The Hybrid Workforce and Its Impact On Employee Benefits

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

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Current HR Challenges

[HRD's 2020 People Leaders report](#) asked 200 HR leaders about their businesses, their concerns and challenges going into 2021, and how they view the rise of the hybrid workforce.

It's no surprise leaders say their biggest concerns are about COVID-19 and uncertainty. In most instances, uncertainty only lasts a few weeks or a month at most. Recent examples include how 9/11 impacted workplace safety and business travel policies, or how the Great Recession of 2008 redefined how companies measure financial stability. However, nothing comes close to COVID-19 in terms of disruption to every single employee across the globe. When 2020 Open Enrollment was planned, most strategies were finalized before the pandemic and had to quickly be adjusted. No wonder last year was challenging. Based on this HRD survey, it could still be bumpy.

Priorities have also shifted dramatically. Combating medical trend, educating employees on their benefits, beating client attrition…all have fallen down the priority list. Instead, the top six concerns were 100% about shielding employees from the impacts of the pandemic.

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CH. 1 # What is a hybrid workforce?

A hybrid workforce includes some employees working at home and others going into an office. After COVID-19, organizations looked at the benefits to productivity, output, and employee morale. Based on the positive results on all three of these categories, many companies began adopting an official corporate policy of a hybrid workforce.

The challenging part of this model is that it blurs the lines between working at the office and at home. A true hybrid workforce includes these three categories of workers:

**100% in office**   **100% remote**   **And 100% flexible**

A flexible worker is an employee who is expected in the office for a few days a week (or every other week), and allowed to work from home the other days. Theoretically, this allows for increased productivity and continued happiness of employees while keeping the in-person engagement that sparks creativity and fosters career advancement.

From our informal poll with hundreds of HR leaders in April 2021, we found that companies are planning:
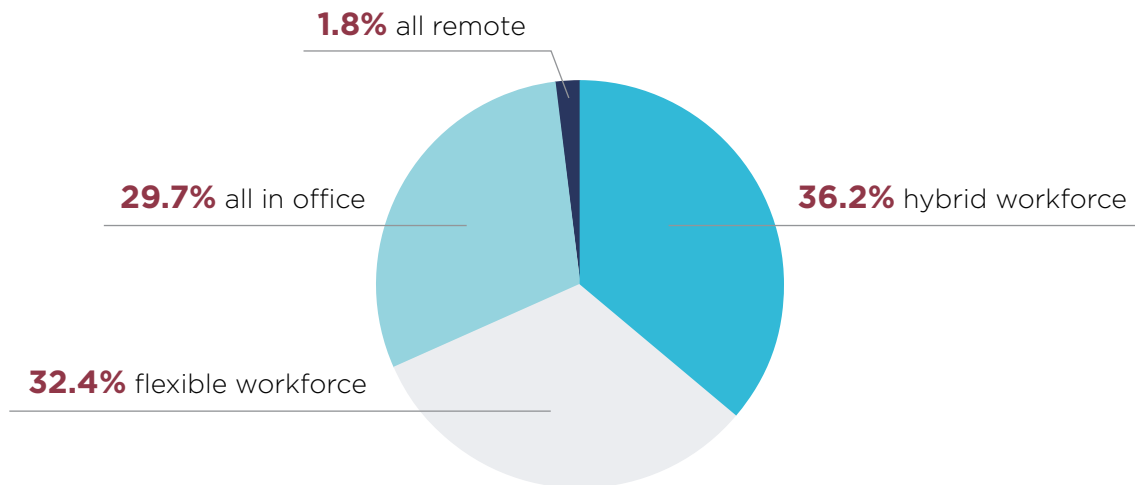
1.8% all remote

29.7% all in office

36.2% hybrid workforce

32.4% flexible workforce

Some studies have shown the world's adoption of technology **jumped forward five years** during the first eight weeks of COVID-19.
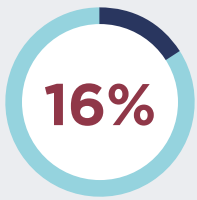
16%

of respondents believe technology advancements to be the biggest opportunity behind megatrends.

A current megatrend is **Zoom fatigue.**

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Some studies have shown the world's adoption of technology jumped forward five years during the first eight weeks of COVID-19 and has increased since then. Video meetings and chats (like Teams or Slack) were easy adoptions that quickly spread, but since then the rise of technology has continued, from social distancing wearables, productivity monitoring, virtual doctor visits, and more. It's no surprise 16% believe technology advancements to be the biggest opportunity behind megatrends…the report mentioned this usually receives 5% of the vote in previous years. In case you are wondering, megatrends cause a sudden interest from the global population because of its impact in a few key categories: health impact, climate impact, population growth, urbanization, and digitalization. A current megatrend is Zoom fatigue and the implementation of return to work policies.

Being nimble is now the norm and employees have shown they are quick to adjust and adopt. However, this is not just about communication vehicles, it's about shifting work from humans to computers in a more sophisticated way. Whether that's leveraging AI-enabled chatbots, investing in workflow automation, or using datasets to determine which employees are ready for advancement. With a hybrid workforce, where your employee's work location is no longer the office and schedules are often more flexible, technology is more critical to get our jobs done. Technology can help educate and enroll employees in benefits, increase engagement, protect your culture and more.

CH. 2 # Advantages and disadvantages of the hybrid workforce

The hybrid workforce is the best of both worlds. Studies show in-person workers benefit from direct, spontaneous interactions with co-workers or leaders. While many organizations have tried to preserve these interactions online with "meet and greet" sessions, some employees don't feel like they are as good as their traditional in-person experiences. During an all-video meeting, there is usually a little bit of interaction at the beginning, instant chat messages between participants during, but a hard stop where everyone jumps off the meeting. In person, it was easier for an employee to have a quick sidebar with other employees while walking out of the meeting to share ideas or perspectives.

On the other hand, purely virtual meetings levelled the playing field for previously 100% remote workers. Rather than being a voice on the speakerphone in front of those that attended in person, everyone suddenly was at the same level. This made it easier for a remote worker to be heard and recognized.

The flexible worker gets the benefits of both: leaders recognize video meetings have fostered a more inclusive environment. Many offices are installing "zoom rooms" to maintain this level of interaction. But having the opportunity to stop by someone's office on their in-office days (assuming it's an in-person day for the other employee) will allow for the spontaneous interactions that result in new ideas.

But here is a challenge: if you don't know where employees are going to be on a given day, how does HR communicate and influence them? For example, it's difficult to know when to schedule an in-person town hall, when managers have informal agreements with their employees to temporarily work from another location. It will take effort to navigate this new workforce landscape.

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CH. 3 ## Risks of a hybrid workforce

This all sounds challenging and exciting at the same time, but there are some risks for employers that are worthy of serious consideration.

In a survey of Microsoft employees, they found 40% are considering finding a new employer. The job market is rebounding, and companies are hiring. In April 2021, nearly a million new jobs were created and 350,000 returned to work. The hybrid worker model is meant to retain and attract workers now that we all have a revised mindset of what it means to work for an employer.

Another trend is location. 43% of workers are considering moving due to the ability to work remotely. While not all positions are suited for 100% remote work, this retains the high productivity of remote work, increases employee retention, but makes it a huge challenge to engage these distributed remote workers.

Leaders need to be proactive, especially when managing a hybrid workforce. It's easy to get out of touch with employees when you have fewer impromptu meetings and don't have the same opportunities to pick up on visual cues. In contrast to the 61% of Microsoft leaders who say they are thriving now, Gen Z, frontline workers, and those new to their careers reported struggling the most over the past year. And workers feel the disconnect. Thirty-seven percent of the global workforce says their companies are asking too much of them at a time like this.
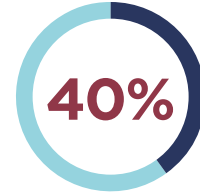
40%

of surveyed Microsoft employees are considering finding a new employer.
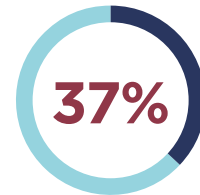
37%

of the global workforce says their companies are asking too much of them at a time like this.

CH. 4   # Strategies for a smoother hybrid benefits year

Having a hybrid workforce takes a little extra planning and new communication ideas to cover both your workforce that is in the office and at home.

Survey for the future of work

Begin by finding out what your employees think of the different work options (in office, remote only, and flexible). Even if you have a "return to work" plan underway or baked and ready to go…you still need to survey employees on their vision for the "future of work" and gather feedback on your own internal future of work plans. This is not a check in on how employees are doing. Instead the focus is on whether employees feel like they will be empowered or have feelings of inclusiveness in the future.

If possible, include separate paths based on worker classification. Does the remote worker feel like the future will be a return to pre-pandemic routines where it was difficult for them to engage? Are flexible workers worried about how to balance the in-office and out-of-office expectations?

One interesting tactic is to include questions that could infer some of your programs, without directly asking if they plan to use a specific program or benefit you plan to roll out. For example, "Are you or your family using ABC Company's benefits to help with exhaustion, feelings of isolation, or balancing work/life priorities?" can help you measure whether employees are familiar with your EAP or mental wellness programs. Or "Is it difficult for you and your family to maintain regular exercise or a balanced diet?" could help validate the need for a weight management or exercise program.

Most importantly, keep this truly anonymous – and be clear about that – so you gather and can react to honest employee feedback.

Deliver engaging and fresh content

When reaching out to employees, make sure you are giving them the latest information. Content should be fresh, relatable, include topics employees want to hear about (COVID-19, preventive care) and personalized, when possible. Technology can be a big help when figuring out how to target your different employee segments.

Best practices to educate and communicate with a hybrid workforce

It's important to communicate with employees before, during, and after open enrollment. There's always something to talk about, whether it's a new decision support tool for open enrollment or a chronic condition management program like diabetes.

1 Use tools to engage employees with your message. Some examples are survey/pulse tools, benefits engagement, decision support, chat bots, healthcare transparency, and wellness gamification tools.

2 Collect all your benefits information into one place. A benefits portal makes it easy to stay up to date with what your company has to offer and to find key information about plans, providers, and programs. Keep your intranet up to date so it reflects the content that is top of mind for your employees. See tips to improve your HR Portal.

3 Make it easy for employees to find help. Having answers readily available gives your employees the confidence to choose and use their benefits. Whether it is a calendar tool to schedule a chat with your HR team, robust frequently asked questions (FAQs) or a chatbot, clearly communicate the different forms of communication available for employees to get answers.

4 Execute a quality benefits fair. Develop a fun and interactive benefits fair. With a hybrid workforce, you could include some in-person sessions but record them so your remote employees can watch on-demand.

5 Hold a hybrid open enrollment meeting. Create an extensive agenda and let employees pick and choose which sessions to attend. Record sessions for remote employees or who are unable to attend live. Looking for more participation? You can drive more interaction with prizes, breakout sessions, and by tracking attendance to be entered into a raffle.

Tango Decision Assist™ Standard is key to a successful open enrollment. The tool is FREE and

- guides employees to find the right plan for their needs at the lowest cost.
- provides healthcare cost estimates based on "people like me".
- teaches about healthcare terms and concepts like HSA/FSA, out of pocket, and deductible.
- shows the math behind a recommendation including tax savings.

Tangohealth

About Tango Health
Tango Health helps you deliver a better benefits experience. Whether we're providing decision support software or helping employees see the impact HSAs can have on their retirement, we're here to make choosing (and providing) benefits easier. See how our free Tango Decision Assist Standard software can empower employees choose, use, and understand their benefits.