

In collaboration with Mercer



Resetting the Future of Work Agenda: Disruption and Renewal in a Post-COVID World

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Introduction

Over the past 10 years, the discussion on the future of work has predominantly been linked to job automation. However, while this trend and its ramifications will undoubtedly remain a relevant strand of the discussion, the rapidly evolving nature of our economies and societies – accelerated by the COVID-19 crisis – has brought about a broader range of shifts in how and where we work, the ways in which work, workplaces and workforces are organized, and the employee-employer relationship.

The COVID-19 pandemic will have profound, long-term consequences for our economies and societies, including for the future of work.¹ As part of [The Great Reset](#) needed to support the transition to a fairer, more sustainable post-COVID world, companies have a responsibility, and a rare opportunity, to rethink their organizational and workplace structures to invest in their workforces as core drivers of long-term resilience and future success. Having recognized the COVID-19 crisis as a defining leadership and transformation moment,² chief people officers and other human resources (HR) and business leaders are now called on to build on what they have learned from the immediate crisis response to reset their organizations' future of work agendas and lead the way towards better and more human-centric work, workplaces and workforces.

This report, developed in collaboration with Mercer, brings together key insights and lessons from the COVID-19 crisis response of the World Economic Forum's broader industry community to imagine and set out an updated future of work company action agenda for a post-COVID world. In particular, the report brings together the perspectives on COVID-19 workforce-related best practices of more than 60 chief human resources officers (CHROs) from leading global employers as well as a broad range of insights into how organizations are preparing for the post-pandemic shape of work

from the Forum's network of Preparing for the Future of Work Industry Accelerators,³ comprising more than 200 senior HR leaders, education technology and learning providers, academia and government stakeholders in nine industries.

Furthermore, this report is intended to complement the Forum's existing set of actionable research and guidance on the future of work, including its *Workforce Principles for the COVID-19 Pandemic: Stakeholder Capitalism in a Time of Crisis*,⁴ white papers on *HR4.0: Shaping People Strategies in the Fourth Industrial Revolution*⁵ and *Towards a Reskilling Revolution: Industry-Led Action for the Future of Work*,⁶ and bi-annual *Future of Jobs Report*.

Building on this wealth of insights and experience from the Forum's broader industry community, this report is intended as a call to action for companies and organizations globally to update and reset their future of work preparedness agendas for a more relevant and inclusive post-pandemic "new" future of work for all. Importantly, these are not just questions for after the crisis. Forward-thinking CHROs point to a need to consider early on how work, the workplace and the workforce will look in the medium to long term to begin making the necessary investments today.

The workforce and workplace impact of COVID-19 crisis

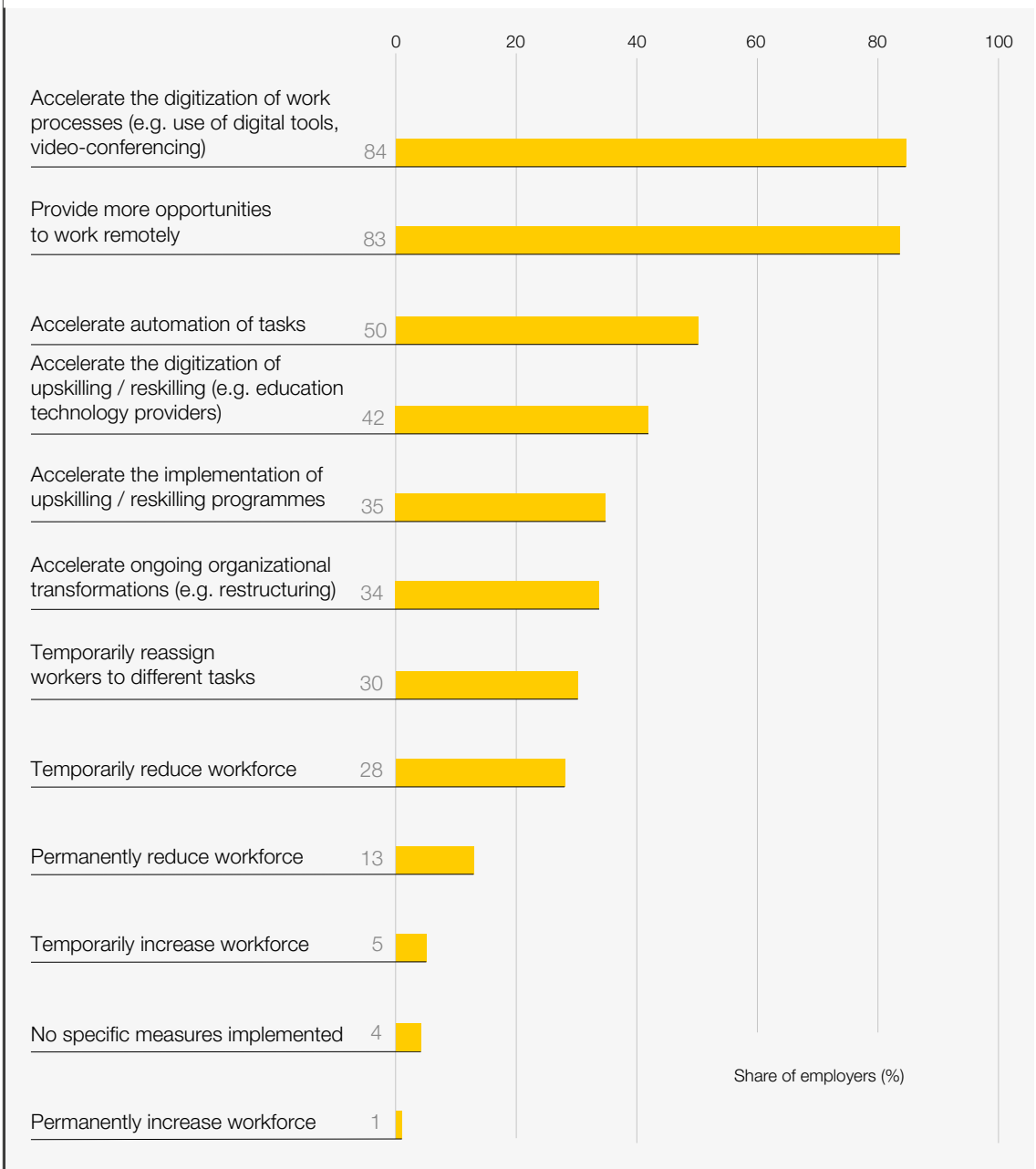
As of mid-2020, 93% of the world's workers resided in countries with some form of workplace closure measure in place to prevent the spread of coronavirus.⁷ Businesses providing essential services, such as healthcare, logistics, food and retail, continued to operate with new health and safety measures in place. Where jobs could be performed remotely, companies pivoted rapidly to the largest experiment in mass remote-working in history, comprising 39% of workers in OECD

countries on average.⁸ Businesses deemed non-essential and those impossible to perform remotely, including in industries such as travel and tourism, were suspended during lockdowns, leading to millions of workers being furloughed or laid off.

Moreover, according to the Forum's *Future of Jobs Report 2020*, more than 50% of global businesses have accelerated the automation of tasks in response to the crisis – with more than 30% also accelerating the implementation of reskilling and upskilling programmes (Figure 1).⁹ With the arrival of the pandemic, companies changed their operating practices essentially overnight, prompting many to re-examine how well their employees were prepared

and supported to carry out their duties. While prior to the pandemic organizations were already undertaking initiatives to support and equip their workforce with the right types of skills, jobs and tools, many were doing so at a pace not aligned to the accelerated speed of change brought about by the Fourth Industrial Revolution and other global trends.¹⁰ As a result, a window of opportunity now exists for companies and organizations to reassess the impact of the pandemic, review the changes imposed and reset and rejuvenate their approach to work, the workplace and their workforce to create new meaningful employment opportunities while ensuring workers are adequately prepared for the new shape of work.

FIGURE 1 **Planned business measures in response to COVID-19**



Source: World Economic Forum, *The Future of Jobs Report 2020*

Challenges and opportunities for HR leaders, boards and executives

As the pandemic is fundamentally a crisis with immediate and direct impacts on workforces and workplaces, CHROs and other senior HR leaders have been at the heart of companies' responses.¹¹ Organizations have had to learn to think and act fast. In doing so, insights and experiences from across the Forum's CHRO and future of work industry communities highlight that addressing employee health and safety has been a primary focus, along with ensuring business continuity and managing the shift to remote working. Having adapted quickly to the crisis, companies have now increasingly begun assessing what good practices need to be institutionalized and what approaches need to be adapted for disruptions that are likely to persist for months if not years – "a marathon, not a sprint", as one CHRO put it.

However, the challenge and opportunity of the current moment goes beyond either managing disruption or returning to some "old" or "new" normal. For HR, there is a real opportunity to move away from prescriptive and standardized approaches to become more relevant to each employee. More broadly, for company boards and senior leaders there is the potential for considerations on well-being, purpose and new ways of working to come together to create a "new deal" for what being a worker in the organization means, and to reshape work, workplaces and workforces for ongoing success in the future.

Based on insights and lessons learned from the Forum's broader future of work industry community, we identify five imperatives for resetting the future of work agenda (Figure 2).

FIGURE 2 **Five Imperatives for resetting the future of work agenda**



Source: World Economic Forum and Mercer, 2020

1

Resetting the future of work agenda



1.1 Transform organization design and work design

a

Empower an agile and distributed workforce

Organizations that operate in complex, multilayered, matrix structures are likely to have experienced challenges to operating effectively during the pandemic due to an ongoing introduction of new regulations and guidelines requiring businesses and employees to frequently align operations with little time to spare. In pursuit of quicker response times and more agile operating practices, a shift from a traditional matrix structure to one that is nimbler by bringing together employees from different functions with varying skillsets and experience may provide

a boost for organizations to transform rapidly to a more efficient, simplified structure. The trend toward such ‘vertical restructuring’—eliminating functions and departments to streamline decision-making, bringing it closer to where companies’ future value will be created—is accelerating. The newly simplified set-up can empower teams to collaborate across functions and geographies and improve decision-making speed by empowering those closest to customers and projects (see box).

BOX 1 Enabling factors of an agile and distributed workforce

Moving from a multilayered matrix structure to a network structure requires a number of fundamental shifts in the organization:

1. Data

Moving beyond “boxing” individuals based on their current jobs/designations to a model that encompasses the employee holistically – shifting focus to collating and tracking employees’ career history (both inside and outside of the organization), associated skillsets and experience beyond their day-to-day professional job (e.g. volunteering, board memberships) – will help in developing this new structure. While organizations tend to place less emphasis on skills and experiences, these traits are more likely to have the greatest impact and importance when activated in network teams. As companies seek to build more flexibility into business models, having data on people’s skills means companies can deploy talent in a faster, more agile way, enabling both short-term and long-term adaptability.

2. Infrastructure

Actively understanding the appropriate type of infrastructure to share and redeploy talent in the organization will help make the transition

more seamless. With the evolving nature of sharing talent within the organization, there is a rising prevalence of implementing talent marketplace programmes, which enables optimal matching of teams and employees for projects/roles within the organization based on skillset compatibility rather than the employees’ current designation or seat in the organization.

3. Culture

Developing a culture that is aligned and embodies the very nature of the newly agile organization is vital to ensuring that employees feel empowered to continue doing their jobs while being proud to work at the organization. Managers and employees will experience varying level of changes as the organization moves into a network structure – managers having less authority due to the easing of reporting lines; employees adapting in a more fluid environment with less structure or stability in their roles. Being transparent and clearly articulating the future organization’s vision and values is key and it is important to provide transitional support to ease employees’ concerns during this phase.

Nestlé: Adaptable global guidelines

Guided by three priorities outlined at the very beginning of the pandemic, namely keeping employees healthy, safe and supported; ensuring business continuity; and helping the communities around the company, Nestlé teams came together across functions and businesses to respond to the COVID-19 outbreak in a quick, responsible and entrepreneurial way. As soon as it became clear that COVID-19 was a global phenomenon, Nestlé, a company that sells in 187 countries and has factories in 84 countries, introduced new health and safety measures across the world. The company also rapidly developed and published global guidelines. These efforts avoided a “one size fits all” approach – every market had to find the right balance between global guidelines and local authorities’ regulations. A framework to support

employees was elaborated, including measures such as sick leave arrangements, cash loans or advances, full wages for staff affected by temporary stoppages, free meals and transport, flexibility for parents.

The pandemic is far from over. Existing measures must be monitored and adapted, and new ones developed, including further strengthening physical and mental health support schemes for the long-run. In the end, as the provider of an essential good, Nestlé was able, through the strong engagement of employees and workers in its supply chain and factories, to deliver on its responsibility and continue meeting the nutritional needs of families around the world.

Saudi Aramco: HR Intelligent Solutions Centre

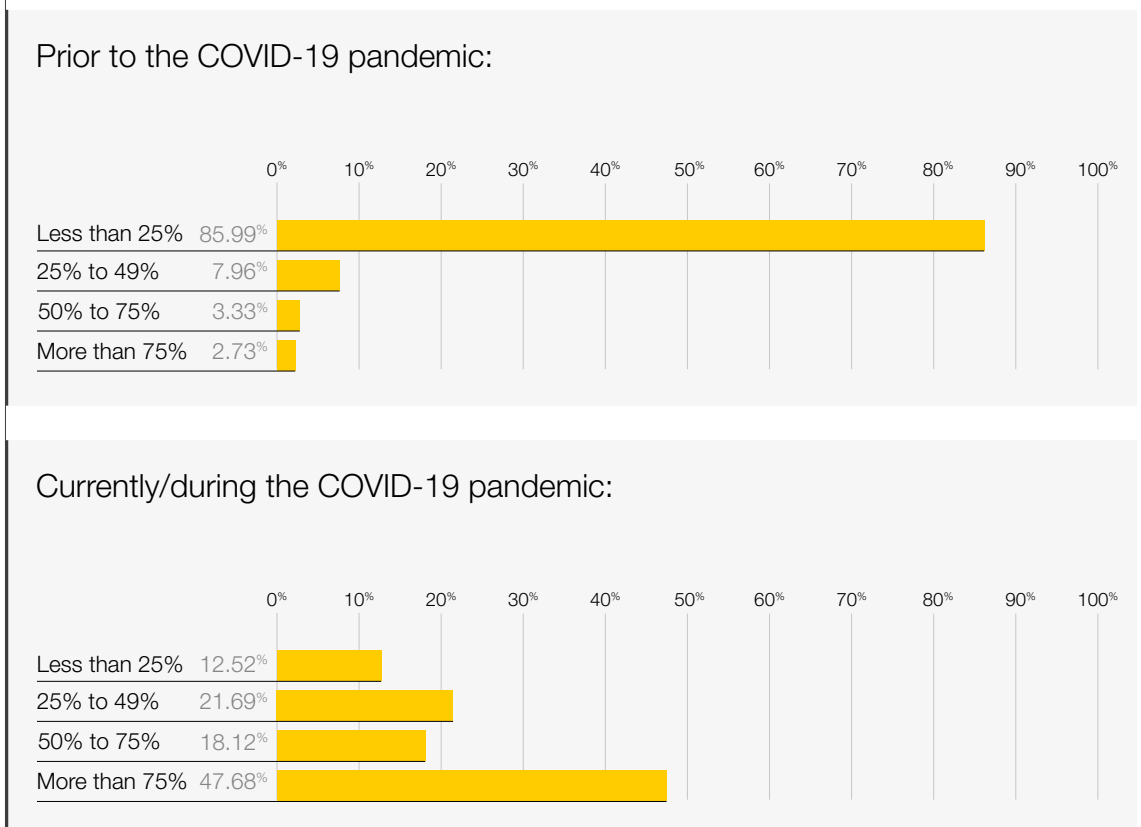
With the arrival of COVID-19, Saudi Aramco saw an immediate need for a more robust human data centre. It created the HR Intelligent Solutions Centre (HRISC), a dedicated physical and supercomputing space to provide real-time workforce insights with scenario planning and benchmarking to leaders across the company. The HRISC gave Saudi Aramco a holistic overview of the organization’s HR, diving deep into the internal and external supply and demand of workforce to support evidence-based decision-making during the COVID-19 crisis. As a result of the synergies created by this system, the company was able to track employees impacted by the pandemic, including employees in different curfew locations, out-of-country employees, dependents, students and employees working from home. In addition, the HRISC displayed potential lockdown scenarios in different cities, their business implications and recommended mitigations, as well as other predictive models. These provided the necessary insights for leaders to proactively capitalize on the information and ensure business continuity during the height of the pandemic. Building the HRISC has pushed the HR function to the core of business planning and opened an array of options to model data and decisions virtually before committing funds or staff time. Instead of trying to manually align databases and results from disparate sources, outside surveys or third-party validation, the HRISC has given Saudi Aramco a much greater command over its people analytics, bridging the knowledge gap for many leaders on the importance of data-driven workforce decisions.

b Explore hybrid working options

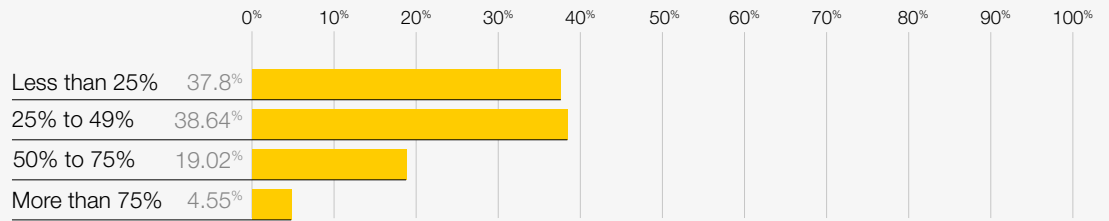
Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, remote working was a distant concept for many organizations and employees, with the majority of companies offering this option to less than 25% of their workforce.¹² When lockdowns were put in place during the pandemic, companies were forced to pivot to

remote working, essentially overnight in some cases. The remote workforce is anticipated to continue to grow post-pandemic as organizations are changing their policies to allow more employees to work flexibly or offsite (Figure 3).

FIGURE 3 COVID-19 impact on remote working practices



Anticipated future state, once regulations are lifted:



Source: Mercer, 2020

In addition to a range of positive effects of providing employees flexibility through remote working options, it also serves as an opportunity for companies to expand their talent base beyond traditional sources – geographically as well as demographically. Remote working removes physical boundaries that previously limited the talent pool and enables hiring across cities, states, countries

and continents. New ways of working are providing new opportunities, allowing companies to tap into new digital talent pools globally. In addition to geographical expansion of talent sources, companies may also be able to further diversify their workforce by extending remote working opportunities to traditionally marginalized groups.

LVMH: Maintaining and fostering culture in a new working environment

The first priority for LVMH during the crisis was to ensure its employees' security, health and engagement. The company's HR teams focused on ensuring that workers were offered the best possible remote working conditions, for those working remotely, or the safest possible working environment for those working in production units. This was especially important as some of the company's teams volunteered to produce hydroalcoholic gels and protective masks within its manufactures. The company's HR teams also offered employees the possibility to access online medical services – including for psychological support. They maintained continuous contact and fostered team spirit and solidarity. LVMH also quickly started to work within its crisis committee and international network to ensure that everyone would feel safe coming back to work post-lockdown. Many LVMH *Maisons* sent safety kits, including hydroalcoholic gels, masks and guidelines, directly to their employees' homes; working environments were reorganized; and guidelines were established at group level and adapted by the *Maisons*. The crisis brought to light the LVMH workforce's commitment, creativity, resourcefulness and energy in answering their clients' and teams' needs. A global pulse survey sought employees' views on their learnings from the crisis and on changing customer behaviours so as to shape the future of the company.

Bristol Myers Squibb: Caring for employees, patients and communities

Bristol Myers Squibb has taken various steps during the COVID-19 pandemic to protect the health, wellbeing and safety of its workforce and to ensure the continued supply of the company's medicines to its patients. Throughout the crisis, the company's more than 30,000 employees have continued working for patients and have contributed to global relief efforts. The company is implementing an innovative, analytics-driven, phased approach to bringing its remote workforce back to sites and into the field. This tailored and scientific approach has enabled the company to make early, impactful decisions. Also critically important has been active, two-way communication with the workforce, which resulted in the company providing flexibility and resources to support their overall well-being and ability to work remotely. The company's employees continue to contribute to relief efforts through their work and commitment to science and innovation, and to care for each other, their patients and their communities.

Deutsche Post DHL Group: Connect App supports crisis response

Deutsche Post DHL Group has aimed to stay true to its promise of connecting the world and make it a better place, despite and especially in times of crisis. Its newly launched internal Connect App helps to make updates immediately available to everyone, anywhere, anytime and gives a voice to each employee working to master the pandemic situation. This is the first time that Deutsche Post DHL Group has reached out to all of its employees digitally—whether they are working in a warehouse, at an office or in a truck. As of mid-August, around 200,000 employees had been invited to join Connect and over 55,000 colleagues in over 50 countries around the world were already actively using the app, making it the fastest growing digital employee tool in the company's history. By the end of 2021, all 550,000 employees will be able to join Connect. During the COVID-19 crisis, the App provides regular updates on regulations, global and local information and the possibility to interact with colleagues via social walls and chats. Furthermore, employees can order their working clothes, share employee feedback in Employee Opinion Surveys or submit an improvement idea on-the-go thanks to Employee Services in Connect.

C

Pivot to remote working

Companies have quickly pivoted to remote working during lockdowns. This has involved introducing new digital tools, clarifying remote-work policies, fostering employee engagement and mental health, and providing equipment for home working to counter issues such as increased musculoskeletal strain. Workday, for instance, provided each employee with a \$500 stipend for their home office. However, CHROs have quickly realized that as remote working persists, some of the routines established early in the crisis to promote engagement, such as daily huddles and evening gatherings, are placing excessive demands on employees' time, leading to exhaustion. In the UK, 48% of people working remotely reported long and irregular hours during

the initial weeks of lockdown, and 60% said they were showing increased symptoms of fatigue.¹³ Solutions include nudging managers to think afresh about what works, even weekly, and making sure that balance and boundaries are respected. In addition to these themes, remote working also prompts considerations around building a more inclusive and cohesive workforce – such as fostering collaboration between remote and on-site employees, providing managers with sensitivity training and embedding the sense of an open workplace in the organization's culture. Some organizations have begun leveraging technology in support of this, for example by analysing social networks via email and calendar activities.

The Adecco Group: a 'people first' response

With 80% of staff working from home at the peak of the pandemic, the Adecco Group prioritized planning for virtual working, coupled with extensive support to help manage people's physical, emotional and social needs. This included a free and confidential Employee Assistance line available 24x7. Where Adecco had offices still open, workspaces were re-configured and protective equipment was made available. Regular communication included a COVID-19 app, an 'Ask the Doctor' resource, weekly CEO town halls and a monthly pulse survey, which gave insights into how people were feeling. The company also organized home virtual 'workout classes' led by ambassadors from its Win4Youth initiative. Externally, it dedicated a section of its website exclusively to COVID-19-related content and updates, and over a four-month period saw user traffic triple. This meant that Adecco was able to continue to help people find work and meet its clients' needs. Even during the height of the crisis, it still had more than 400,000 associates working daily, and for one e-commerce client it hired more than 10,000 associates in a fully virtual way. The company is now conducting a broad consultation among employees on how they would like to work in the future, which will inform new policies for working in the post-COVID world.

Wipro: Virtual interactions foster engagement

COVID-19 necessitated moving from physical to virtual interactions. In the initial weeks of the pandemic, Wipro's business leaders conducted regular Virtual All-Hands Meets to convey information regarding COVID-19, work arrangements and the business direction. These were complemented with regular Virtual Account Connects, bringing together account leaders and their teams. Employees had access to engaged and open leadership that empathized with the prevailing uncertainty and concerns about health, safety and jobs. These practices have helped employees remain anchored with the unit. Wipro understands that employees are under stress during the pandemic; and it has modified its employee engagement framework where necessary to respond rapidly to emerging needs while retaining the core of its engagement philosophy. A key component in any engagement framework is the ability to be heard. Business teams have implemented Virtual HR connects and HR Hours. These interventions complement manager connects and serve to alleviate concerns, leaving employees free to concentrate on their work. For all such connects, unless circumstances do not permit, Wipro encourages video presence to help with human connection. These informal interactions are fostering camaraderie and innovation while building social capital. Agenda-less Virtual Coffee Connects are promoted to recreate elements of a physical experience. Fun is an important element at work that provides stress relief and sparks creativity. Online quizzes, Hobby Chats and Virtual Music Jams are some of the many activities teams are currently undertaking and have contributed to energizing the workforce.



d

Redesign the workspace

The impact of COVID-19 has led companies worldwide to a sudden reassessment of the role of the office. Traditional purposes for dedicated company space include fostering team engagement, creating a sense of community, doing certain types of work where material and equipment are not portable, and providing a workspace for those who do not have the infrastructure at home or the ability to work effectively remotely. Looking ahead, however, offices may not be an essential component for all employees. Facebook, for example, expects half of its staff to work remotely in future.¹⁴ Other companies now envision a hybrid office/remote future for employees. This opens the door to reconsidering the importance of premium office space and revisiting location strategy. One

approach is to focus on working from anywhere so that people can leverage a combination of local workspaces, office hubs and homes. Long leases may prevent companies from closing offices immediately. However, offices can be remodelled to encourage creative and activity-based working. The sooner some of these decisions can be made, the better. Many companies are currently experiencing the paradox of trying to bring people back into the old office arrangement while actively planning to move away from it in the medium term. For the longer term, many CHROs have begun examining site selection data such as local skills availability across talent hubs to make informed decisions on location strategy.

JLL: Ensuring the human experience in office re-entry

JLL has re-opened more than 300 offices around the globe following closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic, using an approach that balances safety with the human experience. Being back in the office looks different and requires new behaviours, and the company has worked thoughtfully to ensure that its people are returning to warm, inviting spaces where they can collaborate and innovate in a safe way. Taking the view that it only had one chance to make a first impression, the company's HR department partnered with JLL's leadership and facilities management, corporate real estate and marketing teams to not only re-imagine the company's spaces and implement safety protocols, but to reduce employees' anxiety about returning to the office. It did this by providing videos and other visual experiences to help employees prepare for changes to expect, while also inspiring and engaging them in the new office experience. Notably, in its US offices it implemented a "Step Forward" campaign, signifying that the journey to re-entry begins with a single, physical step. This campaign includes engaging signage in lobbies, elevators and on office floors to guide employees so they feel comfortable navigating the space in a new way. It is intended to evoke positiveness and provide a consistent re-entry experience for all employees.

Willis Towers Watson: Developing a structured approach to the 'new normal'

After mobilizing incident management teams to ensure employee safety and client service continuity in the early stage of the COVID-19 pandemic, Willis Towers Watson's CEO brought C-suite focus to the company's response as the pandemic revealed its scope and scale. The company moved from 10% to 95% remote working in a few short weeks – making it work with quick technology enhancements, full access to its flexible work-life arrangements and open communication. It also chartered a multi-faceted team to develop a structured approach to the 'new normal.' In under four weeks, the team addressed well-being ideas, travel guidance, remote office equipment provisioning, collaboration tools and manager resources – all to help colleagues adapt. The company also set policies to guide future return-to-office approaches for 45,000 colleagues in 140 countries. Recognizing colleagues' varied situations, their feedback was sought on these efforts. The June pulse survey, with high participation, showed strong support for the company's efforts, with over 90% of staff feeling connected to their teams, getting access to their managers and appreciating the flexibility. Work has since shifted to 'reimagining the workplace', using lessons from the crisis to define the evolving role offices will play in how the company's work is done.

Cerner: At the intersection of healthcare and technology

As a large health IT provider, Cerner works at the intersection of healthcare and technology, helping the medical community manage through the pandemic. The company saw the crisis as a defining moment and understood that surviving will come from defeating the virus—but thriving will come from how it shapes the future. Cerner quickly shifted to a remote work environment and established a taskforce to manage and communicate decisions about its response to employees and clients. It deployed websites to share guidance, field questions and promote well-being. Some 92% of employees responding to a survey were highly satisfied with the approach. To support clients and front-line healthcare workers, the company redeployed resources to focus on tools that monitor COVID trends, enable tele-health visits and provide data to track those at risk. The pandemic highlighted opportunities to improve the healthcare ecosystem and reinforced Cerner's strategy of delivering a connected, interoperable global health network that enables the sharing of health information across multiple systems. This crisis also led to innovation in the company's workplace and workforce models. The changes will increase employee engagement and enable a more inclusive culture, supporting Cerner's vision of a seamless and connected world where everyone thrives.

1.2 Align new technology and skills

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Embrace technology for business transformation

According to the Forum's *Future of Jobs Report 2020*, more than 80% of global employers have accelerated the digitization of work processes in response to the COVID-19 crisis.¹⁵ Technology has been, and will continue to be, a key enabler for businesses to enhance new offerings or to simplify existing procedures, thus disrupting the underlying structural nature of the current tasks and job design within an organization. While the implementation of a digital strategy can be a cost/time-savings strategy, as well as helping employees to make better decisions, it will also cause some job profiles to cease to exist and new ones to emerge, as current tasks will be reorganized or automated.

Insights and experiences from the Forum's CHRO and future of work industry communities highlight that companies which were already exploring digital transformation before COVID-19 have been more resilient during the pandemic, and digitalization is highly likely to remain an integral part of plans to deal with the continued threat from the virus as well

as for the transition into the "new" future of work. Companies are taking advantage of digital tools to reconfigure their production lines and office spaces in a way that enables greater social distancing, and redesigning engagement, communication and operations for remote work. One global company, for example, has trained digital guides who educate people across the organization on digital skills and deployed virtual learning portals, with high uptake. In addition, to capturing the lessons from the crisis response and converting them into guidelines for how to go forward, the company set up an "Agile to the Next Normal" team, which is led by its People and Organization department, but also includes its Chief Digital Officer.

The success of technology adoption depends heavily on organizations holistically reviewing their entire value chain, processes, tasks, jobs and skills to understand the impact of technology on each of these components in an effort to equip employees with new skillsets and enable them to transition effectively into the newly digitized environment.

UBS: 'Ways of Working' platform

With the onset of the COVID-19 crisis and the unprecedented requirement for nearly all staff globally to work remotely, UBS developed a platform, 'UBS Ways of Working' (UBS WoW), to support all employees and line managers in navigating the new working environment. The broad-ranging implications of the decreasing boundaries between home and work prompted UBS to enhance its focus on line manager training, mental health, physical health, and employee engagement. UBS WoW offers leadership and supervisory training, mental and physical wellbeing resources, best practice sharing, and a forum to foster community whilst staying connected to each other as staff work remotely. Its core features include:

- Setting a direction: The concept of the 'new normal' and the introduction of agility, featuring opportunities to learn about new skills and the need to adapt.
- Employee support: Promote health and wellbeing, managing work and family, and leading remote teams, further enabling and developing employees.
- Emphasizing culture: Reiterating core UBS values and strategy in everything the company does, the significance of resilience, and its plan to emerge from the crisis as a winner.

Dynamic content was delivered on a regular basis through varying interventions, including pictorial overviews, online learning modules, live webinars and engagement sessions with senior management. The campaign was rolled out with a variety of topics and weekly features strengthening connectivity and engagement whilst also ensuring fun along the way, with games, photo sharing and staff challenges. The platform has had over 180,000 employee visits since the launch in March 2020.

Agility: Leveraging digital to safeguard employees and supporting customers and communities

With the spread of COVID-19, Agility acted to safeguard employees, gather operational information required by customers and provide free logistics services and expertise to protect vulnerable populations. To boost internal resilience, Agility set up rapid response teams from HR, quality, operations, health and safety, finance and communications in over 100 countries. The company also shared information using a data visualization tool that showed the status of its workforce, offices and warehouses around the world. It tracked the number and status of local COVID-19 cases, IT readiness, availability of PPE, implementation of social distancing, and temperature monitoring at offices able to reopen. For customers, Agility's COVID-19 website provided comprehensive reporting on air, ocean and road freight; customs clearance; border conditions; warehouse and consolidation availability; and COVID-related restrictions. Today, the website

covers over 60 countries, providing real-time updates and interactive maps showing capacity for air, ocean and road freight. Agility initiated a social media campaign, #keepcargomoving, showcasing [case studies](#) in which commercial and humanitarian stakeholders were able to continue moving vital cargo. In addition, Agility designed strategic food stockpiling plans for governments, secured urgent PPE, delivered supplies to quarantined or isolated populations, provided warehouse space, trucking and other services.

Zurich: Digital transformation and workforce protection

Zurich adapted to the new working reality created by the pandemic with a dramatic acceleration to digitizing its relationship with the “heartbeat” of its business – its employees. The company’s state-of-the-art COVID-19 communication microsite enabled an increase in effortless employee interactions, creating a sense of purpose and the company being safe, agile, virtual and in this together to serve its customers and communities. Workloads changed as consumer behaviours changed and the company responded to the crisis internally. With people at the core, staffing needs were impacted, sometimes resulting in an imbalance of resource allocation (i.e., claims, retail distribution, operations). Business areas reallocated resources with a preference to aligning internal (rather than external) talent to where it is needed most to guarantee business continuity. North America, Asia Pacific and select European countries prioritized work and filled vacant positions, while some functions built their own talent marketplace solutions. Zurich’s ability to recognize and proactively equip its teams with not only physical and communication resources but also with skills, mindsets, behaviours and values enabled it to reallocate staff to where customers needed it most.¹⁶

b Integrate reskilling and upskilling

Companies are increasingly called on to assume a critical role in reskilling and upskilling their workforce, necessitating close collaboration between CHRO, Learning and Talent Management functions of the organization – and, increasingly, Chief Diversity and Chief Technology Officers. Business leaders are responsible for painting a clear vision of the future organization, articulating its impact on team structures, emerging roles, evolving roles and declining roles in the organization. HR leaders play an integral and strategic role in the process, with an emphasis on linking activities back to the organization’s workforce strategies by addressing the following:

- **Emerging areas requiring new talent** – to determine “build-buy-borrow-bot” people strategies
- **Evolving areas requiring new skills of existing talent** – to develop reskilling/upskilling activities to ensure that the current workforce is well-prepared to grow with the organization
- **Declining areas resulting in a surplus of talent** – to assess current skillsets, identify skill adjacencies and determine alternate career pathways/redeployment opportunities within or beyond the organization

Given recent advancement and growth in the lifelong learning space, there is a plethora of potential learning solutions available for

organizations to tap into. Education technology providers are increasingly embedding novel features into learning programmes such as gamification technology, micro-learning curricula and network access to subject matter experts. While there has been an increase in the volume of learning programmes developed, less research has been done on learner personas to understand the effective modes of learning for a diverse workforce. In order to create engaging and long-lasting learning impact, employers and education technology providers will need to gain deeper understanding of various learner personas and curate approaches and curricula that fit those profiles. Employees should also be encouraged and given resources to invest time to reflect and discover their learner personas and preferences to help them learn effectively and acquire more skills for their careers.

Beyond efforts relating to identifying talent sources, analysing skills and providing learning content, focus should be given to building lifelong learning cultures within the organization to develop learning as a habit for all workers through: 1) Embedding reskilling/upskilling efforts alongside the organization’s transformation journey, not as an afterthought; 2) Cultivating learning as part of “Business As Usual” through business leaders; 3) Enabling bottom-up learning initiatives through co-designing learning programmes with employees; and 4) Ensuring that hiring and promotion criteria reflect an openness and awareness of digital learning and non-traditional credentialing.

Coursera: Adopting a growth mindset

Adopting a growth mindset continues to be the foundation of Coursera's COVID-19 response. As the pandemic unfolded and Coursera's 650 employees began working remotely, it quickly became clear that work at the company would change permanently. As an online learning platform, it was logical to embrace this as a learning opportunity. Coursera gathered direct feedback from its teams by sending out a remote work survey, which more than 80% of employees filled out. Using that data, it was able to set a plan to better support its employees during this time. This included curating a collection of Coursera courses that teach skills like resilience and well-being, including popular courses like Yale University's Science of Well-Being. This led to a 47% increase in employees taking courses on the platform during May, for example. Embracing the unknown is also key to following a growth mindset. To gather as much knowledge as it could in real time, the company developed a COVID-19 task force with representation from all global offices. This allowed it to check in on local conditions, plan office closures, postpone events, adjust new hire onboarding, and identify logistical support for employees like home internet stipends and reimbursements for home office setups.

PwC: Reimagining learning and development

As a result of COVID-19, territories across the PwC network of member firms have had to further reimagine how learning content is delivered, particularly for sessions that would normally be held in-person, such as onboarding, induction and leadership training. This shift to virtual delivery has taken place in an environment where people are experiencing screen fatigue, speed-to-delivery is critical, budgets are limited, new metrics are being established and the future of work is ever-evolving. Many territories have cancelled all in-person classroom learning through to December 2020 and some have cancelled in-person sessions through 2021 as well. While this set of circumstances is not unique, PwC's network of firms is approaching the changes as an opportunity to set the foundation for the future. It is working to define new blueprints for learning such that the world becomes the new classroom. They are doubling down on digital upskilling. They are utilizing multiple technologies and tools simultaneously to create engaging experiences and using this opportunity as a catalyst to drive and accelerate culture change related to perpetual learning and protected development time. These moves have allowed PwC firms to respond in an agile manner to the current crisis, while putting them on a positive trajectory for the future.



1.3 Cultivate health and well-being

a

Safeguard physical and mental health

In terms of workers' physical health, insights and experiences from the Forum's CHRO and future of work industry communities highlight that immediate priorities during the pandemic have been to ensure safe working environments and comply with evolving public health directives, including consideration for the needs of vulnerable employees, such as those with underlying health conditions. Mental health has also increasingly become a priority as a result of the crisis, with two-thirds of companies offering behavioural health services, such as employee assistance programmes, reporting that they have seen their use increase¹⁷ (see box). In designing a comprehensive approach to these issues, it is important to have in place health and well-being programmes that can be customized to the needs of each employee and to use data, including from employee surveys and self-reporting tools, to support programme design and provide a comprehensive picture of workforce health and well-being throughout the company.

The disruptions created by the pandemic – such as the large-scale shift to remote working – have demanded new approaches to the employee experience, engagement and motivation, from the onboarding of new talent onward. Many CHROs feel that the level of engagement both between colleagues and between leaders and employees has become much deeper during the crisis. According to one study, before COVID-19, only half of workers globally said their company mostly cared or cared a great deal about employee well-being.¹⁸ During the crisis, by contrast, 80% of employees in the United States felt that their leaders had acted proactively to protect their health and safety and 78% thought that their organization had responded to the crisis appropriately.¹⁹ The challenge now will be how to maintain this level of support and engagement as the pandemic continues. Companies have begun reconsidering some of the approaches put in place early in the crisis and are looking at uptake behaviour to ensure that they are sustainable for different employee groups moving forward.

BOX 2 Safeguarding mental health

Working remotely increases the risk of isolation and of mental health problems. Accordingly, CHROs are increasingly focused on how to promote mental well-being. In the US, 88% of workers said they were moderately to extremely stressed during the pandemic and over two-thirds said it was the most stressful time in their careers.²⁰

Mental health remains a stigma in many organizations and it is useful to have senior leaders speaking out about their personal experiences. There is a business case for mental health, beyond the duty of care to employees; people who are mentally healthy will be more engaged, think better and communicate better. The UK's [Stevenson/Farmer review](#) provides one useful framework for companies to act on mental health.

Best practices include: providing appropriate metrics, services and accessible information; offering guidance on well-being, including seminars and podcasts with mental health experts and people in the organization who have dealt with mental health; making sure that insurance plans cover both physical and mental health; and scaling peer support (“mental health first aid”).

Concerns about performance assessment should also be addressed, in a context where many employees are having to balance work and care responsibilities and are concerned about the consequences.

More broadly, it is also important to promote a work/life balance, for example, by encouraging people to take time off, even in lockdown, and making sure that middle-managers in particular, who act as culture carriers, understand how to make the new paradigm work. The pandemic will be with us until a vaccine is developed. By that time, if companies do not take care of their culture, leaders and workforces, the psychological burden will take its toll.

The Forum's [Mental Health in the Workplace](#) initiative coordinates global efforts toward mentally healthier workplaces across industries, regions and sectors. The vision is a world where all workplace leaders recognize, have the right tools and commit to taking tangible and evidence-based action on mental health and well-being in the workplace, enabling their workforce to thrive.

Deloitte: Global Mental Health podcast

A globally produced podcast series for Deloitte professionals on the topic of mental health features leaders from across the organization sharing and promoting support for its people's well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond. Deloitte believes that supporting mental health is a critical element of inclusion and is working hard to address the stigma that still too often exists on this issue. The Global Mental Health podcast series was developed to provide practical guidance, tips and hints to help maintain mental well-being and for Deloitte professionals to learn from the experiences of their colleagues and leaders. Each podcast features topics from maintaining human connection to helping others through empathy, managing worry and anxiety, understanding how and when to ask for help, and sharing ideas for nutrition and exercise. The series quickly became one of the most leveraged features across Deloitte's Global COVID-19 Resource Center, with thousands of views and downloads by practitioners across the globe. Feedback has praised the openness and honesty of leaders for sharing their personal experiences about the subject, particularly at a time when support and empathy is needed most.

HPE: Reinforced commitment to well-being

At the onset of the COVID-19 crisis, Hewlett Packard Enterprise recognized the challenge and opportunity presented by the pandemic to reinforce its commitments to team members through finding innovative ways to support their physical and mental well-being while nurturing the company's culture and shared beliefs. In early March, the Executive Committee increased the frequency of All Team Member Meetings from quarterly to weekly in order provide timely and transparent communication on how the company was assessing, addressing and adapting to COVID-19. The company moved up its annual wellness challenges to April, recognizing the diverse health, wellness, and engagement needs of team members across the globe. The campaign included several wellness webinars, resources and the introduction of free Headspace meditation apps for all team members. In addition, the company created virtual community calls that allowed team members in similar situations like parenting and teaching from home, those caring for aged parents and team members who were sheltering in place alone, to come together, hear from experts and learn and support each other during this unprecedented time. The company has remained dedicated to being a force for good during this time, encouraging team members to take paid volunteer time off to give back to their communities—including through virtual events.

b

Consider total well-being

In addition to physical and mental well-being, concerns such as income security are also an important component of total well-being. A significant proportion of employees globally live paycheque-to-paycheque and lack savings to cope with unexpected financial shocks. Companies increasingly recognize that they have a responsibility to tackle this issue. Addressing financial vulnerabilities in the crisis should include

providing support to contractors and suppliers, in addition to full-time employees. One large retailer provided funds to each of its country operations, where co-workers in the greatest need could apply for support, including rental assistance and food allowances. It is also important to offer paid sick leave, which includes preventing employees with symptoms of COVID-19 feeling compelled to come into work.

Ingka Group (IKEA): Responding to those in greater need

Recognizing that the unfolding crisis would affect us all differently, Ingka Group knew the impact of the pandemic would be disproportionately higher for some of the over 166,000 co-workers employed by the company. To respond to their needs, Ingka provided guidelines to access support during the crisis and beyond. The company provided a framework for income stability for the initial and most critical phase in the crisis and safeguarded basics for all co-workers, such as medical insurance, risk insurance, pensions and co-worker discounts. It introduced an Employee Assistance Programme for all 30 countries where it operates, with helpline support; e.g., finance, legal, family issues (such as domestic violence cases), health, nutrition, emotional, grief and loss. A limited number of co-workers struggling to make ends meet were assisted with rent payments, healthcare costs, school costs, partner support and food allowance. Additionally, the company gave individual support through its network of coaches and provided co-workers with a series of training programmes on building resilience, coping with fear and stress, and mindfulness. Through these actions, Ingka has contributed to protecting the well-being and livelihood of its co-workers, fulfilling its promise as a purpose-led employer siding with its co-workers.

Verizon: Paid leave programme and support for caregivers

Verizon believes that its greatest strength is its employees. The company developed a COVID-19 response strategy that prioritized employee health and safety, transitioned over 100,000 employees to work from home, including redeploying retail teams after reducing the store footprint. To foster a virtual culture and share updates, it introduced a daily broadcast featuring the firm's leaders. Verizon recognized that during the crisis many employees needed time away from work to care for themselves and others, so it

implemented a COVID-19 leave programme offering 100% of pay for up to eight weeks, and then 60% for an additional 18 weeks. Employees with a COVID-19 diagnosis are eligible for 26 weeks paid leave and can access a nurse-led care management programme. For those juggling realities at home, the company expanded back-up care and caregiver reimbursement. In addition, Verizon introduced a constellation of resources that support its employees' well-being, such as virtual health sessions and Wellness Fridays. Looking beyond its walls, it curated volunteer opportunities and encouraged employees with medical backgrounds to apply their training (e.g., emergency medical technicians).

Workday: Financial support and expanded feedback

From the beginning of the crisis, Workday prioritized its employees' (Workmates') safety and well-being. Measures included bonus pay and a relief fund, whereby, in mid-March, Workday awarded all active employees – except for VPs and above – two additional weeks' pay. These funds were for employees to use at their discretion and to get ahead of any unforeseen needs such as child or elder care, or job loss of a family member. In addition, the company expanded its Employee Relief Fund for Workmates in need of additional financial support. Workmates also had the option of donating to the fund to help support their peers. The company also took an expanded view of its employee experience, adapting its weekly global survey to better understand how employees are really doing so it could better respond to their needs. It solicited a series of open-ended responses regarding well-being, working remotely and returning to the office. Using Workday Prism analytics, it assessed hundreds of thousands of data points and comments to identify trends and insights. This information was not only made available to people leaders through dashboards but also was delivered with specific curated actions that could help them be more effective based on the results of their team. Workday took specific actions to drive its COVID-19 responses as a result of the ongoing surveys. Holding regular town halls, setting a return-to-work date and providing caregiver support were a few of the many actions taken as a result of the feedback from employees. In a recent internal survey, 95% of Workmates said they felt well-supported by the company during this time. This has translated into positive feedback from customers.

c

Enable safe return to office

COVID-19 is a global pandemic, but the regional contexts in which companies are confronting the crisis vary widely. Companies should provide local leaders with prompt information about policies and procedures and empower them to act to address local conditions. For example, PwC built a framework for the return to the workplace, based on input from across its network of member firms, that could be customized by each territory to

develop return to the workplace plans, covering health and safety, well-being, office space and client considerations. In addition to providing a consistent approach, the framework also served as a stimulus for cross-border sharing and learning. There has also been a rise in the use of apps to inform employees of the changing situation regarding return to the office, from staggered scheduling to timed lunches to contact tracing.

Centene Corporation: Gaining employee approval by safeguarding health and well-being

Centene has a workforce of 70,000 employees across the US and Europe. Throughout the pandemic, their health and safety has been an uncompromising priority. The company's workforce-related efforts in response to COVID-19 included the following:

- Transitioned 90% of the workforce to work from home in less than a week
- Continued hiring, including virtual career fairs, resulting in nearly 7,500 new hires with virtual onboarding from March to October of 2020
- Activated new benefits for the remote workforce, including 10 days of additional emergency paid sick leave, a new technology stipend, in-office premium pay, and waived prior authorizations and cost-sharing for COVID-19-related employee care
- Provided a medical volunteer benefit to allow up to three months' paid time-off for medical professionals; over 1,000 licensed medical professionals expressed interest and hundreds of volunteer hours have already been logged
- Delivered ongoing, detailed employee communication
- Designed a phased return-to-office approach that is flexible for real-time decision-making across multiple geographies
- Retrofitted workstation cubicles with acrylic sneeze guards

- Installed thermal temperature scanners at large campuses
- Prepared Employee Care Kits with cloth face coverings, a thermometer and hand sanitizer for all employees returning to the office

In a June 2020 employee survey to gauge how employees were feeling about Centene's response, results showed 89% in favour in categories such as Care for People, Communications and Leadership.

HCL: Pandemic response plan

HCL invoked its Pandemic Response plan for COVID-19 in January 2020. Given the humanitarian dimension of this crisis, the firm-wide unified response was led by the chief human resources officer, in conjunction with the CEO and chief risk officer. This placed employee welfare at the core while ensuring business continuity. Very early in the outbreak, 150,000 employees were seamlessly enabled to work remotely. As lockdowns eased, the transition back to office was made voluntary and implemented in a secure, staggered way. A 24/7 Global Helpline provided free well-being services for employees and their families. An empathetic and bespoke communication plan, #TakeCareHCL, reinforced the company's commitment to people. A COVID-19 resource hub on the intranet kept employees advised on safety, remote working risks and policies and strengthened communal bonds to restore confidence. Virtual events and well-being programmes fostered meaningful connections between leaders and teams, employees and families in the era of social distancing. Predictive analytics on the impact of COVID-19 by way of a "virtual situation room" helped leaders make real-time decisions. The company's proactive, inclusive and simple crisis management approach helped it respond to a complex issue like COVID-19 in a timely and effective manner. Over 90% of employees said they were "very satisfied" with the company's initiatives to care for them. HCL's employees enabled 3.5 million client employees to work remotely and 99% of clients polled across over 600 accounts rated HCL's COVID-19 response as "very effective" or "effective".



1.4 Build human-centric leadership culture

a

Empower local leaders and improve communication

Changes to the workplace environment and within organizations pose additional challenges to local leaders and managers to effectively lead their teams. On top of day-to-day managerial tasks, leaders are responsible for establishing the new direction of the organization, driving new changes and managing internal and external stakeholders in an uncertain economic environment. Adding to the surmounting pressure of these activities, leaders are now also expected to fulfil these responsibilities both physically and virtually. The absence of a physical work environment where the entire team is present, sharing similar physical and social context such as visual, auditory and informal information exchange, requires more effort from leaders to align and integrate perspectives within and across teams. Leaders will need to redefine, explore and iterate new ways to manage the business, teams and morale by actively developing empathy, trust and collaboration.

Good leadership has been critical during the crisis. It is important for employees to see leaders “live”; this might include weekly global town halls alongside smaller group meetings. Transparency and authenticity from leaders resonate. Choosing to err on the side of over-communicating rather than under-communicating while providing timely, transparent and clear information about the business, teams and individuals will often be appropriate in these circumstances. It is good for employees to know that managers are also having to balance responsibilities such as family and children and that there is not a simple answer to those challenges. A dynamic leadership assessment is required, beyond the normal structured annual or quarterly cycle, to assess how leaders are performing in the crisis – including pulse surveys to assess employees’ views – and provide the necessary support.

Heidrick & Struggles: Fostering connection and culture in a remote environment

At the height of the pandemic, Heidrick & Struggles’ leadership focused on three core priorities. First and foremost, to ensure the health and safety of employees, including supporting psychological safety and well-being. The firm launched a global employee assistance programme, with confidential counseling for employees and family members, and online resources focused on new parent support, caring for elderly parents, nutrition and more. Second, to prioritize learning as a way to maintain professional development and boost employee morale with an eye toward emerging from the crisis stronger. Senior partners hosted a series of virtual webinars to help consultants develop new strategies for working remotely with clients, prospects, and their teams. The firm also converted in-person programmes into 45+ virtual sessions. Third, to foster connection and help ensure the culture and fabric of the firm remained strong. To do this, the company relied heavily on its network of local ‘culture champions’, across 40 offices, focused on creating connections at the local office level and coordinating participation in global initiatives, such as a global talent competition to raise funds for charities supporting COVID-19 relief, planning a virtual Global Day of Service to give back to communities, and other grassroots activities, such as virtual fitness competitions, Zoom happy hours and parenting support forums.

The Coca-Cola Company: “To refresh the world and make a difference”

Like many multinational fast-moving consumer goods companies, The Coca-Cola Company has worked quickly to adapt throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Its [approach](#) includes three key pillars: commitment to [the company purpose](#), the health and safety of employees, and collaboration with key stakeholders.

To support its employees during this challenging time, Coca-Cola focused on strong leadership as the most important way to drive culture. It launched communications efforts outlining expectations from leaders aligned to the company’s purpose, “to refresh the world and make a difference.”

Specifically, it developed the following content and tools to support leaders:

- ‘Lead & Inspire in a Crisis’ guide for people managers;
- Social learning communities to support networking, learning, and connections;
- Digital platforms like LinkedIn Learning, Yammer and MS Teams to support communities and leadership capabilities;
- Additional support and resources focused on diversity, equity and inclusion through listening, leading, investing and advocating;

- Integration of leadership expectations across people practices, such as performance enablement, recognition, and recruitment.

The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the company's culture transformation. There was record-breaking participation in the latest engagement survey (May/June 2020) where 93% of employees responded. Of those respondents, 93% said leadership communication was effective.

HP: A new engagement approach

HP focused on managing the unprecedented COVID-19 situation with urgency and a deep sense of care. From the onset, the company defined the safety of its employees as top priority as it continued delivering for customers. HP quickly pivoted its HR team to create a new engagement approach, termed "HP Spirit". It assigned a different theme to each day of the week to: Motivational Mondays, Training Tuesdays, Wellness Wednesdays, Thoughtful Thursdays and Family Fridays. Every week the company creates daily offerings—from stress relief sessions and home-schooling activities to office hours with the company's medical director, a global dance party hosted by a DJ, and more. When the team sees a need, it is filled. HP Spirit has garnered more than 75,000 views since March and helped drive a 16% increase in employees' belief in the future of the company. In addition to its engagement activities, HP has hosted Mobility Manager Trainings to help managers support their teams, practise self-compassion and create a sense of belonging and well-being. The company believes the key to building a resilient culture during a crisis is to keep employees at the centre of everything they do.



Enhance employee listening and enable human connection

Recognizing that employees are going through a difficult time as they learn to adapt in a different physical environment while balancing work and home responsibilities will be key to ensuring that they continue to feel supported throughout this process. In addition to the immediate changes imposed abruptly on their lives, many employees are worried about their long-term job, health and financial security and their ability to fulfil their performance goals for the year in this economic environment.

The crisis response has enhanced the need for listening and connecting directly with people across all levels of the organization, flattening the hierarchy and encouraging participation. It is more critical than ever to get feedback from all employees. Tools include surveys, virtual focus groups and internal crowdsourcing sites. Research on the 2008 global financial crisis indicates that organizations that engaged in sharing information broadly and honestly, and that utilized shared decision-making processes, responded more effectively to the crisis.²¹ A straw poll at one of the Forum's CHRO COVID-19 Response virtual meetings suggested that almost two-thirds of companies represented were using employee surveys to inform their crisis response. Asking for employees' opinions shows that the organization

cares and has been shown to result in greater employee engagement and well-being.²²

Digital tools have worked well during the crisis, but it has become clear that additional effort is needed to maintain a sense of human connection in a digital world. Over half of companies represented at one of the Forum's CHRO COVID-19 Response virtual meetings had established new channels of communication for employees during the crisis. Nevertheless, surveys show that employees miss the camaraderie and serendipitous interactions of office life when working entirely remotely. The UK Institute for Employment Studies found that 33% of workers frequently feel isolated while working remotely,²³ whereas a recent Mercer Sirota study found that a third of employees globally responded neutrally or unfavourably when asked if they were receiving the social support needed to feel connected during this period.²⁴ As leaders adapt and flex working hours where possible, identifying areas where collaboration can be fostered within and across teams to provide employees exposure and build a healthy virtual social workplace can support maintaining and deepening human connection. In addition, some global companies are providing safely configured collaborative workspaces that can be booked by teams that feel the need to meet in person.

Upwork: Employee focus groups

Too many organizations make decisions from the top-down, especially in times of crisis. But if those decisions ultimately affect how employees do their jobs, gathering their input beforehand is essential. Upwork considers itself a people-first company, so this approach came naturally. After quarantining began in early March, it started a cross-functional COVID-19 task force charged with identifying and addressing the needs of employees. This was done by instituting a series of in-house surveys to see how employees were faring. Did they feel as creative being physically separated from colleagues? Were home distractions making it more difficult to remain productive? Were some work-teams or people of different identities and backgrounds impacted in specific ways? Were they online for too many hours or experiencing "Zoom fatigue"? Building on this input, the company formed several employee focus groups—bringing in volunteers from multiple departments—to brainstorm and develop a pipeline of programmes, experiences and events in each of

these areas. This ongoing effort has already paid dividends, resulting in a pipeline of ideas that Upwork will implement in its evolving “back to better” plan.

DSM: “Caring, courageous and collaborative”

DSM’s culture has underpinned its response to COVID-19 in the past months. The company learned that the more dispersed, remote or virtual its teams were, the more critical its leadership, culture and values became in providing both direction and a sense of belonging. DSM’s co-CEOs emphasized its longstanding value of responsibility and its commitment to being caring, courageous and collaborative. These “three Cs” drove the firm’s decision-making and how it engaged with its employees, increasing listening and connecting. The way DSM has made that connection, in the most personal way possible, made its employees feel engaged, safe and secure, as evidenced by measurable increases in its inclusion and engagement indexes. DSM’s commitment to being caring, courageous and collaborative as cornerstones of its culture is reflected in its policies and practices, reinforcing the integrity of its culture and, with that, further strengthening employee commitment.



Re-emphasize diversity, equity and inclusion

The COVID-19 crisis has aggravated pre-existing structural and social inequalities, in particular:

- Women have been disproportionately affected by the crisis, threatening to reverse gains made in recent years and exacerbate gender inequalities
- Young people are especially exposed to the economic effects of the crisis and to some of the downsides of remote working
- Black, Indigenous and people of colour (BIPOC) communities have often suffered disproportionately from the impacts of the pandemic, and at the same time a social crisis has emerged over the urgent need to address racial justice²⁵

Companies need to ensure they take steps to mitigate negative impacts of the crisis on at-risk groups, as well as to ensure that equity and inclusion in all forms of human diversity define the “new normal” in the workplace. CHROs note that the crisis has provided companies with a lesson on inclusion, since the experience of lockdown has been quite different for certain employee groups – particularly impacting caregivers and people who do not have good surroundings for home-working. The current moment for work, workplace and workforce reset and redesign, and the way that technology can scale diversity, equity and inclusion efforts, create new opportunities for solutions. For example, the Forum has created a dedicated *Diversity, Equity and Inclusion 4.0 Toolkit*,²⁶ focused on technology which may be leveraged in support of an inclusive workplace.

PayPal: An inside-out approach prioritising employee health and safety

Employees were PayPal’s priority stakeholder group even prior to the global pandemic, so when the pandemic began the company knew that it was critical to take an inside-out approach, ensuring the health and safety of colleagues first. It was through this lens that PayPal introduced a number of benefits and offerings to support its global employee base, from a remote work policy and work flexibility to a crisis leave programme, counselling support, resources for parents, and global wellness days. Because employees feel supported and cared for, they have had a greater capacity to innovate and deliver essential services to customers during this time. PayPal continues to evolve with the needs of consumers and merchants through small business lending and grant programmes specifically for Black-owned small businesses, as well as through products such as QR Codes to meet the increasing demand for contactless in-store payment solutions. It is only through this inside-out approach that PayPal has been able to successfully deliver for two of its key constituents – employees and customers.

Antofagasta Minerals: Protecting workers and local communities

Antofagasta Minerals took swift action to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in its facilities and to support workers, contractors and local communities. The company introduced a system of contact tracing, preventive quarantines for high-risk populations and suspected cases, and a network of sanitary residences to spend quarantine without infecting families or communities. This was on top of measures such as a self-assessment of health conditions, distancing markers on aircraft, vehicles and canteen floors, installation of sanitizing gel dispensers and spot temperature checks. The company’s priority has been to maintain the health and safety of its workforce and to help build resilience in its host communities. Antofagasta has also taken other steps to minimize exposure risk and facilitate contact tracing. It implemented air and bus charters to reduce the need to use public transport and provided additional on-site housing for local workers who would otherwise return to nearby towns each day. Additionally, it has been working closely with government to support health, social and economic programmes, creating a dedicated \$6 million fund. Thanks to these efforts, Antofagasta kept the number of workers infected to a minimum – significantly below national rates of infection in Chile – while preserving operational continuity at each of its mines.

1.5 Embrace stakeholder capitalism

a Protect workers

Companies face difficult decisions on workforce numbers in response to the economic slump created by measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19, particularly as the pandemic persists. However, an overarching theme of the crisis response should be an equitable sharing of risks and rewards between workers, senior executives, companies and shareholders. Many companies are making significant efforts to minimize the need for lay-offs; for example, implementing measures such as mandatory personal time off, unpaid leave and furloughs, helped in some cases by government wage subsidies, and accompanying commitments to no redundancies with support for accelerated reskilling of employees. This partly reflects a recognition that lay-offs do not just have a lasting impact on those laid off, they also significantly affect those who remain and can have a devastating impact on communities. In addition, with increasing competition for talent, it can be difficult for companies to rehire needed talent and skills when the economy rebounds. One important support for companies to take a principled approach to these issues that would also serve the longer-term interests of the business during crises would be the development of a framework to accurately value

human capital as an asset – a theme explored in more depth in a recently published World Economic Forum white paper.²⁷

Some companies are working together to facilitate rapid bridges for employees through cross-industry, supply-demand matches, whether for temporary or permanent redeployment (see box). Such cross-industry redeployment of talent was already a consideration for companies in the context of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. With the COVID-19 crisis, there has been the opportunity to rapidly redeploy workers from industries facing reduced demand such as airlines and hospitality to sectors experiencing a surge in demand such as food retail and logistics.

Examples include an agreement between supermarket chain Aldi and fast food company McDonald's in Germany to transfer several thousand furloughed workers from McDonald's to work for Aldi during the crisis. Such initiatives could serve as a pilot for the kinds of redeployment that will be increasingly needed across multiple sectors, given the transformations that the Fourth Industrial Revolution, accelerated by the COVID-19 crisis, is creating.

Philips: Internal redeployment to boost production of critical care products

The COVID-19 pandemic brought an urgent need to increase production of critical care products, such as hospital ventilators and patient monitors. Philips responded by increasing production lines and introducing new shift patterns and 24-hour production. However, it quickly became apparent that it needed more skilled workers to meet demand. Other business units within Philips had the skills required but lower demand for them. Could these skills be redeployed quickly and remotely? After the cross-functional COVID response team identified the skills required, the HR team adapted tools to allow managers to raise requisitions for those skills specifically. A dedicated internal career site and team of recruiters were established and consistent communication from the CEO down promoted the opportunity, for which staff could voluntarily apply without their terms being changed. As a result, Philips was able to redeploy a significant number of colleagues, maximizing the use of its existing workforce. This enabled a four-fold increase in the production of ventilators and a steep ramp-up of other critical care products. From an employee engagement and motivation perspective, it was equally important to demonstrably pull together during a time of crisis and work as one company with one shared purpose. As well as adapting tools and processes to preserve this new workforce agility, the company is exploring other opportunities to increase flexibility. This includes when and where people work, while recognizing that the workforce is heterogenous and one approach will not work for everyone. It is currently finalizing a framework that will help all colleagues take advantage of flexible working in a way that works for them, for Philips and for customers.

Unilever: Labour sharing during the COVID-19 pandemic

As part of its Future of Work efforts, Unilever has been establishing a coalition of companies to build a common pool of employees, skills-certified and union-backed, who can be shared across industries. COVID-19 accelerated this work, as it had a significant impact on Unilever's business; some product lines encountered increased demand, others completely stopped. To support business continuity and employee engagement, Unilever embarked on a programme of redeploying and sharing workers. To date the company has redeployed 4,744 internal employees and 4,369 third-party employees (such as in-store execution, merchandisers and beauty advisors). One employee sharing scheme was in Argentina with General Motors (GM). Unilever's factory needed additional workforce to fulfil demand. The GM factory 10km away was not operating due to lockdown—employees were suspended and maintained their jobs until year-end under a

trade union agreement. Following a legal agreement with GM, so far 15 GM employees have been deployed in Unilever's operations. Unilever benefits from the fast learning curve of GM operators, who are experienced in factory processes with high health and safety standards. GM benefits from the opportunity for suspended employees. And both companies benefit from innovation via diversified approaches.

Unilever also recently signed a talent alliance partnership with Ctrip, China's biggest tourism company, whose business was heavily affected by the crisis. Unilever needed highly skilled digital workers and the travel industry, having pioneered e-commerce, has many employees skilled in digital. In 2 months, 18 people started their 6-month rotation in Unilever, supporting, e-commerce and sales operations, with plans to redeploy 20 more people in the near future. Unilever is now developing a framework for deploying alliances and employee sharing globally.

BOX 3 People + Work Connect

CHROs from Accenture, Verizon, ServiceNow and Lincoln Financial Group have worked with Accenture Technology to launch [People + Work Connect](#), a global B2B analytics-based platform that facilitates continued employment. The platform connects companies laying off or furloughing

workers with companies that have hiring needs. This allows the participating companies to look in aggregate for where there are roles or talent supply in particular geographies, allowing CHROs to use their expertise to make a difference for the economy and society.

b Reimagine lay-offs

To the extent that internal workforce supports and B2B talent transfers are exhausted, companies can help employees turn being laid off into a positive launchpad for their careers through financial support and "outskilling". For example, Airbnb, which saw its business collapse during the crisis, laid off 1,900 people, one-quarter of its workforce, in May, but those laid off received 14 weeks of pay,

equity stakes in the company, an Airbnb laptop, healthcare insurance for a year and assistance with their job search.²⁸ In addition, in keeping with the principles of stakeholder capitalism, a company's responsibility in such a situation should extend beyond its full-time employees to also encompass appropriate support to its contingent workers.

FutureFit AI: Supporting workers through lay-offs with AI-powered outskilling

FutureFit AI partners with companies forced to make lay-offs during the COVID-19 crisis to provide transitioning workers with AI-powered outskilling and successfully support them into their next role. FutureFit AI's platform acts as a 'Career GPS' and uses AI in order to:

- Locate the worker: Parsing their resume and profiling their interests and preferences;
- Recommend career 'destinations': Identifying possible career paths based on a combination of factors such as demand, automation, skill match, and preferences;
- Create a personalized learning and support roadmap: Recommending specific learning programmes, career support resources, and job matches;
- Connect workers to human guidance: Driving quality employment outcomes with individual success coaching.

Every transitioning worker supported through FutureFit AI's outskilling model also receives a personalized budget of thousands of dollars/euros, allowing them to identify the learning programmes and career support resources that they would most value during their transition. In contrast to more traditional outplacement services, which can often be one-size-fits-all in their support of laid-off workers, leveraging AI-powered outskilling during COVID-19 helped companies increase satisfaction of transitioning workers and improve quality employment outcomes.

c

Responsibly integrate gig workforce

Given COVID-19's impact on the global labour market environment,²⁹ hiring sentiments are currently in cautious mode as companies navigate the economic uncertainty brought on by the pandemic. Global executive surveys find that pivoting to a gig workforce strategy is a top selection when considering how to move the organization forward following an economic downturn.³⁰

A variety of industries experiencing spikes in demand (e.g., distribution and logistics as well as digital services) are likely to increase their use of contingent workers. Even before the pandemic, the share of gig workers in the US alone increased by 15%³¹ (6 million people) since the beginning of 2020 and gig work is expected to continue to grow.³²

For companies, the gig workforce serves as a potential interim solution for filling critical vacancies, closing temporary technical expertise gaps or relieving seasonal peak demands. For individuals, gig opportunities provide temporary employment and more flexible working terms for those who have been displaced or furloughed due to the pandemic as well as for technical experts who prefer to freelance, retirees who prefer to stay partially employed or caregivers who require flexible hours to earn a supplementary income.

Both "traditional" contingent work and the growing ecosystem of online platform work have the potential to provide an opportunity for "win-win" solutions between companies and individuals – but additional efforts are needed globally to ensure this is done in an ethical, fair and responsible manner.

For instance, Facebook's efforts to ensure a 'living wage' for its gig workers globally is an example of thinking beyond the traditional employment contract and emphasizing the importance of the welfare of all of its workers.³³

The rise of remote working offers opportunities for organizations keen to explore talent beyond traditional channels. The rising trend of network organizations that operate with flexibility and agility provide gig workers with an easier assimilation process into the organization. These types of organizations may also provide gig workers with fixed-term projects as new teams are established in accordance to the assignment requirements rather than a fixed hierarchy, placing all team members regardless of employment condition in a similar new environment with common goals.

The labour environment for the gig workforce will continue to evolve as this population grows, such as changes to labour regulations, taxation, social policies and employment conditions in the long term. For instance, in early 2020, the World Economic Forum facilitated the launch of *The Charter of Principles for Good Platform Work*³⁴ to collectively commit to key principles of good platform work in partnership with six leading platform companies. The principles cover a span of topics such as Diversity and Inclusion, Safety and Well-being, Flexibility and Fair Conditions, Reasonable Pay and Fees, Social Protection, Learning and Development, Voice and Participation, and Data Management, which aim to provide a fair and safe workplace for the gig workforce.



Conclusion: A call to action

This report has presented the experiences and lessons learned from the COVID-19 response of the World Economic Forum's broader future of work industry community, encompassing more than 60 CHROs of leading global employers as well as a the Forum's network of Preparing for the Future of Work Industry Accelerators,³⁵ comprising more than 200 senior HR leaders, education technology and learning providers, academia and government stakeholders across nine industries.

Under the overall umbrella of the Forum's 10-year *Reskilling Revolution* initiative, this report is intended as a call to action for companies and organizations globally to update and reset their future of work preparedness agendas for a more relevant and inclusive post-pandemic "new" future of work.

We firmly believe these are not just questions to be addressed after the COVID-19 crisis subsides. Forward-thinking CHROs are taking proactive action on reimagining how work, the workplace and the workforce will look in the medium to long term to begin making the necessary adjustments and investments today.

Members and partners of the World Economic Forum, as well as other global employers interested in learning more about joining the Forum's *Reskilling Revolution* initiative and network of Preparing for the Future of Work Industry Accelerators, are encouraged to contact us at: reskillingrevolution@weforum.org.

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COVID-19 Task Force of the Community of Chief Human Resources Officers

Ellyn Shook

Chief Leadership and Human Resources Officer,
Accenture

Gordana Landen

Chief Human Resources Officer, Adecco Group AG

Toby Switzer

Chief Human Capital Officer; Adviser to the Chairman,
Agility

Ana Maria Rabagliati

VP Human Resources, Antofagasta Minerals Plc

Agnieszka Yank

Chief Talent Officer, APCO Worldwide Inc.

Hamoon Ekhtiari

Chief Executive Officer, Audacious Futures

Sheri Bronstein

Chief Human Resources Officer, Bank of America

Dinesh Khanna

Senior Partner and Managing Director; Worldwide
Leader, Global Advantage Practice Area, Boston
Consulting Group

Kerry Dryburgh

Global Head, Human Resources, BP Plc

Claudia Valdivia

Vice-President, Talent, Breca

Ann M. Powell

Chief Human Resources Officer, Bristol-Myers Squibb
Company

Shannon Bagley

Senior Vice President, Human Resources, Centene
Corporation

Tracy Platt

Chief Human Resources Officer and Executive Vice
President, Cerner Corporation

Rich Jacquet

Chief People Officer, Coursera Inc.

Laurence Barthès

Executive Vice President, Chief People & Information
Officer, Dassault Systèmes SE

Stevan Rolls

Deputy Global Talent Leader, Deloitte

Steven Hatfield

Global Future of Work Leader, Deloitte

Anna Moulton

Group Human Resources Director, Dentsu Aegis
Network Ltd

Thomas Ogilvie

Board Member Human Resources, Corporate
Incubations, Deutsche Post DHL

Gizem Weggemans

Global Chief Human Resources Officer, Egon Zehnder

Helen Lloyd

Chief Human Resources Officer, Gulf International
Bank BSC (GIB)

Amy Ariano

Vice-President and Chief Human Resources Officer,
Gulfstream Aerospace Corporation

Apparao Venkata Varre

Chief Human Resources Officer, HCL Technologies Ltd

Sarah Payne

Chief Human Resources Officer, Heidrick & Struggles

Chris van Steenberg

Chief Human Resources Officer, HEINEKEN NV

Alan May

Chief People Officer, Hewlett Packard Enterprise

Elaine Arden

Group Managing Director; Global Head, Human
Resources, HSBC Holdings Plc

Ulrika Biesert

Chief HR Officer, Ingka Group (IKEA)

Mary Bilbrey

Global Chief Human Resources Officer, JLL

Stephen Parker

Chief Human Resources Officer, Kearney Inc.

Angelika Kambeck

Head of Group HR, Klöckner & Co SE

Alain Gendre

Senior Vice-President; Head, Group Human Resources, Kudelski Group

Michelle Nettles

Chief People and Culture Officer, ManpowerGroup

Pam Kimmet

Chief Human Resources Officer, Manulife

Tracy Faber

Executive Vice President, Chief Human Resources Officer, McKesson Corporation

Kate Bravery

Global Advisory Solutions and Insights Leader, Mercer (MMC)

Marcelo Modica

Chief Human Resources Officer, Mercer (MMC)

Béatrice Guillaume-Grabisch

Head, Group Human Resources and Business Services, Nestlé

Monique Carter

Executive Vice President and Head, People & Organisation, Novo Nordisk A/S

Louise Pentland

Chief Business Affairs & Legal Officer, PayPal

Anne-Gabrielle Heilbronner

Member of the Executive Board; Secretary-General, Publicis Groupe

Betty Ann Jarrett

Global Human Capital Leader, PwC

Carol Stubbings

Global Leader, People and Organizations Practice, PwC

Heather Ace

EVP, Human Resources, Qualcomm Incorporated

Joaquín Hormaechea

Director of Talent, Culture and Internal Communications, Repsol SA

Daniela Seabrook

Chief Human Resources Officer, Royal Philips

Dimitra Manis

EVP & Chief People Officer, S&P Global

Brent Hyder

President and Chief People Officer, Salesforce

Nabil Al Dabal

Vice-President, Human Resources, Saudi Aramco

Manuel-Angel Sanchez

Senior Vice-President, Human Resources, Europe, Schneider Electric Switzerland AG

Randy Clark

SVP & Chief HR Officer, Semptra Energy

Judith Wiese

Chief Human Resources Officer and Member of the Managing Board, Siemens AG

Tanuj Kapilashrami

Group Head, Human Resources, Standard Chartered

Lisa Chang

Senior Vice-President and Chief People Officer, The Coca-Cola Company

Anthony Portannese

Chief Human Resources Officer, The Depository Trust & Clearing Corporation (DTCC)

Mary Alice Vuicic

Chief People Officer, Thomson Reuters

Özgür Burak Akkol

Director, Human Resources, Koc Holdings

Stefan Seiler

Group Head Human Resources, UBS AG

Leena Nair

Chief Human Resources Officer, Unilever

Zoë Harte

Senior Vice President of Human Resources and Talent Innovation, Upwork

Christy Pambianchi

EVP, Chief Human Resource Officer, Verizon

Julie Gebauer

CEO, Global Human Capital and Benefits, Willis Towers Watson

Ravin Jesuthasan

Managing Director and Global Practice Leader, Willis Towers Watson

Saurabh Govil

President and Chief Human Resources Officer, Wipro

Ashley Goldsmith

Chief People Officer, Workday Inc.

Jordana Upton

Global Head, Human Resources, WorldQuant LLC

Sarah Kirby

Group Head, Organization Design and Human Resource Strategy, Zurich Insurance Group

Preparing for the Future of Work Industry Accelerators

* Co-chairs of
the Industry Task
Force

Advanced Manufacturing

Bright Machines
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Project Team

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World Economic Forum

Rigas Hadzilacos

Project Lead, Frontier Solutions, Shaping the Future of the New Economy and Society

Aidan Manktelow

Project Lead, Frontier Solutions, Shaping the Future of the New Economy and Society

Till Alexander Leopold

Head, Frontier Solutions, Shaping the Future of the New Economy and Society

Saadia Zahidi

Managing Director, Shaping the Future of the New Economy and Society

Mercer

Sara Tiew

Job Redesign Practice Leader and Public Sector Leader, Singapore, *Seconded to the World Economic Forum*

Claudia Ukonu

Communications Leader, APAC, *Seconded to the World Economic Forum*

Milan Taylor

Partner, Global Future of Work Leader

Kate Bravery

Partner, Global Advisory Solutions and Insights Leader

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Endnotes

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World Economic Forum
91–93 route de la Capite
CH-1223 Cologny/Geneva
Switzerland

Tel.: +41 (0) 22 869 1212
Fax: +41 (0) 22 786 2744
contact@weforum.org
www.weforum.org