

worktango

A NEW FUTURE OF WORK

9 Workplace Shifts Impacting
Your Employee Experience



Workplace Shifts

That has certainly been true for nearly everyone across the globe, as the COVID-19 crisis upended life as we knew it. Yet even before the health crisis, we were headed for a revolution of our own - an Employee Experience Revolution.

Since March 2020, the world has changed more dramatically than we could have imagined. So we're here with a guide to the **9 key workplace shifts impacting your employee experience** since the start of 2020, and how to address them.



“There are decades where nothing happens; and there are weeks where decades happen.”

– VLADIMIR LENIN



1 More remote work, less commuting

According to research firm Global Workplace Analytics, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic approximately **3.6%** of the American workforce worked remotely at least half the time.¹

By the end of 2021, that number is predicted to jump to 25-30%.¹

While the pandemic won't last forever, the increase in remote work will. Because, as it turns out, people really like working remotely. In a pre-COVID-19 survey of 3,500 remote employees, **98%** of people wanted to continue working remotely for the rest of their careers.²

Along with remote work comes new challenges. Chief among them? **Communication issues.**

The good news is that when communication challenges are addressed head on, the benefits of remote work greatly outweigh the costs.

1. <https://globalworkplaceanalytics.com/telecommuting-statistics>

2. <https://lp.buffer.com/state-of-remote-work-2020>

BENEFITS OF REMOTE WORK



HIGHER LEVELS
OF AUTONOMY



LESS TIME SPENT
COMMUTING



OPPORTUNITY TO
WORK WITH A DIVERSE,
SOMETIMES INTERNATIONAL
SET OF COLLEAGUES

TIPS

Short-term

Do a remote work pulse survey. Especially during rapid change, increasing the speed and frequency of employee feedback can help you spot patterns. Send a short, simple survey on a biweekly basis to get a read on your employee experience in real time. This may also help you identify which employees should return to the office first, when your team is ready to go back part- or full-time. Good news: WorkTango's Surveys & Insights solution makes sending pulse surveys the work of a few clicks. Results are instant, and reports are easy to read.

Long-term

Invest in technology that enhances remote work. Surprisingly, communication is more of a problem for remote employees on office-based teams than it is for 100% remote teams. Why? Problems arise when communication tools that work well in an office setting aren't adapted for remote work. The solution? Make sure everyone is communicating with the same tech in the same channels.

2

A need for greater flexibility

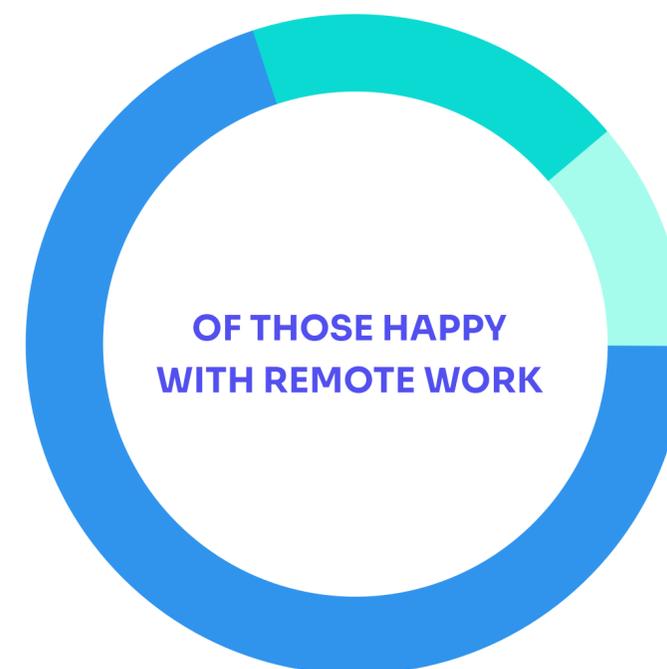
If remote work is so great, should we just burn it all down and call it a day? Not quite.

In a study by Buffer, **70%** of people were happy with the amount of time they spent working remotely. **19%** wanted to work remotely more often, and only **11%** wanted to work remotely less often.³

These nuances are important to point out. Because what's best about remote work isn't always the "remote" part - it's having the **flexibility to decide** when, where, and how to get your work done.

The conditions that set each employee up for success vary dramatically, especially in a post-pandemic world. The key here is **customization**. Organizations that offer the flexibility to customize work hours, location, and more are increasingly the ones that take advantage of their employees' individual strengths - and will succeed in the new age of work.

³ <https://lp.buffer.com/state-of-remote-work-2020>



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TIPS

Short-term

Choose your non-negotiables. Leadership and people managers should take time to nail down what really matters for their teams. Does everyone need to be online at certain hours? Which meetings are necessary? How about dress code? Take time early to define what counts, and communicate it to your employees. With the house rules in order, you're free to be flexible with the rest.

Long-term

Create clear, company-wide boundaries around flexibility. If the upside of flexibility is freedom, the downside is ambiguity. Unclear expectations around when, where, and what an employee is working on can cause stress for everyone involved.

Set standards for communication and expectations at the company level. (Plus, consider updating your old remote work agreements to reflect these new standards.)

3

Fewer meetings & emails, more video & chat

Disruption has a way of revealing what's essential.

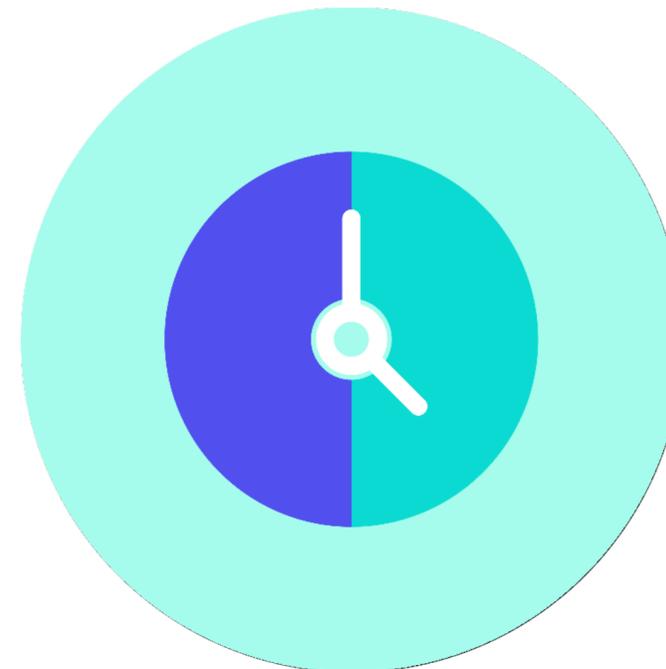
Although the pandemic initially resulted in longer, more complicated work weeks, it may ultimately help us trim the fat from our workdays.

Meeting fatigue has been a growing problem in the corporate world for decades. The Science and Fiction of Meetings estimates the average employee spends **6 hours/week** in meetings, while senior managers spend up to **23 hours/week**.⁴

Some meetings are necessary for solving problems collaboratively. **But when employees perceive that meetings are ineffective, they become stressed, dissatisfied with their jobs and more predisposed to leave.**

As the pandemic dust settles, it's glaringly obvious which meetings and emails no longer serve the way we're working. Thriving organizations are turning, instead, to messaging and video chat applications for **real-time communication** as we adapt to this increasingly flexible new style of work.

HOURS SPENT IN MEETINGS PER WEEK



6
AVERAGE
EMPLOYEE

23
SENIOR
MANAGERS

4. <https://orgscience.uncc.edu/sites/orgscience.uncc.edu/files/media/Rogelberg%20et%20al.%20-%202007%20-%20The%20science%20and%20fiction%20of%20meetings.pdf>

TIPS

Short-term

Block out team meeting-free hours. As your team adjusts to working from home, you may find that everyone's pinging each other more than usual - which makes it hard to focus, hurting productivity.

Help your people reclaim the productive flow state by establishing a set of team- or company-wide "quiet" hours. These blocks on the calendar should be kept meeting-free, so people are freed up to make progress on projects that really move the needle.

Long-term

Eliminate Zoom fatigue. Zoom fatigue is the new meeting fatigue.

To combat it, don't default to video if a phone call, Slack, or email will suffice. Also, challenge your team to shorten video calls to 15 or 30 minutes as often as possible. And if you wrap up early, go ahead and end the call, creating a culture of giving time back.

4

More empowerment, accountability, & ownership

Working through a crisis can negatively impact employee motivation and distraction. But in this case, the issue actually gives rise to the solution.

Because with greater flexibility comes greater autonomy for your employees. And increased autonomy at work has been linked to - that's right - **increased employee motivation** (plus happiness, productivity, and ownership).⁵

There's a sweet spot here, though. Because being given clearly defined goals, and being aligned with company values, are also necessary for employee engagement.

So, create alignment for your newly autonomous employees. The key is to communicate to your team why the work is important, not just how to do it - and that you trust them with the agency to get it done.

5. <https://qz.com/676144/why-its-your-call-is-the-best-thing-you-can-say-to-keep-employees-happy/>



TIPS

Short-term

Reset the why - together. Has it been a while since you reminded your team where you're going, and why you're going there? It's easy to lose the big picture when you're operating in survival mode. Start the move back toward alignment by inviting your team to reassess - together - what your organization is all about, how it might have changed in the recent past, and why it matters. WorkTango's Goals & Feedback solution can help by keeping organizational, team, and individual goals accessible at all times.

Long-term

Invest in goal management software. Continuous employee success practices deliver better business results than the old ways of "performance management"-- plain and simple. And making it easy by using the right technology solution can help individuals and teams stay aligned on goals, track progress, and put feedback front and center - whether from a shared office or from across the globe. With Goals & Feedback, you can view progress in real-time or request feedback from any member of the organization anytime.

5 More empowerment, accountability, & ownership

This era of disruption has paved the way to success for flatter organizations.

In the Harvard Business Review article “Hierarchy is Overrated,” business thinker Tim Kastelle makes a case for “**flat**” organizations - those with less bureaucracy and more shared ownership and decision-making.⁶

He notes there are three circumstances in which flat organizations thrive:

- When there’s rapid change
- When innovation matters
- When the organization has a shared purpose

In our current business climate, we’re experiencing all three, like never before. Yet, most of us still work in traditionally hierarchical companies. And changing that structure takes hard work. Keep reading for some tips on flattening your organizational structure, and reaping the benefits.

6. <https://hbr.org/2013/11/hierarchy-is-overrated>



CIRCUMSTANCES WHERE FLAT ORGANIZATIONS THRIVE

- When there’s rapid change
- When innovation matters
- When the organization has a shared purpose

TIPS

Short-term

Broaden job descriptions. A job description for a hierarchical organization is typically a long list of specific responsibilities. But in a flatter organization made up of many decision-makers, job descriptions should instead include a shorter list of the skills or experience required to navigate the dynamics of the position, like creativity, problem-solving, and sharp communication skills.

Doing so communicates what's most important about the role, instead of getting into the weeds on tasks (which may change anyway).

Long-term

Eliminate a layer of management. Characteristics of a successful flat structure include fewer levels of management with horizontal career paths and flexible boundaries between units. By organizing work around small, autonomous teams, companies are able to increase agility and speed up decision-making.

6

A reset of trust, mutually rebuilt over time

As the social contract between company and employee has evolved in recent decades, **trust has become increasingly important.**

And in light of the recent pandemic, organizational psychologist Adam Grant predicts, “The level of trust that we feel towards our colleagues and our companies is likely to become more extreme - in both directions.”⁷

What he means is: Teams that stuck together during the crisis will come out on the other side more tight-knit than they were before. On the other hand, organizations that didn’t handle layoffs well, or turned to micromanagement, will have a hard time rebuilding the trust they lost.

Grant continues, “Surveillance doesn’t just undermine employee loyalty; it can actually make managers more suspicious, creating a vicious cycle.”

7. <https://www.economist.com/by-invitation/2020/06/01/adam-grant-on-how-jobs-bosses-and-firms-may-improve-after-the-crisis>

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“We don’t need micromanagers; we need “macromanagers” who create clarity amid chaos with meaningful goals and purposeful roles.”

– ADAM GRANT

TIPS

Short-term

Regular Sync-Ups. In the earlier days of the pandemic, employees of some companies felt swamped with communication from their manager, and others felt hung out to dry. Now that the dust is settling, it's critical to establish a regular 1-on-1 Sync-Up schedule to set a productive cadence for feedback and communication. Our Goals & Feedback solution allows managers and team members to schedule their next meeting, receive reminders, collaborate on a shared agenda, and make notes for follow-up.

Long-term

Be honest about what's changed. Across the board, our needs are dramatically different than they were before the coronavirus crisis. As the economic climate continues to change, business leaders are making tough decisions regarding downsizing, restructuring, and in some cases, rapid hiring.

No one will navigate the new normal perfectly, but the leaders who communicate purposefully and proactively will win trust with their teams, no matter what the news is they're delivering.

7

A pushback on “busyness,” the pressure to always be on

March 2020 ended one of the biggest decades of economic growth in history. A period in which, as the stock market skyrocketed, work-life balance suffered.

Despite research suggesting that being busy actually makes us less productive, employees have increasingly felt a pull to be constantly “on.” HR leader Josh Bersin thinks that’s all about to change.⁸

He’s calling it “The Big Reset” - an update of our expectations, priorities, and the way we spend our time. Bersin suggests we haven’t been using the digital tools at our disposal in the right ways.⁹ It’s time to set clear boundaries around work hours, simplify our lives, and make work easier.

8. <https://www.inc.com/travis-bradberry/how-being-busy-makes-you-less-productive.html>⁹.
<https://joshbersin.com/2020/03/the-big-reset-making-sense-of-the-coronavirus-crisis/>



“Rather than just throwing tools at employees, let’s make remote work positive, productive, and satisfying for every employee. And let’s bring people together in the process.”

– JOSH BERSIN

TIPS

Short-term

Set work-life boundaries, and stick to them. When organizations are in growth mode, it can be challenging not to enter each workday with a mindset of “more, more, more.” But at what cost?

With the recent global reminder of the value of personal health, it's time to set better boundaries that support a healthy work-life balance. Encourage your employees to log off each evening, and resist the urge to sign back in until the next workday, to set clear work-life boundaries even when working from home.

Long-term

Do more with less. Over the last decade of intense growth, many companies have layered on new employees, technologies, and overhead, without ever stripping anything away.

Responding to the intense disruption caused by the coronavirus crisis presents a unique opportunity to assess any processes, committees, or conferences that aren't adding value to your business anymore, and bid them farewell.

8

A new emphasis on mental health in the workplace

Traditionally, employees' basic needs for physical safety, food, and shelter haven't been part of the employer-employee social contract. But global pandemics have a way of changing things. The people of the future want to know their all-around well-being really matters to their employer.

Dr. Tracy Brower, work environment sociologist and director of Human Dynamics + Work for Herman Miller, predicts that employers will expand support for employees, including mental health support. This is good news, because an employee who is cared for physically, emotionally, and mentally is much more likely to have a positive employee experience than one who isn't - and drive greater engagement, productivity, and profitability in the long term.



“Many employers have added to employee support systems as a result of the coronavirus crisis and it is likely this new programming will be maintained.”

– DR. TRACY BOWER

TIPS

Short-term

Make mental health part of the conversation.

Communicate that your team's mental health is important, and make employees aware of the mental health resources they have access to. Let your team know you're there to help. (This means taking responsibility for your own mental well-being, too, so you can support and lead those in your care.)

Long-term

Make mental health crisis training part of your benefits package.

Mental health benefits have increased in recent years as employers discover the correlation between stress and job performance. But as of 2019, only 15% of companies were offering mental health first aid and/or crisis training, which can equip employees to respond early to mental health concerns.¹⁰

Some ways to integrate a mental health crisis response into your organization is to work with an external specialist, or encourage an internal HR leader to get certified in Psychological First Aid through the Red Cross.

10. <https://hrxecutive.com/employers-taking-a-bigger-look-at-mental-health/TIPS>

9 A new culture - community without proximity

Meaningful relationships just make work better. According to Gallup, employees who have a best friend at work are **7x more likely to be engaged**, meaning they're more productive and more likely to stay in their job.¹¹

This may not have been true several decades ago, **but today's employee expects work to be more than just a paycheck**. Many of us spend more waking hours working than we do living our personal lives, so it makes sense that we want to feel connected to the people we work with.

So, in a world where many of us are working from home for an indefinite period, how do we create community with no water cooler to gather around? How does a culture based on physical togetherness evolve to serve our new dispersed model of work?

11. <https://www.gallup.com/workplace/236213/why-need-best-friends-work.aspx>



TIPS

Short-term

Encourage remote 1-on-1 bonding. Large-group Zoom calls don't quite feel like the party we thought they would. If large video lunches or happy hours with colleagues aren't quite doing it for you, try staying connected with rotating one-on-one virtual chats instead.

This can be done with a simple #get_to_know_you channel in Slack, or by using a formal service like Donut, which facilitates regular virtual hangouts.

Don't forget about recognition. When peers connect around praise and gratitude, they build speedy connections. Our Recognition & Rewards solution empowers any member of the organization to post a shout-out on the public recognition feed. They can even send reward points to show appreciation tangibly.

Long-term

Onboard remote new hires as if they were in the office. How do we maintain our culture if we're not in the same room? How about spreading values and norms to new team members? Make it a priority to connect new employees to your culture by giving them a warm and welcoming "tour" of their new work environment and proactively setting times for them to get to know their peers.

10. <https://hrxecutive.com/employers-taking-a-bigger-look-at-mental-health/TIPS>

The organizations that succeed in the new world of work will be the ones that adapt to these changes quickly - and prioritize communicating candidly, embracing flexibility, and finding alignment in a workplace centered on employees as people. It won't be easy. Fortunately, we're here to help.

At WorkTango, we're revolutionizing how the world's most forward-thinking companies engage and inspire their people. We offer the only Employee Experience Platform that enables meaningful [recognition and rewards](#), offers actionable insights through employee [surveys](#), and supports alignment through [goal setting and feedback](#).

WorkTango is built for the workplace we all want to be a part of - where priorities become clear, achievements are celebrated, and employees have a voice. So if you're ready to make work lives better, check out this short [WorkTango overview video](#), or schedule a demo today.

We believe this vision is not just possible – it’s critical to the future of work. And, it’s made possible by WorkTango.

We believe organizations flourish when their employees are both aligned and inspired. This only happens when employees find meaning and growth in the work itself, and when they feel appreciated by and connected to their colleagues and their organization.

To achieve this, companies need to turn outdated approaches to performance management, recognition, and engagement on their heads. They need to adopt a new way that’s continuous, manager- and-employee-led, and people-first.

At WorkTango, we’re revolutionizing how the world’s most forward-thinking companies engage and inspire their people.

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