



CONNECT



PRESENT



A COVID-19 Virtual Ideation Experience

Team Topic and Number: Distributed Work

Team sponsor/chapter (if applicable): New England Chapter

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The Post Pandemic Workforce

The recent Coronavirus pandemic has launched the largest remote work experiment in history, and will have significant and lasting impacts on people, place, and technology. Companies across the globe are cautiously navigating through the crisis while planning a safe return to the office for their employees. Our forecasts and recommendations primarily focus on what the future holds for distributed work, although we recognize that some of the content could be leveraged during the current transition phase. We see three key themes emerging from this experiment. It's also important to note that our focus is on the "non-essential" workforce as we understand that a portion of the workforce must work from a physical location. First, leaders will need to adapt to a more dynamic and fluid team working environment, which will have profound impacts on performance management. In addition, the connection to company culture and brand will be more important than ever before, with greater emphasis on experience and engagement. Lastly, the lines between the physical and virtual workplace

will begin to blur as companies strive to create a frictionless experience for their employees. Companies will fully embrace a work anywhere mentality, investing in physical and technological changes to attract, retain, and support their workforce. Personal privacy, data protection, and employee safety will move to the forefront as critical issues that need to be addressed.

A New Era of Leadership & Performance Management

Leadership behaviors were changing long before the pandemic. Command and control management had given way to coaching and support, with increasing emphasis on creating an environment where employees could do their best work. Those skill sets will be needed now more than ever, and leaders will need to develop new skills to become exceptional communicators leveraging a diverse style that can adapt to the personal needs and situations of their team. Establishing trust and transparency amongst the leader and team will be paramount to ensuring a high functioning team. Employers will need to arm leaders with the tools and resources necessary to manage a distributed workforce. This includes access to more readily available and on-demand surveys and tools to allow for continuous feedback loops. Leaders will be asked to navigate through the blurred lines of their team's personal and professional lives, seeking out new ways to create social connections. Leaders will leverage new productivity metrics and performance evaluation criteria.

An inclusive Culture & Brand Strategy

Maintaining connection to a company's culture and brand with an increasingly distributed workforce will be a growing challenge. Companies will need to find new ways to extend culture and the brand beyond the physical workplace. We see the rise and wide adoption of an Experience and Engagement executive in larger firms to curate programs charged with providing opportunities for employees to socialize and interact. Smaller firms may designate someone to take on this task as well. Regardless of the organizational structure, companies should find creative methods to bring the brand from the office into people's homes through branded messaging, custom backgrounds for collaboration technology, and providing branded merchandise. Nominating brand ambassadors throughout the organization to support these efforts should be considered. Focus on community oriented, structured events that promote teamwork and unity within the organization. Appoint Community Captains or Social Committees to host fun offerings such as Zoom bingo, virtual happy hours, and curated Slack channels. Utilize a diverse mix of media and formats for communicating to ensure employees have equal opportunity to participate, but also choose the experiences they connect most with. These experiences should be authentic to the company's brand and values in lieu of generic approaches. Particular attention should be placed on the new hire on-boarding experience and what is appropriate for on-site versus virtual interactions. A formal end-to-end engagement process should be established to ensure new hires are introduced to the company's mission, vision, and values. This can be achieved with pre-recorded videos and content and establishing face-to-face or virtual meet and greets with various leaders who can share their experiences.

Re-birth of the Workplace

The workplace as we know it will change forever. A shift toward more collaborative, activity-based, and maker spaces was already underway; the pandemic will kick this into overdrive...with caveats. Companies will need to convince their employees of the value of physical spaces and their purpose in the "new normal". The workplace as an amenity (WaaA) will become the new normal as employees

look to connect and socialize. Increased distributed/virtual work will only highlight the need for places employees and teams can come together. At the same time, employees will expect a truly frictionless work experience. Significant investments in technology infrastructure and collaboration tools will become the focus. Reliable connectivity at home and high-quality video sharing capabilities will be required, and expected, by employees. At the same time companies will need to balance privacy and data protection with ubiquitous technology and a highly distributed workforce. When coming into the office, employees will demand a higher level of cleaning and the best air quality. Operational staff should be more visible so that employees can see cleaning happening real time. Investments in PropTech will rise as companies look to measure the workplace performance and make adjustments as necessary. Highly flexible spaces with furniture that can be easily cleaned will replace fixed desks and hard wall conference rooms. The increased burden of providing a truly “flawless” workplace coupled with the uncertainty around future demand will give way to company’s allocating a greater portion of their real estate to shared spaces with shorter term commitments. This will allow more flexibility over the size of their portfolio and “outsource” the responsibility of the upkeep of the environment. Co-working spaces will fill this gap by providing meticulous safety protocols and a concierge level of services that companies may not have the funding to implement on their own.

In conclusion, distributed work is here to stay and will become a critical aspect of employer’s ability to attract, retain, and support their workforce. New and dynamic leadership behaviors will become critical to success, and re-defined productivity measures will ensure workers can be measured and assessed equitably. Company culture and brand will no longer be a largely physical experience. Home, workplace, and virtual interaction with the company brand will become more fluid and interactive. Workplaces will undergo a rapid adaptation to support social connectivity and unique experiences that cannot be accomplished virtually.