Virtual Goes Viral: Reimagining how and where work gets done
PwC’s CHRO insights: Latest findings from PwC’s Pulse Survey

Over 100 CHROs from Fortune 1000 and private companies, along with other C-suite executives, participated in PwC’s latest Pulse Survey to weigh in on policy-related issues.1 During this unprecedented time resulting from the global pandemic, the monumental shift to virtual work has posed significant challenges for business continuity, and the well-being of employees remains a top priority for HR leaders. To help ease this transition to remote working, these executives were swift to employ cultural and procedural company-wide changes, enabled by cutting-edge cloud-based HR technologies. This in turn enabled employees to work the way they wanted, or more often, needed.

Battling burnout

The COVID-19 pandemic put HR leaders on the frontline of the dramatic shift to remote work and has fundamentally changed where and how work gets done. Our recent survey found that HR leaders are chiefly concerned with employees’ well-being, with 51% of CHROs surveyed stating that employee anxiety and burnout is their biggest challenge.2

HR leaders are similarly concerned about a lack of adequately deployed tools to accelerate collaboration, creativity, and coaching (47%), as this could weaken company culture (41%) and impact business continuity. To overcome these obstacles, HR teams are focused on several major initiatives, including upskilling/retraining (28%), investments in cloud technologies that support remote work (25%), and employee productivity (25%).

But despite the business challenges facing companies in 2020, 60% of HR leaders surveyed said they are planning to hire additional U.S. headcount in 2021, with only 4% anticipating a net decrease. This positive news may mean a recovery in 2021 for the U.S. labor market, as these leaders are also planning to hire more onshore resources.

Remaining optimistic

Taking a look from the other side of the desk, a recent survey of over 1,000 American workers found that U.S. employees were optimistic about the near future. Some 74% stated that their current job is secure for at least the next six months, and 58% felt confident they could find a new job in their desired field within three months. 45% said they could find one immediately. Additionally, workers want to make themselves more marketable by investing in digital skills training, with U.S. workers willing to invest upwards of 12 hours per month to improve their skills.

The top priority for more than 51% of the HR execs surveyed is employee anxiety and burnout.

Nic Allums, Director, HR Transformation and Technology Practice, PwC
Investing in the future

While the impacts of the pandemic pushed companies to vacate physical office locations, the longer-term impacts are yet to be fully understood. Executives are weighing a mix of pros and cons in adopting long-term virtual work strategies. Benefits such as reducing real estate costs, greater reach for talent, and business resilience — the ability to adjust to change in a challenging marketplace — need to be weighed against negative impacts, like an unsatisfying employee experience and company culture. Management must map out the nature of work across departments to identify who can work productively from home, who requires an office setting, and who might best suit a hybrid model.

Meanwhile, HR leaders are moving full speed ahead, investing in training and technologies to optimize virtual work to reap the long-term benefits. 74% of companies plan to invest in HR cloud solutions to attract and keep talent. Meanwhile 58% of CHROs already have plans in place to deploy upskilling initiatives with an additional 33% considering investing in these efforts. By investing in cloud-based technologies, on-demand and live training can be standardized globally. This also will help reduce training costs and deployment times in meeting future in-office and virtual training requirements. A proactive stance by HR leaders will help ensure their organizations are digitally fit for the future.

Companies that invested in cloud-based technologies were better positioned as the pandemic came into play because they had better insight into their organization and were able to flip quickly. It was built-in resilience for them.

Lori Pierson, VP, HCM Transformation, Oracle

HR needs to be able to show employees what’s possible for them in the future. We’ve seen a lot of organizations moving from on-premises technology solutions to HR platforms in the cloud to take advantage of new feature and functionality-rich platforms with regular updates to respond to change.

Nic Allums, Director, HR Transformation and Technology Practice, PwC

If needed, would find a new job in desired field within 3 months

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18 – 44</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45+</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If wanted, would be able to find a new job in desired field immediately

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18 – 44</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45+</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CHROs plan to accelerate upskilling:

- 74% Companies planning to invest in HR cloud solutions to attract and keep talent
- 58% CHROs planning to implement upskilling initiatives
- 33% CHROs considering a plan for upskilling or have a plan in place but have not started yet
Building the Office of the Future

The results of these surveys indicate that the Office of the Future will be based around a hybrid approach to remote and in-person working, with CHROs leading its design. It will incorporate three complementary workplaces:

- **Branded company office** — Fully dedicated offices where employees will be assigned to a workplace “neighborhood” rather than a specific desk and will have access to technology to enable them to work from anywhere in the office.

- **Virtual office** — Employees will work primarily from home using company devices. This virtual environment will be enabled by cloud-based technologies and will foster more focused work and drive productivity.

- **Co-working site** — This is a shared space that is not company dedicated or branded. The co-working space will allow for lower costs, maximum flexibility, and continued collaboration.

As the workplace evolves, so will the nature of where and how work gets done. PwC has identified below “Five Cs” to the Office of the Future to highlight our view of where work is heading.

The 5 Cs to the Office of the Future

| **Collaboration** | Will happen in the office, and be supported virtually through collaboration tools |
| **Creation** | Will move away from the office and employ cloud-based technology |
| **Communication** | Most communications will be done remotely in the cloud |
| **Coaching** | Will be delivered in hybrid form |
| **Community** | Will happen in the office, and be increasingly nurtured through virtual environments |

To support this move to the Office of the Future, CHROs will need to lead transformational programs focused on changing corporate culture with processes supported by cloud-based technologies, including:

- **Cultural-change programs** — HR leaders will need to build a company culture where remote work is encouraged, and this starts with managers prioritizing remote interactions in their daily team activities. Leaders should also sharpen their skills of empathy and authenticity and focus on building a sense of community in the virtual environment to encourage social cohesion.

- **Work process and communication programs** — A hybrid work environment needs process guard rails. For example, establishing a clear cadence for communication (daily/weekly check-ins) is essential, and setting clear availability guidelines that recognize the need for employees to have break times will counteract the common “always on” feeling when working virtually.

- **HR cloud-based tools and technology** — Cloud tools and technology can help reduce collaboration challenges and bring virtual teams closer together. Simple platforms, such as live file-sharing services, will save time and money in the long run. Similarly, collaboration tools can speed asynchronous communications, while virtual conferencing creates more efficient synchronous collaboration and encourages social interaction.
Building these Office of the Future capabilities will help HR organizations deliver results, such as:

- **Improving talent acquisition** — Cloud-based technologies will extend HR’s reach through video interviews, virtual manager trainings, and virtual career fairs, helping streamline hiring and onboarding.

- **Fostering talent development and retention** — Inclusion and belonging will be key to employee engagement. Hosting cloud-based training and development programs will keep employees on an upward track.

- **Optimizing remote performance management** — Managing by objective will be critical to success in the virtual work environment. Facilitating virtual remote management training will give managers the tools they need to succeed and lead teams in a remote world.

- **Creating a friendly, virtual culture** — Hosting virtual environments that emphasize the benefits of a remote work environment, such as work flexibility and productivity, will help communicate management’s commitment to a virtual workplace.

- **Increasing diversity and inclusion** — A virtual workforce will enable companies to hire across geographic locations, opening new opportunities for a more diverse workforce.

**Looking ahead**

CHROs are resilient, and this year was a true test of their leadership. As PwC’s Pulse Survey shows, these leaders must maintain a strong company and work culture to prevent employee burnout due to the new virtual work environment. HR leaders and employees are investing time and resources in digital upskilling efforts, and the workforce remains confident that their jobs are safe and the market healthy. This is also supported by a majority of CHROs, who expect to expand headcount in 2021.

**HR leaders have an opportunity now to reinvent where and how work is getting done for their organization.**

Brittany Hovell, Sr. Manager, PwC

We believe that a successful long-term shift to the Office of the Future, or hybrid workplace, will require HR leaders to create a blueprint for their future workforce that defines how and where work gets done. Having designed an effective Office of the Future, HR leaders can identify HR cloud technologies that enable virtual work processes to optimize work productivity and support a positive virtual company culture. CHROs that invest in collaboration and HR cloud-based technologies will create a competitive advantage by attracting and retaining a leading workforce, while also building workplace resilience to mitigate future workplace disruptions.

**Learn more**

Watch the Virtual Going Viral webcast on demand for an in-depth discussion about reimagining how and where work gets done.

For more information on how to create the Office of the Future, please visit PwC-Oracle Solutions.

---

**Endnotes**

1. CHRO insights: Latest findings from PwC’s Pulse Survey.
2. This and other metrics cited in this report were taken from the PwC Workforce Pulse Survey.