The COVID-19 crisis of 2020 is already writing itself into history books as a defining moment in modern business, comparable to the 1914 assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand and the subsequent outbreak of World War I. The current situation is unprecedented, with businesses underprepared, and the future plans of many are uncertain.

We conducted a survey to try and understand what challenges businesses are facing as a result of COVID-19. The survey results revealed that businesses are adapting to remote work, laying off or furloughing workers, and redesigning workplaces to ensure safety and productivity.

As is now known, a significant impact of COVID-19 on business was the shift to remote work. In our survey, and drastically altered their planning. Whether it's layoffs, a shift to remote, or redesigning workplaces, this new standard has become a new reality for many businesses.

Challenges of remote hiring

Frozen hiring completely

Asynchronous operations

Remote work

Consulting/Business Services

IT/Technology

Healthcare

Other

Impact of hiring

Adapting as we have gave us knowledge to be more personnel driven. It's going to look very different without a doubt … Yes, we are definitely changing. But that's just one side of the same coin. The other side is that more companies are realizing that remote work is the new standard.

The major takeaways from our survey results include the fact that many companies are planning to keep remote work going forward, the response was comprehensive, with all listed options included. A shift to remote was the largest category, with 56.5% of respondents indicating a shift to remote as a result of COVID-19. Closely following are layoffs (44.9%) and a reduction in workforce (59.3%).

Respondents who chose to layoff or furlough workers included IT/Technology (36.7%), Healthcare (32.6%), and Consulting/Business Services (26.1%). Many people will adapt more wellness programs for their remote workforce.

As people start to go back to the office, we're seeing a shift in how companies are thinking about remote work. It's not just about saving money anymore, but about creating a more flexible workplace for employees. It's also about improving productivity and increasing job satisfaction.

Many companies are now considering a more permanent shift to remote work. This is especially true for companies in industries like IT, consulting, and healthcare, where remote work is already a common practice. However, some industries like retail and manufacturing may struggle to make the transition to remote work.

In conclusion, COVID-19 has had a significant impact on businesses worldwide. The shift to remote work is here to stay, and companies must adapt to this new reality. This includes creating a more flexible and inclusive workplace culture, improving remote work policies, and investing in technology to support remote work.

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The impact of COVID

Challenges of remote work

Remote work

A new economy

Benefits of remote work

Future of remote work

Demand for remote work

The reasons for remote work
When asked what they think will be significant challenges in a remote workflow without disruption, more than two thirds (68%) of respondents highlighted individual productivity. This places a greater value on soft skills around adaptability and resilience. In fact, our respondents highlighted these soft skills when asked about what they think will be most challenging aspects when moving to remote. In a follow-up question, we asked about the top focal points to ensure employee engagement. About a third (33.7%) said they plan regular all-hands from top management up at night. Individual employees and managers, on the other hand, are more concerned about anxiety and they therefore prioritize tech adoption in the new world of work.

Some of the unique challenges facing remote hiring are not immediately obvious. "The world of work will be focusing on new technology to make work easier and more effective, especially virtual meeting apps," a respondent wrote. "Adaptability and resilience is critical to survival, and that requires technology in all aspects of the business, as well as a culture of creativity, innovation, and continuous improvement." These sentiments have been echoed across many business leaders, but a key question remains: what technologies should companies prioritize in their digitization efforts? It's striking that given the overall worries about working remotely, only 45.5% of respondents said they plan to introduce or increase technology adoption. The majority (54.5%) expect there will be minimal disruption to productivity and team engagement. If the past few months have taught us anything, it's that technology can enable that to happen. Perhaps that's a permanent or never-changing change -- or maybe businesses will continue to make do with the technology they have.

When asked about what they think will be the three most challenging aspects to hiring after the crisis passes, respondents gave a variety of answers. "Hiring candidates that have never worked remotely is the biggest concern," one respondent wrote. In a survey organized by the recruiting platform Workable, respondents were asked to identify the number of business leaders who plan to hire in different timeframes. Of business leaders who plan to hire in the coming months, 40.0% plan to do so within 1-2 years, while 22.8% plan to do so in 4-6 months. As for the top focal points to ensure employee engagement, 54.7% of respondents highlighted individual productivity, followed by by team collaboration and logistics (50.4%) and remote-first environment (45.5%). When asked about what they think will be significant challenges in a remote workflow without disruption, more than two thirds (68%) of respondents highlighted individual productivity.

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In terms of remote hiring, perhaps the lack of in-person interaction is the biggest challenge. "Remote hires will be more challenging than ever," one respondent wrote. "It will not be easy to identify the right people to fill those much-needed roles is crucial to business success and will be more challenging than ever." When asked about what they think will be the three most challenging aspects to hiring after the crisis passes, respondents gave a variety of answers. "Hiring candidates that have never worked remotely is the biggest concern," one respondent wrote. In a survey organized by the recruiting platform Workable, respondents were asked to identify the number of business leaders who plan to hire in different timeframes. Of business leaders who plan to hire in the coming months, 40.0% plan to do so within 1-2 years, while 22.8% plan to do so in 4-6 months. As for the top focal points to ensure employee engagement, 54.7% of respondents highlighted individual productivity, followed by by team collaboration and logistics (50.4%) and remote-first environment (45.5%). When asked about what they think will be significant challenges in a remote workflow without disruption, more than two thirds (68%) of respondents highlighted individual productivity.

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CHAPTER 8

Conclusion

“I have been amazed at how well our team have adapted to working from home. We have all acknowledged that we miss the team interaction, but I really feel we’ve got to know each other more, we’ve had daily calls since the lockdown, which has helped our split-site company. I think it will take time to accept the new normal, but we will get there... I hope that we take all the learnings we’ve acquired during this lockdown and bring these forward. Our air is clearer, our seas are cleaner, we recognise the importance of being connected after being so isolated for so long, we appreciate the small exercise time we’ve had outdoors. The world will be different, but so much potential to be better too.”

Our initial goal in the survey was to identify when businesses thought they might start to see trends of “normal” after COVID-19. That part of the survey, however, resulted in the most inconclusive findings. What we learned, instead, is that remote work is clearly the way forward, digitization of processes is the way to enable that shift, and employee engagement is – understandably – a mounting concern. Also, most of our respondents either have the tech tools to operate in a remote world of work, or are in the process of getting them. More needs to be done to support the new work environment. The basic human need of work has not changed; connectedness is the key to happiness, for instance. Old line managers, in particular, have used informal communications and personal interaction to keep teams connected and engaged.

Finally, the emphasis on the solutions of more meetings, more “coffee dates”, and all-hands to maintain employee engagement in a virtual work world as opposed to new trainings for a new world echoes Einstein’s famous quote: “We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them.” The remote world of work is here to stay, and there’s a clear willingness to adapt to that new world – at least in the adoption of new technology. But in order to really succeed in this new model of work, we need to shift from the traditional hierarchical structures, and start thinking about different silos and positions so we continue to set ourselves for success. In short: the new world of work requires a new way of thinking.

Firmographics

The survey was sent out to HR professionals, talent acquisition professionals, and business leaders in early June 2020. A total of 366 around the world completed the 30-question survey, representing a broad cross section of company sizes, industries, regions, functions, and job levels.

The majority of respondents were from companies in the 100-499 employee range, in IT/Technology, operating in the United States or Canada, in HR, and at the manager/director level.

Approximately how many full-time employees does your business employ?

Which of the following best describes the main industry of your business?

Which region or regions does your business operate in?

Which best describes the primary function of the department in which you work?

Which of the following best describes your current job level?

“This time shall pass. Social distancing will end. We will all be back to being regular humans again.”