



Workforce and the workplace: from surviving to thriving

With the pandemic far from over, how can we support our workforces during the pandemic whilst planning ahead for the future? In this article, Citi, together with friends and partners from Accenture, explore some of the lessons learned during Covid-19, which we hope it will help shape our future working lives.

At the height of the pandemic, organizations worldwide moved to remote working very suddenly, with digital tools, channels and communication platforms rapidly becoming a permanent fixture in our working lives. Despite personal anxieties, employees demonstrated remarkable creativity and ingenuity, enabling businesses to survive the peak of the crisis and continue to meet the needs of their customers. Although we continue to live through a period that we hope generations ahead of us never have to experience, the prospect of vaccines and treatments are giving business leaders the confidence to look ahead to the 'future normal'. While everyone wants to move beyond the pandemic as quickly as possible, business leaders should not forget the valuable lessons and experiences they have gained, and use these to shape future business models.

"THE PANDEMIC HAS ALREADY CHANGED WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A LEADER. THERE IS NO LONGER THE SEGREGATION BETWEEN WORK AND HOME LIFE: LEADERS ARE NOW EFFECTIVELY SPENDING TIME WITH THEIR EMPLOYEES IN THEIR HOMES. AS A RESULT, LEADERS HAVE BECOME MORE HUMAN AND ARE MORE WILLING AND ABLE TO ACCEPT THEIR EMPLOYEES AS AN ENTIRE PERSON. THIS IS AN EXCELLENT DEVELOPMENT, LEAPFROGGING A WHOLE GENERATION OF LEADERSHIP THINKING."

Margaret Smith, Accenture

Home as the new office

In the short term, remote working will continue to be the default for many employers. For those who need to be in the office, companies need to ensure that their people feel safe, both in the office and on their commute.

"OUR TASK AS LEADERS IS TO DISTINGUISH BETWEEN WHAT WE NEED TO DO TO ADDRESS THE CURRENT REALITY, AND WHAT WE WILL CARRY FORWARD, SUCH AS PEOPLE WORKING VIRTUALLY, AND HYBRID ARRANGEMENTS, WHICH WILL UNDOUBTEDLY BE PART OF A NEW NORMALITY."

Margaret Smith, Accenture

Remote working brings a number of advantages, but there are also challenges that need to be overcome when planning future working models. People coped with the first lockdown period admirably, despite dealing with constraints and anxieties, but extending this to a year or more puts significant strain on people's mental wellbeing and family life.

"AS LEADERS, WE NEED TO LOOK AT WHAT PEOPLE NEED TO BE SUCCESSFUL. THIS IS NOT SIMPLY ABOUT SKILLS AND TOOLS TO INCREASE PRODUCTIVITY METRICS. RATHER, WE NEED TO THINK ABOUT THE WHOLE PERSON. WOULD MORE FLEXIBLE WORKING PATTERNS, EXPANDED CHILDCARE, OR ACCESS TO RESOURCES TO HELP MANAGE THE NEEDS DISABLED DEPENDENTS OR ELDERLY RELATIVES HELP THAT PERSON TO WORK? WHILE THESE MAY HAVE BEEN OUTSIDE AN EMPLOYER'S REMIT IN THE PAST, THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN OUR WORKING AND PERSONAL LIVES HAS BECOME BLURRED." Eva Sage-Gavin

Existing pressures faced by women in the workplace have been exacerbated even further during lockdowns and school closures, and are leaving the workforce at an unprecedented rate, which could have a disastrous impact on the talent pool and corporate culture unless it is addressed rapidly.

Despite the challenges for some employees, a recent Accenture survey, which spanned the period both pre- and during the pandemic, illustrated that 47% of employees do not want to go back to their old working practices, and instead want flexibility to do their best work in the workplace they find most enabling. This has significant implications for leaders engaged in workforce and workplace planning. When we work from home, we spend most of our time sitting at a desk in one room. Few people will want to incur the cost, time and inconvenience of going to an office to do the same thing. Rather, they expect the office environment to offer an experience that they cannot replicate at home.

"WORK PLAYS A VARIETY OF ROLES IN OUR LIVES: NOT JUST EMPLOYABLE, BUT ALSO RELATIONAL AND PHYSICAL. PEOPLE COME TOGETHER FOR A VARIETY OF REASONS, WHETHER FOR RECOGNITION, INSPIRATION THROUGH ACCESS TO NEW IDEAS AND VIEWPOINTS, OR COLLABORATION AND INTERACTION, BOTH FORMAL AND INFORMAL. LEADERS BUILDING A WORKFORCE STRATEGY AND HYBRID TEAMS NEED TO TAKE INTO ACCOUNT EMOTIONAL, PHYSICAL SPACE, FINANCIAL AND EMPLOYABILITY ISSUES?" Eva Sage-Gavin

The challenge is therefore how to develop hybrid models that leverage the advantages of remote working with the benefits of spending time together.

"FOR CITI, PRESERVING OUR CULTURE, OUR TEAM IDENTITY AND RELATIONSHIPS IS VERY IMPORTANT. THE WORKING PRACTICES OF THE FUTURE WILL DIFFER SIGNIFICANTLY FROM THOSE OF THE PAST, SO WE NEED TO ENSURE THAT OUR FUTURE WORKING MODELS ENABLE US TO NURTURE A COMMON SPIRIT, SHARE IDEAS, AND ENSURE THAT OUR PEOPLE HAVE THE TOOLS AND SKILLS THEY NEED TO BE EFFECTIVE IN THEIR ROLES."

Steve Donovan, Citi

Equipping employees for future working

As business leaders start to design innovative, often hybrid, workforce and workplace models that combine resilience and agility, they need to consider how best to support people within their organisation so they can offer customers and suppliers the experience they expect. Some of these considerations are quite straightforward, such as providing technical or office equipment that enable people to do their jobs comfortably and safely.

"WE SEE COMPANIES USING SOPHISTICATED DATA ANALYSIS TO ANTICIPATE FUTURE SKILL REQUIREMENTS AND PREPARE THEIR EMPLOYEES. EQUIPPING PEOPLE WITH THE RIGHT SKILLS AND PURPOSE, AND SHARING SUCCESS IS ESSENTIAL TO TAKE CARE OF TALENT. IN BRAZIL, FOR EXAMPLE, 72% OF EMPLOYEES BELIEVES THAT THEIR EMPLOYER IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THEIR CAREER DEVELOPMENT AND WELLBEING. THIS REFLECTS A SIGNIFICANT LEVEL OF TRUST THAT PEOPLE PLACE IN THEIR EMPLOYERS, WHICH COMPANIES NEED TO TAKE SERIOUSLY." Patricia Feliciano, Accenture

Business leaders also need to ensure that their employees are equipped and empowered with the skills and real-time data they need to fulfil their role. Digital platforms and processes are critical to the employee experience, but to leverage these fully, companies need to consider what new skills and training their employees may need. Furthermore, while digital tools enable new working models, they supplement rather than replace the human dimension.

Business leaders need to ensure that their new workforce and workplace practices embrace diversity and inclusion, and give people the confidence that the work they are doing is purposeful and aligned with their mission.

The pandemic – and more importantly, its ending, marks not just a restart, but a new, ‘digital first’ era of business in which customer engagement and employee experience are delivered and defined in very different ways to the past. Business leaders need the foresight, and confidence, to cast off practices and cultures that no longer serve the needs of the business, and reinvent themselves, and their social and environmental contract, to serve their corporate purpose. However, while digitisation is key to enabling more innovative, flexible and strategic ways of operating and delivering services, leaders must continue to ensure that there is time, space and opportunity to listen, engage and act with empathy and compassion.

Top tips for business leaders for remote working

- **Employee wellbeing.** When asking “how are you?”, coach your team so that if a person answers “fine”, go back and say “I’m genuinely asking how you are.” This is likely to uncover individual challenges that people are experiencing, some quite practical and easily resolved, but also more complex issues around personal anxieties or mental health.
- **Replace informal interactions.** Spend time at the start of meetings engaging personally with other meeting attendees. Allow gaps between meetings to look after yourself.

- **Measure productivity differently.** Review how you measure productivity, moving from measures of time to team goals and measures of output, such as service levels. One of the benefits of digital technologies is automation, enabling more time to be spent on problem solving, analysis and tasks that have a clearer purpose.
- **Share success.** Even though people are at home, they still want to share, celebrate and connect socially. Try and recreate this virtually in instances when it cannot be done physically.
- **Be human.** We are all experiencing personal anxieties, and uncertainty will continue as we move towards a currently unknown “future normal”. The best leaders share the load, talk about what they are going through, and make it acceptable to be honest, open and show vulnerability. There are days in all of our lives when we are not OK.

.....

This information is provided for educational and illustrative purposes only and not as a solicitation by Citi for any particular product or service. Furthermore, although the information contained herein is believed to be reliable, the following does not constitute legal or any type of advice and Citi makes no representation or warranty as to the accuracy or completeness of any information contained herein or otherwise provided by it. You should consult your own expert(s) for advice on any of these matters. The information and materials are exclusive property of Citi and their total or partial reproduction and / or distribution is prohibited.

.....



Steve Donovan
Latin America
Treasury and
Trade Solutions
Head, Citi



Patricia Feliciano
Managing Director
of Growth Markets
& Latin America,
Accenture



Margaret Smith
Managing Director,
Global Geographic
Services,
Accenture



Eva Sage-Gavin
Senior Managing Director
of Global Talent and
Organization/Human
Potential Practice & Services,
Accenture