

The Future of Work Arrives Early: How HR leaders are leveraging the lessons of disruption

United
States

RESEARCH OVERVIEW

Oxford Economics and the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) partnered with SAP SuccessFactors to understand the realities of a post-pandemic workplace for both employers and employees in 10 countries.¹ Our research offers a glimpse of the various workforce strategies adopted by organizations in response to COVID-19, including insight into hiring and layoffs, expectations for future employment changes, readiness for remote work, and investment plans around digital technologies.

This brief report highlights research results for the **United States** and suggests next steps for HR leaders as they plan for the years ahead. The findings show that US employers expect to make major operational and strategic changes in the coming year—but may be overlooking critical long-term planning around employee reskilling.

US RESPONSE TO COVID-19

Experiences with COVID-19 vary from country to country, based in some part on the scale of the virus spread, national responses to controlling the pandemic, and local economic realities. The United States has struggled to control the virus, and done less than many other countries in our sample to limit unemployment and distribute funds to individual workers.

Our research (including a previous program conducted by SHRM and Oxford Economics) shows the profound economic impact of COVID-19 on people in the US. They have suffered huge financial losses—not just from unemployment, but from reduced hours or pay cuts. The data also reveal major disparities across the workforce by industry, type of employment (e.g., hourly vs. salaried), remote vs. on-site work, and other factors.

Understanding regional and local differences will be critical for HR leaders in the US and across the world as they make plans for their global workforces.

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¹ Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, Germany, India, Mexico, Spain, United Kingdom, United States. To learn more about the research, including a detailed overview of each country, visit: <http://www.sap.com/human-experience-shrm-oe>

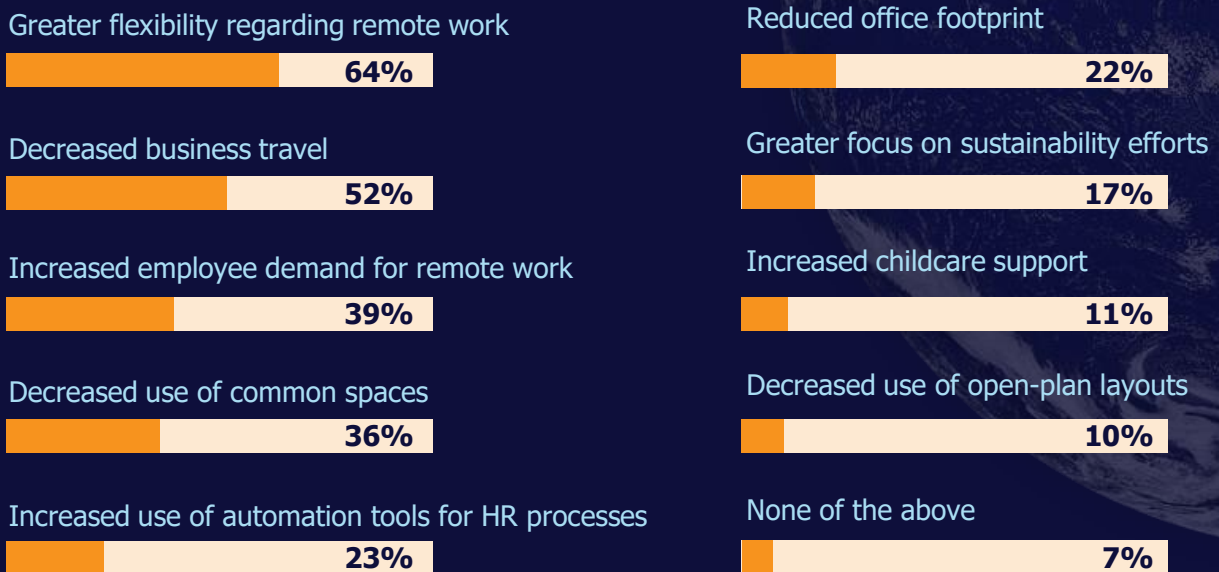
REDEFINING THE WAY WE WORK

The pandemic has redefined work and altered workspaces for millions of Americans, forcing leaders to adapt to unexpected disruptions, anticipate future challenges, and plan for strategic changes.

- The vast majority of US respondents say their organization has effectively handled new ways of working in response to COVID-19 (96%) and is well prepared to address the changing work environment (85%).
- But with change comes challenges. Nearly two-thirds (64%) expect COVID-19 to increase flexibility for remote work over the next year; unsurprisingly, maintaining productivity given new ways of working (60%) and establishing a culture that supports more remote employees (54%) are expected to become top challenges for businesses.
- Most respondents are increasing sanitation and cleaning (90%) and implementing social distancing guidelines and precautions (81%) to keep employees safe and engaged at work. However, far fewer are staggering the number of employees in the workplace at once (55%) or conducting regular pulse surveys to gather employee feedback (27%), and just 11% plan to invest in return-to-work technologies (e.g., testing and tracing) over the next 12 months.

FIG. 1: US leaders expect greater flexibility for remote work

Q: Which of the following long-term changes (12+ months) do you expect COVID-19 to have on the workplace? *Top-three ranked*



THE POST-PANDEMIC TALENT CRISIS

Securing and retaining top talent remains a concern for leaders across sectors—34% expect competing for top talent to be a main challenge post pandemic—and many acknowledge the need to strategize for the new work paradigm.

- Nearly eight in 10 (78%) believe COVID-19 will make flexible work more important to attracting and retaining talent, with work/life balance also top of mind. However, US leaders might be underestimating the importance of healthcare and other benefits (43%) and compensation (36%)—both of which take precedence for international respondents.
- Reskilling must be viewed as a long-term talent investment, but just 22% expect to invest in learning programs for reskilling and upskilling over the next year (vs. 38% internationally).

FIG. 2: Flexible work will not be the only talent differentiator

Q: To what extent do you expect the following to become less or more important in an organization's ability to attract or retain talent, given the effect of COVID-19?
"Somewhat more important" and "Much more important" responses



MIXED MESSAGES ON TECHNOLOGY

Most US organizations are satisfied with the technology they have for new ways of working—but are they accommodating all workers?

- More than three-quarters (79%) say their company has the technology it needs to navigate the changing work environment. This could explain why just 34% expect to invest in remote collaboration tools.
- Yet less than half (42%) say most of their workers can work remotely *and* have the necessary technology and environment to do so effectively, with customer service workers (55%), general staff (49%), and service/field workers (40%) being especially disadvantaged in this area.

Q: Which technologies do you plan to invest in the most over the next 12 months? Top three technologies

34%	Remote collaboration tools
25%	Automation tools (e.g., self-service portals)
25%	Recruiting and on-boarding programs