This report is the first of a six-part series detailing the key findings from our research study and our extensive analysis of workforce and talent mobility trends.

We would love to hear from you. If you have any questions, suggestions, or feedback, please contact us at [hello@fuel50.com](mailto:hello@fuel50.com).

We look forward to sharing more learning with you!

**Fuel50 is the AI Opportunity Marketplace solution that delivers internal talent mobility and workforce reskilling.**

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