Adjusting to a New (Distributed) Way of Working
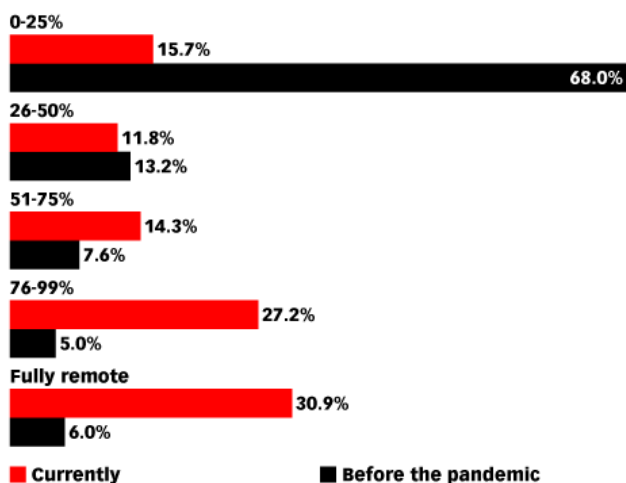
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For knowledge workers, the coronavirus pandemic brought an abrupt change to daily work life. As many companies shut down their corporate offices—some out of regard for employee safety and others due to government mandates—the norm of conducting business from an office ceased. Without an in-person option, teams were forced into a distributed work model and given little to no time to prepare.

According to a May 2020 survey from The Adecco Group, 69% of US employees said they had to make major changes to their usual ways of working to adapt to the pandemic. A National Association of Corporate Directors (NACD) poll from the same month found that 54% of US directors cited changing the way in which work gets done as a leading trend that would impact their company's post-coronavirus recovery.

A June 2020 survey from Workable, a talent-acquisition tech provider, found that among human resources and talent acquisition professionals and business leaders worldwide, 30.9% said their employees were now fully remote, up from just 6.0% before the pandemic. Moreover, the percentage of respondents who said that one-quarter or less of their workforce was remote fell from 68.0% before the pandemic to 15.7% in June.

Percent of Their Workforce Working Remotely Currently vs. Before the Coronavirus Pandemic According to HR/Talent Acquisition Professionals and Business Leaders Worldwide, June 2020

% of respondents

0-25%
Currently: 15.7%
Before the pandemic: 68.0%

26-50%
Currently: 11.8%
Before the pandemic: 13.2%

51-75%
Currently: 14.3%
Before the pandemic: 7.6%

76-99%
Currently: 27.2%
Before the pandemic: 5.0%

Fully remote
Currently: 30.9%
Before the pandemic: 6.0%

■ **Currently**　　　■ **Before the pandemic**

Note: numbers may not add up to 100% due to rounding
Source: Workable, "The New World of Work," Aug 3, 2020

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Even prior to the pandemic, some firms were already attempting "workforce transformation," according to research from December 2019 to January 2020 by SilkRoad Technology, an HR software provider, and Workforce, a platform for workforce management. Their survey defined workforce transformation as "creating the ability and agility of an organization to work in fundamentally different ways."

Of the professionals they surveyed, just 19% said their companies had fully implemented workforce transformation plans to address disruption, though many of these companies were reportedly still in the process of optimizing those plans. A quarter of respondents said their companies had no plans in place to transform their workforce.

Now, several months into the pandemic, even within organizations where executive teams may feel they've successfully scaled their remote workforce, many employees feel otherwise. Across various facets of the employee experience, there was more than a 30% gap between how many executives worldwide said they were supporting their employees and how many employees worldwide reported feeling supported by their companies, per IBM Institute for Business Value and Oxford Economics research from April to July 2020.

How Businesses Are Supporting Employees According to Executives vs. Employees Worldwide, July 2020
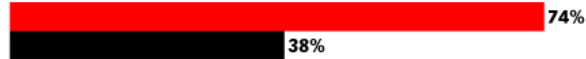
% of respondents

Organization is providing clear guidelines and expectations for how our organization will work
- 86%
- 51%

Organization is supporting the physical and emotional health of its workforce
- 80%
- 46%

Organization is helping staff learn the skills needed to work in a new way
- 74%
- 38%

■ **Executives**   ■ **Employees**

Note: executives n=3,450; employees n=13,374
Source: IBM Institute for Business Value and Oxford Economics, "COVID-19 and the Future of Business," Sep 30, 2020

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Managing a remote workforce at scale is challenging. Many companies weren't prepared for this abrupt and mandatory switch to distributed work. To sustain this working model, companies need to consider how their people and processes strategies enable employee success.

To learn more about how business leaders are adapting their people and process strategies to accommodate the abrupt shift to remote work, eMarketer PRO subscribers can read our recent report:

Report by Jillian Ryan Oct 26, 2020

The Sustainability of Distributed Work Models

THE SUSTAINABILITY OF DISTRIBUTED WORK MODELS

How People and Processes Have Transformed to Accommodate Remote Teams

OCTOBER 2020
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