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4 Trends That Are Shaping the Future Workplace

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The last few years have created an urgent need for executive leaders to become adaptable and intentional in the face of both sudden and ongoing change. As the workplace is continually being reshaped by these changes, there are several trends that demand the attention of these leaders, compelling them to evaluate and respond strategically in order to build resilient, innovative, and inclusive workplaces. We address four critical workplace trends that leaders must consider as they plan for the future.

1. The Ongoing Conversation of Remote Work

The conversation around remote work is, perhaps, beginning to stagnate; at least [one in ten employees](#) are working from home exclusively, while at least one in four are hybrid. This seems to have become the post-pandemic norm. Yet employers haven't perfected what work-from-home practices should consistently look like. Leading and managing employees within a virtual workplace is particularly challenging, with [little training](#) in place for improving and evolving best practices.

Furthermore, while the data still shows that most remote employees report feeling more productive, the jury is still out on [whether that's true](#). It seems to depend on how productivity is measured and whether other factors are taken into account like cost savings and retention rates.

Additionally, for some industries, such as banking and financial services, [regulation regarding home offices](#) has been shifting ever since the onset of the pandemic. At the time, regulators loosened their stringent supervision rules to adapt to shelter-in-place orders. Now, however, these rules are being revisited and, in an effort to maintain compliance, some firms are abandoning remote work altogether.

However, the fact is that a significant portion of the U.S. workforce likes and desires to work remotely—and this shift in expectations is [opening up new questions](#). For example, some leaders who have been curious how new workplace models might impact productivity and engagement, have experimented with four-day work weeks. Some studies even show that one in three workers would accept a pay cut in exchange for a shortened work week. What would that mean for the way organizations operate? In what industries and scenarios could a model like this achieve greater success?

Executive leadership must ask these questions in the context of their own four walls. In a world where professionals are looking for greater meaning and more autonomy at

work—whether that’s remote, hybrid, or otherwise—leaders need to evaluate the unique needs of their teams and respond accordingly.

2. Longer Life Expectancies and Career Trajectories

When [social security](#) was first established, with retirement benefits granted at age 65, the average life expectancy was just 58 for men and 62 for women. Currently, U.S. life expectancy is an average of 76 (down from 78 pre-pandemic) and is into the 80s in other countries around the world.

What this means in the context of employment is that careers are steadily expanding in longevity. The [BLS](#) predicts that the labor force participation rate for employees age 65 to 74 will be 30.2% in 2026, up from 26.8% in 2016, while the rate of those age 75+ will be 10.8%, up from 8.4%. These percentages have been steadily increasing over the last several decades.

Leaders will need to consider what this means for career development programs as well as their hiring profiles for various positions. With longer career spans, it’s likely that people will gain a greater diversity of experiences across different industries and different types of roles, disrupting traditional career paths and sparking many “second-act” careers. Additionally, for CHROs, there might be the question of how to manage and [nurture a multi-generational workplace](#) and how to combat ingrained ageism.

Finally, employers will likely encounter new and complex questions regarding how Social Security, Medicare, 401(k) contributions, Required Minimum Distributions, and any other government-regulated benefit might be impacted by employees continuing to work well past the normal retirement age. There will likely be other unforeseen consequences requiring HR leaders to develop creative solutions to address the multigenerational workforce of the future.

3. Reframing the Role of Technology

As Director at the MIT Center for Collective Intelligence, Thomas Malone, [poignantly says](#): “We have spent way too much time thinking about people versus computers, and not nearly enough time thinking about people *and* computers. Way too much time thinking about what jobs computers are going to take away from people, and not nearly enough time thinking about what people and computers can do together that could never be done before.”

When faced with pressures of cost cutting and scaling, companies are no stranger to the efficiencies that are possible through the use of technology. In many instances, this looks like

a tool or software replacing a transactional function and ensuring there is someone to QA that work as it's completed.

However, there is a growing focus on human-centric technical infrastructure, in which there is greater [opportunity for collaboration](#) between man and machine. In this case, technology *augments* rather than replaces, and human intelligence builds upon what technology is capable of. It's easy to see how this works with AI in the picture, with the proliferation of AI-powered "assistants" to empower professionals and leaders to achieve more in new, better, and bigger ways. Insight from Deloitte suggests that there is an even greater spectrum of possibility for human-tech collaboration, including machine as "peer" and as "manager."

As leaders strategize around the role of technology in their workplace, they must also be aware of how the growing remote workforce and deeper infiltration of technology in people's personal lives impact how professionals interact with an organization's digital infrastructure.

4. Shifting Focus from Shareholders to Stakeholders

It's a rare organization that *isn't* in some way driven by profit and long-term financial performance. The shareholders and their economic interests have traditionally been the number one priority. But this [model is evolving](#), with a growing focus on the stakeholder. Those stakeholders include the obvious ones—the employees, customers, and vendors—but also the less common ones: the community and even the environment.

In practice, this looks like an increase in ESG initiatives as well as a more intentional approach to building trust and transparency among stakeholders. Leaders need to begin the quest to better understand the societal and environmental impacts of their business and start leaning towards practices that nurture the long-term welfare of all stakeholders.

Beyond acting for the greater good in these instances, the data shows that employee engagement significantly increases when an organization's values and initiatives shift in this way. That in turn sparks greater retention and productivity, which inevitably impacts the bottom line in a way that also benefits shareholders.

Preparing for the Future Workplace

Change, of course, is inevitable, but the first few years of this decade exponentially shifted our workplaces—from employment models and work environments to demographic shifts, emerging technologies, and stakeholder values.

Executive leaders across all functions must seek to stay in tune with these evolving trends as the workplace is steadily reshaped around them. Efforts to creatively and intentionally address these shifts will position organizations to stay ahead of the competition and achieve new levels of growth and innovation.

How have you seen these trends play out in your organization?