



## Post-pandemic Work: The Future is Now

**W**hat will work look like in your organization, post-Covid? When the pandemic ends, which new normal adaptations will endure?

Our common response to massive disruption, such as a pandemic, is to hope for and assume things will return to normal. However, do we really want to return to all the old ways of doing business?

This topic comes up frequently with my clients right now. And it makes sense: planning for an uncertain future is challenging, even for great leaders and managers. They want to avoid old “bad” habits, and incorporate new policies and processes that make sense for their organization, including their employees.

Savvy leaders and managers understand the importance of an effective strategy, careful planning, and great execution in order to emerge from this pandemic.

But do we truly know, and understand, how our work has been changed?

## When the Pandemic Ends...

**A** massive disruption provides an opportunity to examine how things were before, including our view of the future.

Based on an analysis of consumer and business trends, The McKinsey Global Institute (MGI) recently published [a report on the future of work](#). According to MGI, **remote work, digitization, and automation** were accelerated by the pandemic. They predict that these trends will “have a lasting impact on workers and work, even after the pandemic.”

However, others caution about expectation management.

It is incredibly wonderful how so many have come together to create solutions, now and for the future. It is truly remarkable how we adapt, remaining

### *A Message from Nancy...*

Let me ask you:

- Are the people on your team engaged and committed or just collecting a pay check?
- Do you have the right people in the right seats on the bus? Are *you* in the right seat?
- Is the high cost of turnover eating away your organization’s bottom-line?
- Are your processes and procedures (or lack thereof) delivering productive and efficient results?
- How comfortable are the members of your senior team managing and leading others?



In today’s highly competitive environment, it’s no surprise that “*what got you here may not get you there.*”

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flexible, creative, and productive through-out the process.

A pandemic changes the way we work, learn, and live. It alters our perceptions and expectations.

## The Future of Work is Now

According to McKinsey, the pandemic highlighted the impact of physical proximity in the workplace, and spurred changes in business models. Based on their research in eight countries, including China, France, Germany, India, Japan, Spain, the UK, and the USA, McKinsey found that the physical dimension of work is a new factor shaping the future of work, primarily as it relates to health and safety considerations. The four work arenas most affected, both short- and long-term, include:

1. Leisure and travel venues (including restaurants and hotels)
2. On-site customer interaction (including retail and hospitality)
3. Computer-based office work
4. Production and warehousing

## Work Trends

Three groups of consumer and business trends are likely to persist beyond the pandemic:

1. **Remote work and virtual interactions.** According to their research, 20-25% of workers could work remotely 3+ days/week on a long-term basis. This represents four to five times more virtual/remote employee work/interaction than pre-pandemic.
2. **Surge in use of e-commerce and other digital platforms.** Digitization of products and services has grown two to five times during the pandemic. McKinsey predicts a shift to gig jobs in the independent workforce.
3. **Deployment of automation and artificial intelligence (AI).** Their research found an uptick in the use of robotics, robotic process automation, and AI. In a July 2020 global survey of 800 senior executives, 66% indicated plans to invest in automation and AI, "either somewhat or significantly."

McKinsey predicts that more than 100 million workers may need to switch occupations by 2030 as middle- and low-wage jobs decline, and more high-wage jobs increase.

## Leadership Decisions

Many leaders are in the process of making strategic decisions about the future of work, including whether or how to develop ongoing remote

and hybrid work. They are considering policies and practices that support the employees they lead, the clients they serve, and achieve optimal performance. The best leaders:

- **Remain flexible.** Look beyond the pandemic to reimagine how and where work can be completed. Employee response to Covid-19 demonstrated an ability (and willingness) to quickly adapt to rapid changes in working practices. Leaders who remain flexible and work with managers and employees can improve processes, efficiencies, and productivity.
- **Consider hybrid options.** Continue to analyze activities that can be completed remotely without a loss of productivity. Review your health and safety policies and practices, including vaccinations. With input from different perspectives, including managers, employees, and teams, devise an intentional approach as to when and where they are in the office together.
- **Communicate effectively.** Leaders have an opportunity and responsibility to be proactive and intentional. This means listening, as well as consistently sharing information. Ensure you have strong, two-way communication in place that allows everyone to raise questions, concerns, and ideas without fear of personal repercussion.

## Questions for Leaders

According to a recent article published by [Harvard Business Review](#), key decisions about the future of remote work will fall into two main categories: company policies and management practices. Below are a few questions that could be quantified (scored on a scale) for analysis:

- What is the nature of the work? For example, is it highly independent, or collaborative? If the later, how much management is required?
- What is the experience level of the individuals or teams?
- What is the employee and team preference?
- What is the cost/savings of remote versus in office time?

From a broader, qualitative perspective:

- How do/will you support a strong company culture, in person and remotely?
- How will changes affect HR policies? For example, what is your policy on work from anywhere (WFA)? Will compensation or benefits be adjusted relative to geography? Will training change?

- For new or returning workers, will you require a COVID-19 vaccination?

Consider this: In a [poll](#) published by the Center for Infectious Disease Research and Privacy (CIDRAP) on March 9, 2021, 25% of Americans said they are still unwilling to receive the COVID-19 vaccination. This presents a challenge to employers who have a legal duty to create a safe work environment. According to Dorit Reiss, Professor of Law UC Hastings College of Law, “Employers face limits on the ability to mandate vaccines. If you have a valid medical reason not to get the vaccine, the employer has to accommodate you. It could mean the employee with a medical issue will have to wear extra PPE.”

One approach to encourage vaccination is to incentivize it. According to Anthony Capuano, CEO of Marriott International, vaccination is key to business. They are offering four hours of pay (and the time required) for employees to receive a vaccine.

## Post-pandemic Management

According to McKinsey, employees working in a computer-based position could spend 70% of their time working remotely without losing effectiveness. As a result, they anticipate hybrid remote work for the long-term. Of course, management practices will be critical to success. Here are few questions for managers to consider:

- How will you support a healthy remote-work climate?
- How will you support employees as they manage competing priorities, professional and personal?
- How will you support a sense of psychological safety?
- How will you consciously engage your employees?
- How will you foster employee trust and accountability?
- What tools, resources, and practices will you need, and use?

Studies find that even small doses of high-quality social interaction can lower stress and improve well-being. Predictable communications, that is to say, a predictable cadence, can foster productivity and foster trust.

High performing teams are most often led by managers who use virtual and/or face-to-face meetings to connect socially, build personal relationships, and engage all employees. The best managers ask questions, show vulnerability, share reliable information, and are open to new ideas.

Whether the future of work in your organization will transition back into full-time, in office work or some type of hybrid, safety is critical to empower talent and productivity.

Some offices are utilizing a virtual receptionist who can work from an onsite or offsite office. With new technology and Apps, receptionists can monitor and manage air quality, virtual meeting attendees can share whiteboards, and management (or IT) can have certain limits on work-from-home devices.

## Your Future of Work is Now

There remains a great deal of uncertainty about if, when, and how employees will return to work. Some workers anticipate a ramp-up from part-time to full-time work, with a hybrid mix of remote and in-person time. With a lack of communication between leaders, managers, and employees, it's not uncommon for tensions to grow. Add to that a resistance to relinquish telecommuting and/or receive a vaccination, employees may limit their career options. Instead, employees can prepare for the future of work by focusing on their performance, expanding skills, and effective, positive communication. Here are a few tips for employees who are working remotely:

- **Consider returning to the office for work one day/week.** If you work with a team, consider how you might share one office, rotating your time, to reduce real estate costs. Alternatively, or in addition, you might coordinate your time so you are all together, post vaccination.
- **Prepare for face-to-face meetings.** Plan 25% of your meetings (with colleagues or clients) to be in-person, once we reach herd immunity.
- **Be proactive in your own goal setting and tracking.** Share your intentions and results with your manager.
- **Expand your knowledge and skills.** There is, and will be, a growing need for workers who can create, deploy, and maintain new technologies, as well as social and emotional skills. Participate in training, and share your experience and accomplishments with your manager.
- **Be flexible and open** to new ideas, opportunities, and reassignment within your organization. McKinsey research finds that a markedly different mix of occupations may emerge post-Covid. Job growth is most likely in healthcare, STEM, warehousing, and transportation.
- **Stay positive.** Agility and collaboration can lead to greater productivity, career growth, and upward mobility. Consider working with a trusted mentor or coach; let me know how I can help.



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