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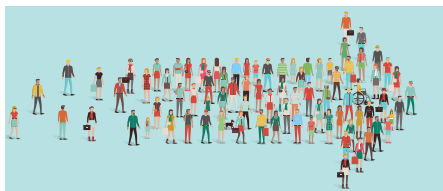
**Rebooting the  
workforce experience**



## Introduction

COVID-19 has caused organizations to quickly adapt to rapidly changing circumstances and ultimately reevaluate their workforce and workplace strategies. Many leaders have sought advice in recent months to determine how best to respond to the crisis and look after their workforce. This has accelerated conversations around redefining the workforce experience, which had gradually become a more prominent topic of executive-level discussions prior to the pandemic. As workplaces reopen and welcome employees under new regulations and conditions (alongside a second wave of the pandemic in certain countries), we look at how organizations will use leadership, employee reskilling, rewards & wellbeing, the digital experience and the digital office to shape the workforce experience of the future.

## Leadership



Leadership turned to transparency as a tool to share insights during the pandemic. Rather than focusing on strategy, Unilever CEO, Alan Jope, focused on what he calls the “operational brains”, which include the heads of HR, supply-chain and operations, all of which have an employee focus at Unilever<sup>1</sup>. These “operational brains” run things on the ground and therefore witnessed firsthand the impact of the pandemic on employees and guided them to success. During the next phases of the pandemic leadership is faced with the task of “inventing a future that does not exist yet which creates feelings of doubt and uncertainty in the workforce<sup>2</sup>. This is especially important given that the Deloitte 2021 Human Capital Trends report has echoed 2020 findings, reminding us that purpose and belonging united workers and drove organizational performance. Leadership must consider individual and

collective emotions with compassion and empathy and personalize their messaging and initiatives to allow each individual in the organization to personally thrive before supporting the organization in its own mission. This can be facilitated by repositioning purpose and belonging at the center of the workforce and driving initiatives through communication and consistent transparency<sup>4</sup>.

## Reskilling of employees



In the Deloitte 2021 Human Capital Trends report, 72% of respondents selected “the ability of their people to adapt, reskill and assume new roles” as the most or second most important factor to navigate future disruptions<sup>3</sup>. However, reskilling employees became a necessity overnight as more and more organizations digitally enabled their workforce to accommodate shifting priorities and provided them with the skills necessary to perform well at work. While we initially thought of roles in the next 1, 3 or 5 years, one Canadian banking firm has had to think of job roles during COVID-19 only. After sending home 80% of the workforce, a need for call center support grew in small cities and towns. The business responded by turning their newly “sent home” workers into call agents<sup>5</sup>. Soon enough, however, these call agents received on-the-job training to be able to adopt a consultation and advisory role and actively support their customers with financial advice, which has become a growing demand throughout the pandemic<sup>5</sup>. Organizations in the Middle East also experienced a shift in their customers’ priorities; Majid Al Futtaim launched a redeployment program to quickly reskill and redeploy employees who worked in facilities that were once shut down, such as cinemas, parks and public beaches<sup>6</sup>. Employees completed

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on-the-job training along with health and safety training to be able to join Carrefour, for example, and support in the fulfilling of online orders and replenishing stocks. These employees have become a flexible resource now that can be repositioned according to shifting needs in the future. Organizations need to carry this forward and continue with efforts toward training and developing employees, not only to overcome the obstacles created by COVID-19, but in order to create a resilient workforce that is able to rebound from future adversity.

## Rewards and wellbeing



The pandemic fueled anxiety globally as more and more employees feared pay cuts and salary reductions. The pandemic highlighted a need to focus on benefits and wellbeing initiatives; in fact, the Deloitte 2021 HC Trends Survey encouraged organizations to embed the wellbeing factor in performance management, work scheduling as well as rewards and recognition programs<sup>3</sup>.

Remote working has become a perk of most organizations which have reopened their offices but which also understand that parents, for example, benefitted from being around their children. On the other hand, gym memberships as benefits are no longer cherished as people realize they can work out from home for free; it is up to organizations to rethink which benefits provide flexibility to their employees now that priorities have shifted<sup>7</sup>. More than ever, organizations are reassessing their Human Capital Balance Sheet, with the pandemic encouraging more strategic and cost-effective investments that also provide valuable and meaningful rewards that support the needs of the future workforce – one that requires more flexibility<sup>8</sup>.

Organizations sought to improve employee wellbeing to support them in making healthy choices during the pandemic. Sprinkler, an American software development company, hired a mindfulness instructor they called a “Happier Coach”, who administered “Mindful Moment” sessions three times a day for 15 minutes during the pandemic. Employees spent time stretching, doing breathing exercises and following a guided meditation to be able to feel rejuvenated and return to work more productive<sup>9</sup>. Furthermore, Landmark Group, which was named one of the UAE’s best employers by global research and consultancy Great Place to Work, vowed to support its employees’ wellbeing during the pandemic. The organization prepared food kits for employees who may be quarantined, ran emotional wellbeing and medical webinars as well as HR and Marshal Groups in their stores, warehouses and offices<sup>10</sup>. While moving out of the crisis management phase, organizations are realizing that looking beyond pay and providing alternate support during challenges is necessary to build deeper connections with employees. With employees known to be looking for flexibility and security, this may redefine how organizations look at compensation and benefits moving forward<sup>11</sup>.

### The digital experience



The digital experience during the thrive phase focuses on combining platforms, tools, and processes to create compelling, consumer-grade, personalized experiences with the aim of increasing productivity and fostering collaboration and creativity. These tools also enable remote work by creating channels for feedback and, consequently, immediate action to maintain productivity. Due to a change in the digital agenda, the role of employee communications has also changed; it's now more targeted, connected to the CEO and has to be quick and accurate. Johnson & Johnson leveraged employee experience solutions to monitor its employee concerns by analyzing the types of questions employees have and determining any trends<sup>12</sup>. Within minutes, Johnson & Johnson’s HR was able to have a clearer view of what to focus their webinars on or what to share more knowledge about. The use of employee experience solutions is a sustainable approach and is still effective during the thrive phase, as organizations can provide targeted information, addressing their employees more effectively.

### The digital office



Organizations across the region have also adapted and adopted similar arrangements within their working environments and are looking into maintaining elements of the new working arrangements post-COVID. Standard

Chartered has implemented a working from home policy, which currently includes 90% of their workforce across Africa and the Middle East, and has plans to maintain such policies following the end of the pandemic through a digitally enabled workplace, which has allowed employees to seamlessly collaborate and innovate through digital tools and solutions<sup>13</sup>. The banking and financial services organization is leveraging this opportunity to drive engagement and productivity by streamlining and simplifying interactions between employees through automation and artificial intelligence (AI), in an endeavor to promote a digital culture of knowledge-sharing and collaboration throughout its operations. Kathleen Hogan, Executive Vice President and Chief People Officer at Microsoft, has indicated that Microsoft will be adopting a hybrid workplace model moving forward and will give employees options regarding working in the office while most roles will remain remote. Moving forward, employees will have “touchdown space” at the office but may not need a desk full-time<sup>14</sup>.

Digital maturity will become more reliant on organization’s operations and behavior. While organizations would not have been able to survive the pandemic without digital tools and technologies, leaders need to drive the digital experience from within. By driving a culture of digital transformation, instilling associated behaviors and ideals, and providing the right training to the workforce to align with the future of work, organizations can create a digital office and experience that not only can withstand uncertainty and ambiguity, but that can unlock organizational and individuals’ potential.

Our key recommendations for our clients to thrive

**1. Provide leadership with the leadership toolkit**

Organizations must ensure that their leaders are equipped with a toolkit that consists of the right tools, resources, and policies to enhance and ensure clear communication, increase team member engagement, and effectively lead team members through the phases of the pandemic. The leadership toolkit should provide leaders with clear and consistent messages and values in order to support them in managing their own communication and leadership, as well as leading and managing teams through change and uncertainty.



**2. Employ workforce development and reskilling strategies**

Organizations that employ workforce development strategies to not only reskill workers but also to build worker resilience will equip workers, and thus the organization, with the tools and strategies to adapt to a range of uncertain futures. The right focus on workforce development strategies can reassure worker security and help organizations build a team that is both loyal to the firm and ready to take on unexpected events.



**3. Reassess your Human Capital balance sheet**

The pandemic has changed employees' priorities and requirements, and organizations need to re-evaluate rewards and wellbeing strategies and reassess investments made in the workforce in order to keep up. While the pandemic has impacted pay in many organizations, by implementing wellbeing initiatives and offering benefits that provide flexibility, firms are able to both satisfy and motivate employees, as well as rationalize their Human Capital balance sheet and reduce costs.



**4. Stop planning for digital and start being digital**

When it comes to thinking about the customer experience, workforce experience, and more generally the decision making and solutions put in place, organizations need to start being digital. In relation to the workforce, organizations can use artificial intelligence (AI), augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) in order to learn and collaborate based on specific working and learning styles, or introduce a virtual personal assistant that helps employees interact with enterprise portals through personalized and intuitive interactions, in order to enhance engagement.



**5. Create your own digital office**

The pandemic forced organizations to rethink their working models, and firms should continue to question the optimum levels of workers required in the office to get things done. Organizations must also take a human-centric approach and consider differences in employees' personal circumstances and expectations during these times. Flexibility in terms of working conditions and solutions, including the introduction of a hybrid model of working, flexi-time, job sharing, and part-time working policies, should be considered and introduced in order to accommodate employees' requirements.



## Conclusion

COVID-19 is a so-called 'black swan' event whose severe consequences have forced organizations on a course to redefine business and bring people and technology together to create lasting value across industries. However, in addition to the obvious focus on driving productivity and supporting business objectives, more and more organizations are implementing changes with the aim of creating a sense of belonging, collaboration and creativity across the workforce. Through a complete reassessment of leadership, development and rewards and digitization strategies, organizations have stepped up and redefined their workplace experience (WX) in response to the global pandemic. This has not only revolutionized the way we work forever but has also prepared these organizations to thrive in this next phase of the pandemic.

By driving a culture of digital transformation, instilling associated behaviors and ideals, and providing the right training to the workforce to align with the future of work, organizations can create a digital office and experience that not only can withstand uncertainty and ambiguity, but that can unlock organizational and individuals' potential.

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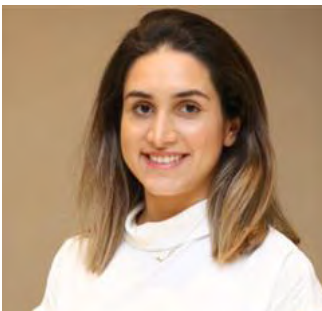
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