Evolution or revolution?
Re-imagining remote work
Workforce Transformation: Remote Work

With virtual work becoming ubiquitous, the coronavirus has been a catalyst for change in the way we work. And with recovery looking more like a marathon than a sprint, organizations now need to do more than simply enable remote work.

In our conversations with clients around the world, it’s clear a remote workforce is likely to remain part of the normal operating rhythm. A recent Korn Ferry Rewards survey found 75% of organizations said they will operate more virtually after COVID.¹ And some aspects have worked surprisingly well – when we spoke with 30 senior leaders in global financial services firms in September, they said working from home has led to increased productivity and output.

But there have also been downsides. Some organizations have seen employee engagement diminish, working parents are under intense pressure to work around remote schooling, and the loss of casual workplace interactions has reduced opportunities to share ideas or information.

So far, this global work experiment has been a reactive response to the health pressures of a pandemic. In the process, it’s forced many people to challenge the assumptions about how and where work gets done.

Now’s the time to assess what’s working, solve emerging challenges, and proactively plan for the future – putting structures in place alongside a change management strategy. With more conscious design, your remote work model can be more effective – for your organization and your people.

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¹Korn Ferry global rewards survey, June 2020
At the crossroads of work

Many organizations we’ve spoken to say remote work has opened up access to new talent pools, along with opportunities to re-think their physical footprint and associated costs.

They now realise how much employees value the flexibility to work from home, along with a greater sense of control over their time. Less time commuting or in meetings allows more time for focus on meaningful tasks. Of the 30 financial services leaders we spoke with, 40% said working from home allows for more total hours worked, while half said it provides a level of flexibility not found in a typical workday.

However, this increased output comes at a cost: the number one concern amongst those respondents is burnout. And the major driver of stress is having children at home. It’s also been harder for many people to use their vacation time and take time off from the intensity of their workload.

And for workers who do still need to be onsite, there are growing feelings of inequity. There is a tension between remote-able work and remote-able talent: not everyone who can work from home wants to, while some people whose roles demand physical presence know they’d thrive in a remote environment.
Challenging underlying assumptions

Your organization’s remote work needs to address the tension between remote-able work and remote-able talent, by resolving these six fundamental questions:

01 Who can work remotely – and who wants to?

People with different psychological ‘personas’ will have widely varying preferences and abilities to work from anywhere.

For example, Korn Ferry research based on millions of assessment data points suggests those who are self-directed, have a strong tolerance for ambiguity. They have a low need for interaction with peers or managers, and will find it easier to adapt to working remotely.

02 What jobs are truly remote-able?

One thing we have learned during this experiment is that more jobs are ‘remote-able’ than we ever thought possible. Entire call centres have dispersed their customer service operators, medical practitioners can diagnose remotely, engineers can assess building requirements via video call, and sales professionals are doing deals via Zoom.

You can follow a methodical process to make these decisions, assessing criteria such as the value it adds if performed remotely, local regulatory, safety or security requirements, the complexity of the role, and access to technology.
03 How can you manage work-life balance – and prevent burnout?

It’s time to re-think some long-held assumptions about when work should be done.

One of the biggest levers your organization can pull is a shift from synchronous to asynchronous work. Instead of insisting work takes place during meetings where everyone is contributing simultaneously, enable communication channels and collaborative document editing that effectively allow work to happen when it suits the individual. This is especially important for teams working across time-zones. And it creates time for important work – rather than back to back Zoom calls that could have been a Slack thread. Thinking differently about work scheduling, including an unspoken need amongst some managers to ‘see’ everyone in their team, can help you minimize cognitive overload.

04 What should the work environment look like?

Organizations may be re-thinking the concept of the traditional centralized office. But they also need to consider whether every remote worker has a domestic space that is optimised for the job. These are practical factors which also affect whether someone can feasibly work remotely – and while you may find opportunities to reduce real estate costs, remote work can mean significant expenditure on supporting technologies. You may also want to introduce new ways to bring people together physically, such as team retreats.

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2 Reimagining the Urban Office, Peter Bacevice, John Mack, Pantea Tehrani, and Mat Triebner, Harvard Business Review August 14, 2020
3 Is your organization ready for permanent WFH? Maxim Sytch and Lindied L. Greer, Harvard Business Review August 18, 2020
How can you maintain purpose and engagement?

It’s one thing to support employees to get their work done, and another to inspire their commitment and willingness to continue to put in extra effort. This is where leaders who have the emotional intelligence to connect with people on different channels become essential.

One thing we’re seeing is greater visibility between senior leaders and the most junior members of the team. Organizations are flatter; it’s easier to get everyone together on a Zoom call to hear from the CEO than get everyone into the CEO’s office. But the ad hoc interactions with senior staff that shape a graduate’s career are less likely to happen. Make career development and mentoring programs a conscious part of remote workforce design.

How can you manage vital issues like collaboration and performance?

Co-ordinating project work remotely is inevitably challenging. In reality, few people are part of just one team; projects have complex interdependencies. One option is to intentionally assign interdependent projects to the same team, and also ensure employees on a particular task are all remote, or all in person.

The way you measure effectiveness is also likely to change, and it’s important to make all performance metrics and rewards clear and transparent.
Applying work preference personas

Understanding individual work styles can help leaders manage their talent with great empathy. For example, let’s say you have a marketing manager who is a “Connector” – she may tend to lean towards group activity, and inspires ideas and direction through her relationships.

Now her role has been made remote under a flexible work arrangement. She will appreciate having clear direction on how to apply new behaviours, and welcome some encouragement. And she may prefer learning with others through familiar, structured learning experiences.
Features of work preference personas
Looking to transform your workforce?
Working preferences matter

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning with others</th>
<th>Level of guidance required</th>
<th>Variety</th>
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<tr>
<td>Type of preparation for, and degree of involvement with coaches, cohort peers, managers, and others.</td>
<td>Degree of support, direction, and &quot;push&quot; provided to ensure goal achievement.</td>
<td>Degree of consistency vs variability</td>
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**Personas**

01 Visionary
02 Architect
03 Facilitator
04 Explorer
05 Advocate
06 Implementor
07 Connector
08 Stabilizer

**Traits**

- **Presence:**
  - High: More group activity
  - Low: More independent activities

- **Striving:**
  - High: More self-directed
  - Low: More guidance and direction

- **Agility:**
  - Exploration and ambiguity
  - Structured with consistency
New models for remote work

Many organizations tell us they are considering a ‘hybrid’ model, where no one is likely to work five days a week onsite. How you manage these new models for remote work still needs to be consciously thought out if you are to inspire performance and retain talent over the long term.

This will depend on the nature of your work, your people, and your strategy. There is no one-size-fits-all approach, but we are seeing five distinctive models emerging.

Fluid hub and spoke

Clusters of talent in key cities around a single headquarter, with some flexibility to work on- and offsite. You will need to set the ‘rules of engagement’ for who works where at any given time.

Periodic culture infusions

Most people work remotely, but come together to socialize and share purpose. It’s important to make that onsite time feel worthwhile.
Onsite at minimum

Only those workers who must be physically present to perform tasks or meet customers work onsite. For this model to work, you need to make it feel ‘fair’ for everyone.

Team-driven

Each working team is empowered to make decisions about their best onsite or remote collaboration model. Give those teams guidelines so they make rational and inclusive decisions.

Remote-only

No real onsite presence, with all collaboration done virtually. This can make it hard to maintain engagement over the long-term. You will need a clearly documented approach to work and behavior expectations, such as GitLab’s Remote Manifesto.4

4GitLab’s guide to all-remote, GitLab
Remote work and remote-able people are two different things. So it’s critical to answer two questions before you start making choices: what do you hope remote work will help you achieve, and how will you measure that success?

For example, you may want to build a more positive employer brand to retain more talent, optimize property costs, or have access to a wider pool of diverse talent.

With this insight, you can set up a sustainable model for remote work going forward – understanding what jobs are remote-able, and which people are.

Korn Ferry can help you assess talent to understand their deep-rooted preferences – such as a need for a high degree of group involvement, guidance or structure. As one executive told us, his people fall into two camps: “those who can motivate themselves and those I have to call every hour.”

We can also share decades of deep insight into job roles to support smart remote work decisions. You may need to break some roles apart, and re-make them as a set of tasks and competencies that can be performed virtually. There may also be opportunities to accelerate the digitization and automation of some tasks – such as claims processing, bookkeeping or risk management.
This global working from home experiment has been thrust upon us, with little time to think carefully about the behavioural and operational changes required. But to embed any model more effectively, it’s important to establish a roadmap for implementation.

Korn Ferry has identified nine levers of remote work, where critical changes may need to be made to enable your chosen model. Once these are mapped out, you can take your organization on the change journey - supporting the behavioural shifts needed to make your new remote work model work more effectively.

For multinational organizations, it’s also important to acknowledge the cultural differences in employee preferences for remote or in-office working, along with different local regulatory requirements.

### Nine levers of remote work

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<th>Lever</th>
<th>Description</th>
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| 01    | Management processes & systems  
Key management planning and measurement processes that influence people and support performance targets to be aligned with remote work |  
02 | Rewards & Recognition  
The way behavior, capability and results are reinforced to meet requirements of remote work |
| 03 | Performance Management  
Management of performance of remote workers to ensure direction, focus and efficiency of remote work |
| 04 | Work Process and Business Systems  
Systems and processes in place with resources deployed in the right sequence of activities to enable remote work |
| 05 | Values and Culture  
How systems and processes merge to create behaviors and organizational norms that support remote work within the strategy |
| 06 | Leadership  
Leadership abilities that create a compelling vision to mobilize the parts of the Organization in a remote work environment |
| 07 | Individual and Team Competence  
Necessary capabilities of people needed for remote work to support the mission and realize the strategy |
| 08 | Organization, Team & Job Design  
The design of structures and accountabilities organized to support strategy and work processes for remote work |
| 09 | Engagement  
Level of engagement necessary to ensure motivation of remote workers at achieve discretionary effort |
Finally, having a good model and the right talent management practices will mean nothing unless people understand and embrace the change. Korn Ferry works with organizations to create innovative change management initiatives. Leveraging techniques such as storytelling and Organizational Network Analysis, we can help you ensure new ways of working show up in positive behaviors across the organization.

These tools can help you work through the difficult questions that emerge as you assess the right working model to take forward in your organization, and plan your resources and investment around it.

All of us have already learned so much about what does and doesn’t work with remote working: now is the time to make it work more effectively for our organizations, and our people.

Learn more about the future of work. Read:

Choose your own future
About Korn Ferry

Korn Ferry is the preeminent global people and organizational consulting firm. We work with organisations to design their organisational structures, roles, and responsibilities. We help them hire the right people and advise them on how to reward, develop, and motivate their workforce. And, we help professionals navigate and advance their careers.

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