

HR leaders plan to embrace remote work post-pandemic

By: Kathryn Mayer | July 20, 2020

The vast majority of company leaders say their organizations plan to allow employees to work remotely at least part of the time.



(Photo by Michael Loccisano/Getty Images)

After coronavirus pushed a massive experiment in remote work, now there's more evidence it will continue post-pandemic.

New data finds that 82% of company leaders surveyed by research firm Gartner say their organizations plan to permit employees to work remotely at least part of the time even after the COVID-19 pandemic. What's more, nearly half (47%) say they intend to allow employees to work remotely full-time going forward. For some organizations, flex time will be the new norm as 43% of survey respondents reported they will grant employees flex days, while 42% will provide flex hours. Gartner surveyed 127 HR, legal and compliance, finance and real estate professionals for results.

"As business leaders plan and execute reopening of their workplaces, they are evaluating more permanent remote working arrangements as a way to meet employee expectations and to build more resilient business operations," says Elisabeth Joyce, vice president of advisory in the Gartner HR practice.

Gartner's research follows other evidence of the staying power of remote work. Roughly 30% of 385 HR leaders surveyed by research firm Institute for Corporate Productivity (i4cp) said they would allow their employees to work remotely indefinitely.

Meanwhile, the vast majority of employers (92%) also offer a work-from-home option to meet accommodation requests for employees who are at-risk or uncomfortable returning to the workplace in the midst of a pandemic, according to a recent XpertHR poll of 276 human resource professionals.

Companies too have announced their plans to continue work-from-home arrangements, further buoying the trend. Twitter said in May it is giving its employees the option to work from home "forever." Facebook said starting in 2021, some experienced employees can apply for permanent remote status, with an estimated up to 50% of the workforce working outside a company office in the next five to 10 years.

Remote work arrangements—often demanded by employees, according to industry surveys, yet usually only reluctantly embraced by employers—are looking like a permanent trend especially as many say the model is working. For instance, just 13% of business leaders voiced concerns over sustaining employee productivity.

"I think companies are going to see that some, maybe many, of the jobs they've always thought had to be done onsite could be done just about anywhere and could be done just as well," Mark McGraw, i4cp's total rewards research analyst, recently told *HRE*.

Still, experts say, there will be a lot to figure out in the new working world, with some employees working full-time remotely with others still in offices. Challenges include maintaining company culture, engaging employees and ensuring employees work together effectively. As a result, 61% of respondents in Gartner's survey said they had implemented more frequent check-ins between employees and managers.

"The question now facing many organizations is not how to manage a remote workforce, but how to manage a more complex, hybrid workforce," Joyce says. "While remote work isn't new, the degree of remote work moving forward will change how people work together to get their job done."