



NEW WAYS OF WORKING

HR DIRECTORS DISCUSSION FORUM

At a Zoom Interactive Event on 25th August, CRF hosted HR Directors and experts in discussion on the topic of new ways of working. In this session, we took stock of what we have learned over the course of the crisis, and discussed which elements of our new ways of working we expect to make permanent. This summary shares some of the key insights from the discussion.



The Location of Work and the Role of the Office / Hybrid Models of Working



Maintaining Corporate Culture with a More Remote Workforce



Adapting Performance Management Systems for Remote Working Environments



The Location of Work and the Role of the Office / Hybrid Models of Working

- There is a tension in the conversation, in that those workers in front-line positions have not had the luxury of participating in the en masse move to remote working. For those organisations where the majority of the workforce did not work remotely during the crisis, there isn't so much in the way of new ways of working to adapt to (beyond safety protocols).
- Many organisations are experiencing a tension between 'elite colleagues' who have the luxury of being office-based with flexible hours, and those who are frontline (and tend to be lower-paid, with fewer benefits). Equity and fairness between colleagues in the organisation are critical points going forward, but the equity question is very difficult to manage. The reality is that those who are paid less and have less comfortable jobs have been hit again and again throughout the crisis; a balance of fairness for all is overdue. In the words of one Forum participant, "We don't want some people on call 24/7, while their colleagues in HR and Finance are on their laptops in their underwear in the Bahamas."
- In some organisations, there does not appear to be ill-will between office-based and frontline workers.
- There is recognition of changing leadership expectations in a hybrid remote/office working model. It will be important to ensure that those working remotely do not feel left out.
- Some organisations are developing smarter working policy statements that give people some flexibility to determine what suits their day, but equally clearly expresses the expectation to be on-site if they are needed.
- Many organisations expect to have more of a blended approach between office and remote working going forward, but are not defining what that means just yet.
- There are concerns about how to handle the messaging around the return to work. A return to presenteeism is unlikely, but equally many organisations feel that permanent remote working is off-the-table. Having employees within commutable distance for meetings, collaboration, and innovation will still be essential.
- Some organisations are reporting that their leaders and staff are frustrated with the ambiguity around the return to work. They would like clarity sooner rather than later



NEW WAYS OF WORKING HR DIRECTORS DISCUSSION FORUM

about what the future will look like. From a psychological perspective, this is unsurprising, as people need stability and are looking for it. But organisations just do not have clarity yet, with so many shifting factors around the pandemic, winter flu season, and so on.

- Good communication as things develop is really important to mitigate any frustration around the ambiguity about the return to work. Organisations that had good communications early in the crisis are finding that they now have a reservoir of goodwill from their people.
- Many organisations are finding that their people lack the energy, ambition, or confidence to come back yet. There is an expectation this might change with the return to school in September.
- It is important that organisations articulate the purpose for why people need to return to offices. Many people are saving time and money and want to be remote most of the week (in North American and European geographies; this is different in other countries such as Japan).
- Some organisations are seeing success by treading carefully in the return to work. They are seeking a balance between creating a runway for employees – ‘the road we want to take’ – versus not having all the answer in place by January (which will be a pressure point anyway). Clear expectations are being set, but the runway isn’t too long. For example, one organisation has set the expectation that everyone will be in a minimum of two days per week from September, hopefully progressing to three days per week from November.

PARTICIPANT POLL

Once the model of working (e.g. WFH, split teams in the office) adopted in your organisation over the last six months is no longer a necessity, what do you expect to happen?

Return more or less to previous model

5%

Most employees will return to previous model

5%

Will allow employees to choose what’s best for them and the organisation

11%

Use our experience to develop a new model

74%

Don’t know

5%

INSIGHTS: KEY LONG-TERM CHALLENGES

CRF Research Director Gillian Pillans shared insights about some of the key long-term challenges HR should be thinking about. These challenges present an opportunity for HR to step up.

1. **Innovation** – Innovation comes from interaction and collaboration – offices have traditionally been a place that spark the chance encounters that bring about new ideas. Many organisations have found that over the short-term they can maintain productivity remotely, but longer-term we have to think about how we create those moments where people come together serendipitously and ideas bounce off each other.
2. **Culture** – Without free-flowing dialogue, building the right corporate culture becomes even more of a challenge. How do we maintain and develop culture at the level of the individual (sense of identity and belonging), the team (sense of psychological safety and cohesion) and the organisation? Over the short-term many organisations have been focusing on the individual and the team; over the long-term HR thinking needs to shift to how to develop the organisation culture. The factors that drive culture will likely change with our new ways of working, bringing about new questions. How do we make culture visible? Storytelling – elevating good things that are happening or calling out unhelpful behaviours – may be one part of the answer. What elements of culture do we want to maintain or change?
3. **Careers** – Conversations around careers need to be happening in a different way. Those with long-established careers already have a strong reservoir of social capital to draw on. For others, how do we design early careers to build social capital and informal learning?

FURTHER READING

CRF. 2020. **Post Covid-19 Planning Tool**. <https://www.crforum.co.uk/research-and-resources/post-covid-19-planning-tool>

CRF. 2019. **Creating an Inclusive Culture**. Speed Read. <https://www.crforum.co.uk/research-and-resources/speed-read-creating-an-inclusive-culture>

CRF. 2016. **Creating an Inclusive Culture**. Full Report. <https://www.crforum.co.uk/research-and-resources/crf-report-creating-inclusive-culture>



NEW WAYS OF WORKING HR DIRECTORS DISCUSSION FORUM



Maintaining Corporate Culture with a More Remote Workforce

- One organisation has had success creating a buddy system for new on-boarders and a mentoring programme to create a link between storytellers and new joiners. This organisation is also considering running quarterly workshops with guest speakers from the future leaders community to engage new people. All of these efforts are contributing to a continuity of culture in the organisation.
- Some organisations are focusing on reinforcing their values. For example, one organisation is using virtual values cards to recognise and call out positive behaviours. A real effort is made to recognise new colleagues too.
- Pulse surveys in some organisations are showing that people want to come back because they miss the social aspect of the workplace and its sense of community.
- Organisations will have to make hard choices going forward – they have to continue listening and engaging their people. A blanket approach is unlikely – segmenting policy for different populations' needs is likely to continue.
- For many organisations, the key drivers for getting people back into the office are collaboration, innovation, and technology (i.e. access to double computer screens).
- Some organisations are reluctant to force people to go back too soon because they do not want to squander the goodwill they have built up.
- Individuals are thinking about how they manage their time differently now (what tasks they do in the office vs. at home). But there is also a question around how we collectively organise time for teams. Self-selection of when to come in often leads to fragmentation of teams and is counter-productive. Some organisations are finding they need to take a more structured approach. It doesn't necessarily organically sort itself out, so organisations need to be alert to when they might need to be a bit more prescriptive (but still allowing flexibility within that structure).
- Some organisations are being very mindful about the balance between those who are in the offices versus those who are at home. It's important that those that are in do not create their own subculture. One practical way to handle this is to still have meetings on Zoom when teams are divided between home and office.



Adapting Performance Management Systems for Remote Working Environments

- It is critical to make sure performance metrics are appropriate for the current environment. Don't just rely on what you've always used; identify the key attributes for success in this environment, whatever they might be, and then evaluate people based on those.
- For some organisations, the crisis has accelerated an already-shifting focus to outputs/outcomes rather than hours.
- There is a looming issue around equity, and people and managers are showing some nervousness about it. As performance reviews come in, how will the tension around reviewing those with fewer responsibilities (because of caring etc.) and their colleagues who have taken on more responsibility be resolved? How do we ensure some are not unfairly disadvantaged at end-of-year performance reviews, while others' efforts are recognised?
- One solution might be to give everyone the opportunity to reset. One organisation reset its business plan and iterated the objectives, so that in the vast majority of cases, people are delivering the same plan but may have extended timelines for doing so (if there are clear mitigating circumstances).

crf UPCOMING CRF EVENTS



ONLINE:

[Strategies for Downsizing with Compassion and Care](#)

10th September 12.00PM BST



ONLINE:

[Diversity and Inclusion for the 2020s: Emerging Issues](#)

16th September 12.00PM BST



ONLINE:

[Talent Management: Careers, Development And Succession In A Changing Landscape](#)

18th November 12.00PM