Workplaces of Today and Tomorrow to Attract and Retain Top Talent: Challenges and Opportunities with Remote / Hybrid Practices

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Abstract: The face and nature of the workplace are changing; remote work technologies and the capabilities of artificial intelligence are having a transformative effect on traditional norms of work performance, to which both employees and managers must adapt. The article analyzes the advantages and problems of remote work, its impact on staff turnover and retention, the sources and specifics of industrial stress during remote work, and the problem of environmentalization of workplaces with this format of work organization. The basis of the study was the results of an electronic survey from November 2023 till March 2024 of 40 specialists from the public and private sectors of South Florida (USA) who studied a postgraduate course in personnel management regarding their views, expectations, and preferences for onsite, remote and hybrid workplaces. Respondents gave answers to both closed and open questions to analyze the answers to which content analysis and inductive coding were used. 54% of respondents work in traditional offices, 32% can work remotely, and 14% of respondents have a hybrid work format. Analysis of the answers to the open questions allows us to determine the desired organizational culture format as flexible, remote/hybrid, positive, belonging/inclusive, work-life balance, and employee-oriented. The majority of respondents consider workplace design to be an essential determinant of labor productivity. Technologies for monitoring employees' working hours for office, remote or hybrid work formats are different, and it is necessary to respect the employee's right to privacy (20% of respondents consider regular monitoring appropriate, 50% – periodic, and 30% consider monitoring inappropriate). Organizations that organize a comfortable format of remote work for their employees are more likely to be able to attract and retain a talented workforce at a lower cost than those that require the presence of employees in the office (over the next decade, only 10% of respondents are willing to prefer working in the office, then as 90% - hybrid or remote work option). Based on the survey results, a list of criteria a company must fulfill to attract and retain talented employees and the characteristics of the most attractive work environment was formulated.

Keywords: remote work, hybrid work, virtual offices, technostress, commuting, nature at work, employee monitoring, sustainability.


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INTRODUCTION

A transition towards remote work in most developed economies has been increasing over the past two decades, and the Covid-19 pandemic made it more of a necessity for those managers and employees that were resisting it (Turner & Heng, 2023). Even in developing and poorer economies people are adjusting and adapting to remote work using basic cell phones and tablets with internet capabilities. The good news is that remote work and online education are not new since universities have been experimenting with it for several decades. Remote work, learning and hybrid practices have been observed in most higher education campuses since the 1990s. Despite stiff resistance from some academicians, higher education has been at the forefront of the transition to this asynchronous remote/hybrid formats. While a student can earn an accredited four-year college degree online through remote learning without ever stepping into a face-to-face classroom, he or she would need to complete much of the professional medical courses in traditional means by being in laboratories and hospitals to learn using a hands-on approach while diagnosing illnesses of diverse patients physically and through telehealth. Such mixed-modality educational experiences enable the modern and future workforce to remain agile, flexible, and ready to adjust as needed, and so should their organizations. Luckily, many organizational leaders are concerned about sustainability and are integrating digitalization and remote work technologies to their advantage, while doing good for the environment.

Environmentalism is a theory or concept that sees the natural environment as dynamic rather than hereditary; as such, it is an important factor in the growth, change, transformation, socialization, and cognitive development of people as individuals and groups (Oxford, 2024). The theory of environmentalism advocates for the preservation, restoration, sustainability, and improvement of the natural environment so each generation of human beings can leave this planet a little better than they found it for those that come after them (Davies, 2020; Grady et al., 2019). In other words, environmentalism is about minimizing any destructive human footprint on earth so nature can be preserved and enjoyed by the generations that follow. The good news is that modern automation and internet technologies allow for remote and hybrid work options that all organizations should consider regarding the design and restructuring of existing and future operations.

According to Zahidi (2020, para. 2), “The workforce is automating faster than expected, displacing 85 million jobs in the next five years.” Of course, the rapid availability of artificial intelligence is assisting in this area and perhaps forcing some of the automation. Consequently, modern organizations must understand the necessity of adapting new technologies into their operations, while accommodating the needs and preferences of today’s workforce. It has been said that,

*Automation, in tandem with the COVID-19 recession, is creating a “double-disruption” scenario for workers. Companies’ adoption of technology will transform tasks, jobs, and skills by 2025. Some 43 percent of businesses surveyed indicate that they are set to reduce their workforce because of technology integration, 41 percent plan to expand their use of contractors for task-specialized work, and 34 percent plan to expand their workforce as a result of technology integration. Five years from now, employers will divide work between humans and machines roughly equally. (Zahidi, 2020, para. 2)*

According to Zahidi (2020), around 84% of employers are planning to rapidly digitalize their work processes over the coming years, including a significant expansion of remote working options. Employers have said that there is the potential to move about 44% of their workforce to operate remotely.

Since a transition towards remote and hybrid work options are no longer just for the “leading-edge” firms, all managers, entrepreneurs, and public sector leaders must reflect on the reality of making work more flexible for their employees. The following section will discuss relevant literature about remote work, technology, and the management of its associated challenges.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Modern technologies in today’s globalized world make remote work an attractive possibility for the young generation of employees and cost-conscious managers. The major benefits of working remotely tend to include saving commute time, avoiding the stresses of having to get to work, more flexibility or control over work hours, and reduced cost of office space for employers (Tahir, 2021) since the “hoteling” alternative work arrangement
process allows employees to occupy any open office when they come to work for face-to-face meetings with clients and colleagues. “Most of us have a fixed workspace, while others hot-desked, meaning you do not have a permanent work desk, but rather work on a desk that is available” (Turner & Heng, 2023, p. 139). At times, it is necessary to be physically present at the office and visible to prevent the negative outcomes associated with “out of sight, out of mind” or proximity-bias phenomenon. It should be noted that any major transitions towards remote or hybrid work structures are likely to result in some benefits, challenges, and perhaps some resignations.

Benefits of Remote Work

According to Tsipursky (2024), about 75–85% of workers do not want traditional office-centric work since productivity can be high for many hybrid and remote workers. In fact, about 55% of hybrid workers seem to have higher productivity than their counterparts at the office. It is reported through large scale studies that “89% of workers expect to work from home at least some of the time after the Covid-19 crisis” (Turner & Heng, 2023, p. 140). Organizations should frame remote and hybrid work as an opportunity for competitiveness to attract top talent from around the nation and retain productive workers. According to Turner and Heng (2023, p. 141), “There is no going back to the pre-pandemic way of working as the “experiment” of working from home has, ironically, been hugely successful.” As such, new knowledge, skills, and tools must be provided to help employees do their jobs well as previous training and practices may not be sufficient to keep everyone performing satisfactorily.

Nowadays, research shows that employees want developmental opportunities and career guidance but are increasingly getting it from artificial intelligence (AI) instead of their senior colleagues and managers (Petrone and Rodman, 2024). According to recent research, about 33% of employees believe they received better career recommendations from artificial intelligence than from their experienced colleagues and managers. And almost half (47%) Generation Zers feel that way since they believe managers are too busy for the career discussions (Petrone & Rodman, 2024). The new workplace phenomena show a lack of quality interaction between remote workers and bosses, and that many employees are favoring digital media over managers and senior colleagues as a primary source for career development information. Despite their limitations, AI tools are being used for collaboration, guidance, and recommendations. It is true that AI can perform certain management tasks (such as timely communications, data-based problem-solving, information and knowledge distribution, continuous learning, and team collaboration), but they are not a substitute for proper career planning and development in a specific organization. These recent trends are raising “red flags about the ability of firms to develop leadership pipelines for the future” (Petrone & Rodman, 2024, para. 6).

Challenges Associated with Remote Work

A massive number (59%) of employees say their managers and organizations either rarely or never help them pursue developmental opportunities outside of their current departments (Petrone & Rodman, 2024). Sadly, managers are playing a very small role or no role in helping employees develop and climb up the ladder of their careers. AI can and should be used by employees and managers for general industry information, advice on career pathing, or even certain sensitive information that cannot be discussed with others. But for properly assessing an individual’s strengths and goals or acquiring mentors, AI cannot replace caring managers and senior colleagues. AI should be used as a tool to personalize career journeys, making opportunities more transparent, and providing learning and upskilling programs so the outcome can be win-win-win for employees, managers, and organizations.

While technology has progressed immensely over the past three decades, AI cannot replace actual hard work of mentoring, goal setting, and employee development. It is said that employee development is in some cases delegated to machines. The actual incentive structures within organizations need to be designed appropriately to make the culture more developmental. For example, when retail managers develop their employees and assistants to replace them, it is then and only then that they will be more likely to get promoted faster to the next level. In such cases, both the mentors and mentees benefit. The use of modern technology, coupled with developmental communication, planning, and guidance of managers and mentors with employees should lead to mutually beneficial outcomes.

The use of modern technologies can increase some of the negative consequences associated with remote work, where a worker is likely to perform much of the work in isolation from the comfort of one’s home or couch. Being away from the traditional face-to-face workplaces can have a negative psychological impact on one’s
mental health due to isolation, lack of proximity to teammates, and the absence of bonding or camaraderie. According to a study by Prasad et al. (2020), information technology employees that worked remotely felt isolated, reported disturbance of their family dynamics, felt the absence of their peers, and were overworked at times, which can be stressful. The initial stages of remote work can be described as the honeymoon period which provides feelings of control and eustress, the positive motivation that drives one to work harder, but the qualitative stress and quantitative overload with excessive demands to get more done faster can lead to distress, agony, and debilitating anxiety for the employee and his/her family.

New team norms are needed when members are not seeing each other regularly. Failure to define and agree to new norms causes unnecessary friction and stress. One common complaint is people feel their work and personal lives are now blurred when working from home. They feel they are working longer hours at home with little personal space. The leader is often seen as contributing to an unsettled environment (Turner & Heng, 2023, p. 141).

Some studies (Béland et al., 2021) have linked remote work with additional cases of family stress and domestic violence. The added family stress and violence is not necessarily due to the work arrangement, but rather the inability of remote workers to adequately meet their financial needs and/or maintain productive social relationships. Perhaps some remote workers are not being compensated equitably due to the presence of “proximity bias” since “out of sight also lead to being out of mind” for career development and promotional opportunities.

Remote work impacts men and women differently in society due to various institutional, cultural, and societal norms. Women report having more stress when working remotely due to the added responsibility of simultaneously shouldering household chores at a higher rate than men. According to Manzo and Minello (2020), remote work has created an unequal distribution of duties among parents, as women are expected to also take care of the children and other such domestic functions to a greater degree than their male counterparts.

According to the research by Moretti et al. (2020), remote work is not always associated with better performance since 39.2% of remote workers believe they have been less productive, while 41.2% reporting back pain, and 23.5% acquiring neck pain from remote work. Managers must take relevant steps to make sure their remote employees’ mental and physical health are in good standing by balancing their work to levels that are not too stressful, while always providing technological support along with informal opportunities for socialization and networking.

Remote work means that one is not likely to experience what we at Nova Southeastern University’s College of Business and Entrepreneurship have termed as “spontaneous collegial interactions” (SCI) in the hallways, around the watercooler, or while getting coffee to exchange pleasantries, being updated on research projects, as well as receiving timely suggestions from co-workers. These spontaneous collegial interactions, which are not possible for remote workers, can lead to better social relationships, gaining more friends, and a reduction of negative politicking in the organization’s culture (Noori et al., 2023).

Resignations and Remote Work

It is apparent that the transition towards remote work was in place long before the Covid-19 pandemic and will continue to reshape the workplace to various degrees. However, the pandemic prompted many employees to voluntarily quit their jobs, which became known as the “Great Resignation” of 2021. As explained by Sull, Sull, and Zweig (2022, para. 1), “More than 40% of all employees were thinking about leaving their jobs at the beginning of 2021, and as the year went on, workers quit in unprecedented numbers” …since “Between April and September 2021, more than 24 million American employees left their jobs, an all-time record.” Some industries, such as the apparel retailers, lost more employees (perhaps at two to three times the rate) than airlines, medical device makers, and health insurers. According to Fuller and Kerr (2022), the Great Resignation was not new, but the pandemic spurred natural consequences, such as early retirement and some reshuffling. Today’s leaders can benefit from understanding the specific factors that impact their industries since the forces underlying the resignations are here to stay.

The onset of the pandemic brought unprecedented changes. Of course, as confirmed by the Wall Street Journal article, the impact of the pandemic continues, as noted by Ip (2024), since employees from multiple generations are more carefully evaluating both if and where they work. We have witnessed a massive shift to
remote work, a transformation in employee attitudes towards their jobs, and saw organizations rapidly adapting to these new challenges. The pandemic has certainly influenced employee turnover and retention, as many explored changes in work-life balance, which caused an increase in remote work, and evolving employee-employer relationships. It has been said that some workers during the pandemic were prepared to quit if their employer did not offer a hybrid-work option. In fact, “In a survey of over 10,000 Americans conducted in the summer of 2021, around 36% of workers said that if not given a hybrid or remote option, they would search for an alternative, and 6% reported being willing to quit outright, even without a new position in hand (Fuller & Kerr, 2022, para. 12).

The “Great Resignation” did not appear suddenly or out of nowhere. Yes, it was spurred on by the pandemic, but it was a consequence of several factors, such as retirement, relocation, reconsideration, reshuffling, and reluctance (Fuller & Kerr, 2022). It behooves managers and organizational leaders to understand which of these factors are contributing to turnover of their organizations and industries so they can respond in a timely manner using modern technologies and sustainable organizational designs to attract and retain top talent. Modern leaders must create an environment where people are excited to work and can effectively manage workplace stress.

**Technology and Stress**

Any stressful or unhealthy work environment with uncaring or unprofessional colleagues and managers can be unpleasant, and lead to employee dissatisfaction and dysfunctional turnover. The research by Marawan and colleagues (2021) with 142 academic staff showed that gender, living in rural areas, older age, poor internet infrastructure, and low levels of internet training were associated with higher levels of technostress, which is psychosomatic stress or illnesses stemming from the use of computers and other technologies like personal phones or tablets. A study by Molino and colleagues (2020) confirmed that technostress is related to workload and positively contributes to work-life imbalance and conflicts which can involve one’s colleagues or family members. One of the contributors to this remote work stress is associated with technical challenges since information technology support may not always be readily available in the next room or through chatting or a phone call. The best way to mitigate technostress is to provide ongoing training to equip everyone with the latest technical skills, provide infrastructure support, and engage everyone through relevant fun activities to reduce stress levels in each department.

According to Ingusci and colleagues (2021), there is a positive relationship between workload and behavioral stress of remote workers. Job crafting is one way to help protect remote workers from excessive behavioral stress (Ingusci et al., 2021). Job crafting usually means encouraging everyone to take personal and proactive initiatives which may require a paradigm shift towards enjoying one’s work and job, while developing fruitful collegial relationships with others in the profession and maintaining a positive attitude. As the “fake-it-first principle” declares, if you repeatedly tell yourself that the day will be productive and positive, then you will be happier in just a matter of minutes since the mind tends to believe the input it receives without always consciously distinguishing between the real and ideal. Positive input tends to result in a positive mindset and better outlook about one’s job and work environment.

According to the findings of Miyake et al. (2022) with 4052 respondents in Japan, there is a moderate level of influence from remote work on people’s feelings of being lonely. People get tired of excessive “zoom” meetings, which can lead to feeling like “zombies.” Consequently, it is normal for most remote workers to miss the joy and happiness from spontaneous collegial interaction with their coworkers and its associated camaraderie.

Supportive senior colleagues, managers, and supervisors should assist remote workers by maintaining a positive relationship with them through regular interactions to reduce feelings of loneliness. According to Miyake et al. (2022), leaders’ support can be a great way to mitigate feelings of technostress and its associated illnesses. Additionally, as reported by Spagnoli et al. (2020), the added pressure of negative authoritarian leadership practices can exacerbate feelings of technostress. However, the use of a democratic and supportive leadership style can reduce or eliminate the presence of technostress for remote workers. Additionally, supportive leadership practices can attract and retain diverse talent in the organization (Wesley et al., 2024; Delapenha et al., 2020).

No organization is immune from the use of stressful or destructive leadership styles and ineffective management practices with remotely working professionals. Research has documented that there is a negative
relationship between ineffective e-leadership and innovative work practices (Subramaniam et al., 2023). It has been empirically confirmed “that when supervisors are abusive, people become emotionally exhausted and hide knowledge” (Um-e-Rubbab & Khursheed, 2024, p. 1). There tends to be a strong association between abusive management practices and emotional exhaustion on the part of their subordinates. However, “Coworker support may offer a sense of support and social connection, which can help employees cope with the stress associated with abusive supervision (Um-e-Rubbab & Khursheed, 2024, p. 14).

As mentioned by Bedeian (2002), some academic leaders rely on authoritarian influence at times since college Deans can get compliance from higher education professors because of the resources they control. Academic leaders often exercise coercive power, which “is characterized by the use of verbal threats, confrontation, and punitive actions to force compliance from faculty members” (Bedeian, 2002, p. 164). The use of such authoritarian leadership style or coercive techniques is referred to as “the dark side of the dean's disease,” which can have devastating effects on the college’s faculty members teaching face-to-face or through remote platforms. Bedeian (2002, p. 164) recommends screening out such authoritative and destructive leaders during the applicant review process by recognizing the dean's disease telltale signs at the outset, since one or two symptoms might be sufficient to raise serious concerns. Organizations should attract, hire, develop, and retain the best leaders who use appropriate leadership styles with all their employees, especially remote workers that operate in distant locations outside of the main offices.

Modern workers returning to office (RTO), in this post-pandemic environment, offer organizations the opportunity to create a better employee experience for everyone by adapting and optimizing their compensation and reward programs to better serve those working in-office, remotely, and/or on a hybrid schedule. Some of the main elements of an effective reward for employees returning to the office are competitive compensation, benefits, well-being, recognition, and career development (Tsipursky, 2024).

The idea of managing by walking around might be relevant for retail, hospitals, transportation, manufacturing, and other production-related work environments to train people, to keep workers safe, and to socialize with them by getting to know everyone better, and to recognize good work. However, physically seeing employees or monitoring their work to manage their level of productivity is no longer an effective answer to controlling workers’ efforts and motivation, especially those that are in remote locations. Modern managers need to measure performance through SMART goals that are set in conjunction with employees (what Peter Drucker labeled as MBO or management by objectives), so they can focus on key performance indicators (KPIs). SMART goals should be specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound with specific milestones for periodic reporting and assessment of the results jointly by managers and employees.

Effective leaders must avoid the proximity bias, which is about valuing, engaging, and even promoting workers who are the closest to managers at the office, as it has a negative impact on workers that are in remote locations (Tsipursky, 2024). Proximity bias or offering opportunities to those who are near the leader in the office, usually negatively impacts qualified workers, which can drive these professionals to seek other opportunities. Organizations must avoid the proximity bias through inclusion by engaging all remote and hybrid workers in career development and other opportunities in the organization without compromising privacy and employees’ legal rights (Roberts & Mujtaba, 2024).

**Appealing and Sustainable Workplaces**

Today’s workers want to take pride in their work by knowing that what they do makes a positive difference in the community and lives of others in society. Additionally, today’s workforce is likely to be tech-savvy and sustainability-focused, while wanting a balanced approach to work, nature, and life. Researchers (Klotz, McClean, & Tang, 2023) conclude that experiencing doses of nature at work has improved the way employees felt about their work, increased task performance, and enhanced creativity.

According to Slatinsky (2023, para. 1), “The future of office design demands a thoughtful and integrated approach that aligns with the values of sustainability, community, employee development, flexibility, and a connection to nature.” Using energy-efficient infrastructure along with smart building technologies, future firms must be able to create visually appealing workspaces that minimize the organization’s carbon footprint, while satisfying the needs of individuals and teams to get their tasks done in productive manners. According to Klotz,
McClean, and Tang (2023), designers and developers are integrating nature with work in some very creative and appealing ways:

- Google’s UK headquarters, a rooftop park with over 250 trees crowns the building, providing employees with a natural escape from the offices and urban environment below.
- Retailer L.L. Bean cut out the middle of one of their warehouses and turned the space into a courtyard, so that everyone at their new home office would have views of nature while working.
- In Canary Wharf, the London base for many global enterprises, developers are building a “green spine” that will give workers access to green spaces during their workdays.

“These real-world examples of incorporating nature into commercial spaces are part of a growing trend to design places where employees can be immersed in nature during their workdays” (Klotz, McClean, & Tang, 2023, para. 7). Integrating nature with the modern workplaces aligns with the goal of being sustainable, collaborative, and appealing to the diverse preferences of employees, suppliers, and customers. Empirical studies have proven that nature makes workers feel better about themselves and their daily functions. According to Klotz and Bolino (2021), workers’ emotions, thinking, connection to others, and physical well-being can all be enhanced by being in and around nature.

The results of modern studies are consistent in concluding that experiencing nature at work can improve the way employees feel and work. Integrating even micro-nature into the modern work settings can contribute to worker well-being and performance in a meaningful way (Klotz, McClean, & Tang, 2023). It has also been found that employees were more productive the next day if they had spent time outdoors in the prior evening (Klotz, McClean, & Tang, 2023). Remote workers should know that they can benefit from being around nature outside of their homes by taking a walk, talking to neighbors, and enjoying the scenery on a regular basis. To build trust, better mental health, and an inclusive workplace for all workers, companies can encourage remote employees, especially minorities and disadvantaged workers, by offering affirmative action programs that encourage them to socialize, collaborate with professional associations, grow in their careers, participate in mentorship programs as mentors or mentees, and benefit from the spontaneous collegial interactions while they are at the office (Kanaris & Mujtaba, 2024; Mujtaba, 2023b).

**METHODOLOGY**

To better understand the needs and desires of today’s human resources workforce, this study asked working adults that were living or studying in the South Florida regions to provide comments regarding their views, expectations, and preferences for onsite, remote and hybrid workplaces. The survey instrument for this study was made up of two open-ended questions to glean the general views of practitioners in the field of human resources.

During November 2023 until March 2024, we gave the instrument to 55 working adults in the human resources field to voluntarily complete electronically, and 40 of them responded. The respondents were chosen through the convenient sampling methodology as they were completing graduate degrees in human resources in the South Florida region through evening, weekend, and online modalities. The respondents were public and private sector working adults with expertise or experience in the field of human resources. Overall, we asked working adults in the human resources profession to provide comments regarding their views for onsite, remote, and hybrid workplaces.

**Instrument.** The survey instrument designed for this study was comprised of seven multiple-choice questions and two open-ended questions to collect both quantitative and qualitative data (Appendix A).

**Sample.** 55 working adults in the human resources field received the survey electronically, 40 (73%) voluntarily completed the survey. The respondents surveyed and/or questioned during in-class exercise were working adults from public and private sectors working adults taking graduate courses in human resources with the two authors. The purpose of the survey was fully explained, and the survey process was administered within the guidelines of the institutional review board (IRB) standards. Participation was entirely voluntary and respondent names were not recorded.

**Demographics.** 32 participants identified as female representing 80% of the sample, and eight participants identified as male representing 20% of the total respondents. Age demographics include four participants (20%) were under age 25, and five (25%) over the age of 40, (31) participants (77.3%) were between 26-39 years old.
The participants all had work experience ranging from (36)/90% with 1–19 years of experience, and four (20%) reported 20 or more years.

Based on their diverse biographies and age distribution, it was apparent that this population would be a good representation of most working adults in the United States of America. As part of the discussion processes, lectures, and reflections on the future of work in the authors’ courses, the respondents were asked to share their insights regarding the survey instrument topics.

We analyzed the content of the responses to the two open-ended questions contained in the survey to understand the subjective experiences and perceptions of the survey participants. Content analysis is a research tool used to determine the presence of certain words, themes, or concepts within some given qualitative data. Using content analysis, researchers can quantify and analyze the presence, meanings, and relationships of certain word categories (Drisco, 2016). Inductive research was used to analyze the qualitative data as this is an exploratory study with an emergent topic in the early phase of research. Inductive research allows the researchers to collect and analyze data to develop theories, concepts, or hypotheses based on patterns and observations seen in the data. The inductive coding emerged directly from the data itself by creating codes based on patterns and themes observed in the responses to two open-ended questions. Inductive coding allows for fresh insights and discoveries, as it captures nuances that might not fit predefined codes (Denizen, 2005).

RESULTS

Our findings offer organizations intentional and informed characteristics to effectively design, adapt, and optimize the workplace through lucrative compensation and reward programs, hybrid work arrangements, organizational culture, and work-life balance experiences to better meet the expressed needs of adults, as shown in Figure 1. Having a positive organizational culture is the most significant and sought-after workplace characteristic for an ideal work environment.

Figure 1. Codes Extracted from Two Open-ended Survey Questions

Themes Extracted From Two Open-ended Survey Questions:
1. Work Place Characteristics
2. Ideal Work Environment

The main elements to deliver the desired organizational culture focus, presented in Figure 2, are described as flexible, remote / hybrid, positive, belonging/inclusive, work-life balance, and employee-centric. Our findings regarding a desired organizational culture are in alignment with previous research by Sull and colleagues (2022, para. 11) as they found that “A toxic corporate culture, for example, is 10.4 times more powerful than compensation in predicting a company’s attrition rate compared with its industry.” Job insecurity and
reorganization, high levels of innovation, failure to recognize and appreciate employee performance, and poor response to employee safety issues (like Covid-19 pandemic) are other significant issues that increase departure of employees or their attrition rate (Sull et al, 2022).

The respondents reported having had work experience, with many being in the human resource field, as demonstrated by their thoughtful and rich qualitative comments regarding workplace characteristic to attract and retain top talent. Regarding the question of “whether a nature-friendly workplace design would help respondents be more productive,” 8 said “no” but 38 indicated “yes” or “maybe.”

Today’s work environment is still predominantly onsite, since 54% of the respondents in this study reported working in traditional office-based structures (Figure 3). While 32% can work remotely, 14% of the respondents have a hybrid work option where they go to the office or work from home depending on their schedules and needs to meet with clients or teams.

Workplace monitoring is a necessity of modern times to keep employees, customers, and the organization safe. As shown in Figure 4, in this study 20% of the respondents said employees should be monitored regularly,
50% saying it should be periodically, and 30% believe that workers should never be monitored. A total of 70% say employees should be monitored regularly and periodically, which means that most workers are aware and agree that monitoring in today’s digital world can keep the workplace safe from bad actors such as hackers, thieves, and vengeful employees.

![Figure 4. How Often Should Employees’ Work be Monitored?](source: created by the authors.)

As shown in Figure 5, over the coming decade, only 10% of the these working adult respondents said they would like to work onsite.

![Figure 5. In the Coming 10 years, I Would Rather Work Onsite, Remote or Hybrid?](source: created by the authors.)

In other words, 90% of the responding employees in this study prefer a hybrid or remote work option. Organizations that cater to such preference and demands are more likely to be able to attract and retain such talent at a cheaper cost than those requiring employees to always come to the office.

**Attracting and Retaining Top Talent**

Companies can take short-term and long-term measures to attract and retain top talent. For example, some of the short-term steps that companies can take to enhance their retention rate includes offering lateral career development opportunities, offering remote work arrangements, having company-sponsored social events, and making the schedules more predictable (Sull et al., 2022).

In the long term, a brand name that is valued can go a long way in attracting more applicants to an organization. Having good management with strong democratic leadership skills and an inclusionary organizational culture where people feel valued is very important in retaining top talent. Regarding workplace characteristics that would attract and retain top talent in the modern workplace, the respondents emphasized the following as an overall theme:

- **A culture of continuous learning and development opportunities.** Providing employees with opportunities for professional growth and career advancement ensures that they feel the organization is invested in their future, thereby encouraging loyalty, and reducing turnover.
Inclusive organizational culture. A workplace that fosters diversity and inclusion not only attracts a wide range of talent but also creates an environment where all employees feel valued and respected, thereby enhancing retention.

Flexible work arrangements. Flexibility in work hours and the option for remote work cater to the work-life balance desires of employees, thereby making the organization more attractive.

Competitive compensation and benefits. Offering a competitive salary, comprehensive health benefits, retirement plans, and other perks such as wellness programs and childcare support is crucial for attracting and retaining talent.

Purposeful work and innovation. Employees, especially millennials and Gen Z professionals, are increasingly looking for roles that provide a sense of purpose that contributes to greater good. An organizational culture that encourages innovation and values each employee's contributions can significantly enhance job satisfaction and loyalty.

Figure 6 shows additional comments from the survey regarding essential characteristics that attract and retain top talent in modern organizations.

| 1. | Opportunities for continuous learning and development, career advancement pathways. Career advancement opportunities – Potential for growth / succession |
| 2. | Flexibility for work arrangements, remote and hybrid work options, quality of work-life balance |
| 3. | Clear mission and values aligned with my values. |
| 4. | Strong company culture for talent management |
| 5. | Trustworthiness and transparency with leaders – trust in workers |
| 6. | Fairness would be the top characteristic for attracting top talent. |
| 7. | Learning and career development opportunities |
| 8. | Well-rounded cost-effective benefits program |
| 9. | Being nature orientated, I don’t want to feel like I’m locked inside a box. |
| 10. | A sustainable and environmentally friendly company that cares for society and the progression of humankind towards a brighter and friendlier future – being socially responsible. |
| 11. | Emphasizing work-life balance through supportive policies and benefits and aligning with a meaningful mission that allows employees to make a positive impact. |
| 12. | Fostering a positive company culture that prioritizes inclusivity and well-being. |
| 13. | Competitive pay |
| 14. | Effective training |
| 15. | DEI focused workplace – diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging work culture. |
| 16. | Paid leave options for all circumstances such as children and parental care |
| 17. | Effective leadership and management |
| 18. | Ample PTO (paid-time-off) that separates sickness, vacation, and personal time. |
| 19. | A supportive and non-toxic team |
| 20. | Feeling trusted by my supervisors |
| 21. | A positive work environment – a friendly and welcoming environment. |
| 22. | Recognition, incentives, and rewards for employees. |
| 23. | A relaxed and structured work atmosphere |
| 24. | Motivational and clear goals |
| 25. | Foster open and candid communication |
| 26. | Autonomy with work (No micromanaging) |
| 27. | Collaborative environment |
| 28. | Proper work conditions |
| 29. | Building a strong employer brand |
| 30. | Develop a talent pipeline. |
| 31. | Must have windows. |
| 32. | Effective strategies for onboarding and training |
| 33. | Supportive leadership and mentorship programs |
| 34. | Learning environment – a culture of learning |
| 35. | Enhancing a candidate’s experience. |
| 36. | Culture with a sense of belonging |
| 37. | Opportunities for recognition and rewards |
| 38. | Accountability |
| 39. | Adaptability |
| 40. | Authenticity |
| 41. | Accepting |

Figure 6. Additional Comments from the Survey Regarding Essential Characteristics that Attract and Retain Top Talent in Modern Organizations

Source: created by the authors.
While having a great organizational culture and environment can boost retention temporarily, managers and leaders must address the toxic elements of their culture that are causing employees to disengage and leave. And, as a result, these managers and leaders must root out all issues that contribute to a toxic culture proactively and in a timely manner (Sull, 2022). In hybrid teams and workplaces, “it is easy to miss out the persons who are not physically present at the workplace” (Turner & Heng, 2023, p. 147); so, inclusionary managers must reach out to hear every voice on the team to build trust and sustainable commitment through a caring mindset.

**Ideal Work Environment**

Everyone prefers to be associated with a modern workplace that offers flexibility, growth, and one that is socially responsible. However, an ideal workplace must also be balanced with efficiency, safety, quality, and a healthy return on investment.

When asked to describe an ideal work environment for the future, responses varied, and the following are actual comments showing a general overview of what these working adult respondents said they would prefer:

In this study, participants offered quality comments regarding the type of place they would prefer to work at in the future.

Figure 7 shows additional comments from the survey regarding an ideal future work environment.

1. One that prioritizes flexibility, autonomy, and well-being. It would provide remote work opportunities, enabling people to operate from any location while being connected and efficient. This adaptability would be facilitated by sophisticated technology that allows smooth teamwork and communication across remote teams. The perfect work environment would promote a culture of ongoing learning and growth, offering people chances to enhance their abilities and advance in their careers. They will have access to mentorship programs, customized training resources, and state-of-the-art tools and technology.

2. A place to grow with my company, a safe space which is a mental health and wellbeing app to become a completely remote position where I can travel the world searching for new safe space and learning more from other cultures and people. Essentially go on the hunt for all the mental health and wellbeing resources around the world, allowing me to go give everyone access to mental health and wellbeing tools at the click of a button.

3. Ideally, I would like to have a hybrid work where I can work from home most days but having one or two days to go to the office where I can socialize and build team relationships. The pay and benefits must be highly competitive with ample PTO. Ideally, I would also like an environment where I won’t feel like I am being watched like a hawk and that trust is placed on me.

4. A hybrid model that allows for flexibility and autonomy in managing my work schedule and location. It would have a nature-inspired design with ample natural light and green spaces to promote well-being and productivity. The culture would prioritize collaboration, innovation, and diversity, fostering a sense of belonging and fulfillment among employees. Additionally, the technology infrastructure would be robust to support seamless remote collaboration and communication.

5. Characterized by a blend of flexibility and structure, where employees have the autonomy to work remotely or in-office according to their preferences and job requirements. This environment would ideally prioritize a healthy work-life balance by offering comprehensive support for mental and physical well-being, access to wellness programs, and flexible scheduling options.

6. Hybrid work that involves support of team and individual tasks. I would like to maintain a balance for work and family so having a job that supports that involves family into the work with the efforts to grow within the organization but not at the risk of losing my family. Culture is vital. I want to enjoy my job and those I work with; so, opportunities to foster is vital.

7. The ability to work remotely from anywhere. Currently with my company we can only work from our home address. I would love to have the ability to work from anywhere so that I can have a hardwired internet connection.

8. My future work environment would have flexibility in my schedule, an understanding leader, room for growth, autonomy, and decent benefits. I would like to have more PTO.

9. I'd like to be able to go into the office when I need to, for certain things. It'll be removed from my home, but with an off-site office as well.

10. My ideal work environment would be quiet, relaxed, structured, and an environment where I’m allowed to work at my own pace.

11. It is important to know you are working in a healthy environment, where you can communicate without fear to your boss. It is important to have flexibility (PTO) and that the benefits can be used according to my needs more than the company needs. Feeling appreciated is super important to continue improving in different areas.

12. My ideal future work environment would have a lot of people within the company ranging from my age (21) to people in their late 50s. Everyone would be friendly and kind but bring constructive criticism to make progress. The environment would have lots of windows and sunlight, and the facility would have a gym and snacks.

13. Ideally be transparent, open communication and the willingness to collaborate and make great teamwork. Also, one that allows for flexibility and encourages work life balance while offering competitive compensation and benefits for the adjusting economy.

14. A clean safe space. I believe that the environment should be positive and challenging as well as have great leadership for the best success.
Inclusive and diverse work environment via work from home with no micromanagement.

You know you are working in a healthy environment, where you can communicate without fear with your boss. It is important to have flexibility (PTO) and that the benefits can be used according to my needs more than the company needs. Feeling appreciated is super important to continue improving in different areas.

To work remotely, full time, working 4 days per week and having shifts that start in the afternoon.

An incredible corporate culture goes a lot further. It includes open correspondence, common regard, shared objectives, and a pledge to worker development and improvement.

Warm, positive, friendly and an atmosphere where there is an open-door policy, confidence, fairness, and teamwork.

I have the option of choosing where I would like to work and how I prioritize my day. One where I’m encouraged towards career progression and receive adequate support and feedback from leadership. As well as an environment where the company culture helps to bridge gaps in differences and welcomes the involvement of the workforce in its business strategies.

A place that allowed me to work by myself while also allowing me to collaborate with other departments and employees. I would like open communication but also a lot of goal setting and planning. I would also want there to be lots of room for growth for both me and the department.

A work-life balance, having access to onsite training and resources, and strong communication between teams or employee and employer.

| Figure 7. Additional Comments from the survey regarding an Ideal Future Work Environment |
| Source: created by the authors. |

**Employee Monitoring Implications and Guidelines**

Using the comments and interactions with the audience of this study regarding workplaces of today and tomorrow, it is clear that technology has reduced privacy as every online transaction provides an opportunity for personal data to be stored on “cookies” or leaked to criminals (Mujtaba, 2023a). Therefore, practical guidelines regarding the pros and cons of employee monitoring are reflected upon in this section.

Today, we see that some managers, hackers, and law enforcement officials alike can easily access anyone’s computer, phone contacts, text messages, and call history from mobile devices without the person’s permission and without notice (Mujtaba & Cavico, 2023; Mujtaba, 2023c). While there are conveniences associated with remote work and modern technologies, there are negatives as well. In the United States and many other developed economies, the "right to privacy" is an important and necessary right of every citizen. It was emphasized long ago that “The common law secures to each individual the right of determining, ordinarily, to what extent his thoughts, sentiments, and emotions shall be communicated to others” (Warren & Brandeis, 1890, p. 202). As human beings progress, move forward, take on new initiatives, and invent better or more intrusive technologies, the legal side of protecting people’s rights must also keep pace with it simultaneously.

Human resources professionals can and should educate managers about the privacy rights of employees, customers, and vendors. There are many federal and state level laws which apply to companies as they attempt to protect their employees and customers’ data. The Fourth Amendment provides some security that one’s private data cannot be seized by any government authority without proper warrants for probable cause. In other words, the U.S. Constitution gives citizens some sense of freedom and privacy from “unreasonable” or arbitrary intrusions, seizures, or searches by government officials. In most cases, the government provides sensible regulations to protect everyone in the country. And “Workplace privacy is just one of many areas of law that are specially regulated” (Garon, 2020, p. 77). The protection is linked to the workplace in terms of a worker’s freedom, private space, and thereby “privacy,” being respected. Of course, there are some limitations because this sense of privacy can be breached if there is “probable cause” in any given situation to protect the collective wellbeing of everyone in the community, department, or company.

It should be noted that private entities and employers have more freedom in monitoring their employees’ offices and organizational buildings. Workplace monitoring is at the discretion of companies and performed by many employers to keep the organization safe, and workers protected. Garon (2020, p. 109) explains that: "Workplace monitoring is permitted under both state and federal law. The scope of the monitoring is typically mentioned in the employee handbook. The monitoring may include cameras throughout the workplace (other than bathrooms and locker rooms), access to all company-owned computer accounts, computer monitoring, phone call recording, and tracking of all data flowing protected by the NLRA, companies that follow their policies are free to monitor their operations in this manner."
Employee monitoring policies do not necessarily differentiate whether a transaction is from an in-office, remote, or hybrid employee. In alignment with much of the Federal laws on employee monitoring, in Florida private employers can conduct surveillance of their associates at work. Companies like Amazon, Google, Walmart, Publix, Disney World, and others use extensive surveillance systems to monitor security and measure productivity, safety, theft, and other such issues in the workplace. For example, Amazon employs about 59,000 employees in Florida (Florida Today, 2022), making it one of the largest organizations in the state, besides Disney World, Publix, and others. While the surveillance systems can provide some sense of security, it can also violate a person’s sense of privacy; however, there are strict and specific state laws to protect data privacy of employees and customers.

Public sector and unionized employees have more protection against being monitored than private employees. Nonetheless, “Monitoring employees in Florida requires balancing privacy rights of employees against the need to prevent possible claims based on employee misconduct and negligent hiring” (HR Expert, 2022, para. 7). Overall, there can be many local, state, and federal laws that apply to modern organizations operating in the United States, and employers must clearly communicate these regulations and their own specific policies to their managers and employees on a regular basis to ensure compliance (Noe, Hollenbeck, Gerhart, & Wright, 2022, para. 7). Overall, there can be many local, state, and federal laws that apply to modern organizations operating in the United States, and employers must clearly communicate these regulations and their own specific policies to their managers and employees on a regular basis to ensure compliance (Noe, Hollenbeck, Gerhart, & Wright, 2022, para. 7).

Employee monitoring is one area where several federal regulations apply to protect the privacy rights of employees, but there are exceptions provided for employers’ legitimate reasons to check and observe their workers on company premises and when they are representing the firm online or in the community. For example, the Electronic Communications Privacy Act (ECPA) bans people and employers from intercepting most personal communications, especially when workers are using their own personal devices outside of the office or during breaks. Yet, the ECPA grants an employer permission to monitor all employee activities conducted in computer systems or equipment belonging to the employer, as this is company property. So, a company must make sure that their privacy policies are aligned with multiple regulations and different national and state laws such as the Privacy Act, the Stored Communication Act, the Patriot Act, the Employee Polygraph Protection Act, the National Labor Relations Act, and ECPA guidelines as well as specific collective bargaining agreements from unions all at the same time. In a way, “The law in the US is a cacophony of so many different laws and cases that it often lacks consistency or definitive answers” (Solove, 2015, para. 14). Therefore, it would be easy for some managers and employees to become confused with all these complex rules and policies. As such, relevant communication and training must take place about monitoring policies to protect employees, consumers, and the company from unnecessary risks and liabilities (Blaisdell, 2021).

When it comes to monitoring the work of employees, organizations should do so transparently, and for legitimate business interests without violating the employee’s rights to privacy (Mujtaba, 2003). Some of the common reasons to monitor employees on and off employer property can include tracking data for improving productivity, enhancing quality, reducing theft of company equipment or products, preventing bullying and discrimination, and keeping the workplace safe for workers, customers, and vendors. When employers are monitoring employees for legitimate business reasons, they must abide by all applicable laws and policies (Habinsky & Boone, 2022).

In general, organizations are allowed by law to monitor certain employee activities in the workplace or when workers are using company property or equipment off premises like telecommuters or remote workers (Figure 8).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pros</th>
<th>Cons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>✓ Improved security</td>
<td>✓ Increased stress among workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Regulatory compliance</td>
<td>✓ Higher turnover and resignations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Increased productivity</td>
<td>✓ Concerns about lack of privacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Less administrative work</td>
<td>✓ Select employees can be monitored by vengeful managers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Transparency in business processes</td>
<td>✓ Software and data could be hacked.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 8. Employee Monitoring Pros and Cons**

*Source: Ekran Systems (2020).* 

As an example, for quality control and safety purposes, employers can monitor their workers’ computer activities, internet usage, texting and messaging to customers or vendors, and phone calls that are not personal. Of course, as presented in Figure 9, managers and employers should all be aware that there are some advantages such as better security, compliance with regulations, more productivity, transparency, etc., and shortcomings (i.e.,
increased stress of always “being under the gun”, higher employee turnover, and concerns on lack of privacy) associated with employee monitoring (Ekran Systems, 2020).

The Federal Trade Commission’s (FTC) Safeguards Rule demands that organizations have procedures in place to keep all employee data and personal information secure. Experts have recommended the following best practices for selecting an appropriate employee monitoring software application (Blaisdell, 2021):

1. Determine why you are using monitoring software.
2. Check the legal requirements and regulations.
3. Create a detailed and clear policy.
4. Avoid being invasive.
5. Communicate the policy, and
6. Listen to employees’ concerns while addressing them clearly and concisely in a timely manner.

It is very important to take the time necessary to clearly communicate the monitoring policy with all workers through the employee handbook, training programs, blogs, website, and other platforms before it is implemented (Mujtaba, 2023b). Employers must explain how the monitoring process works, why monitoring is necessary for the safety of everyone in the company, and how it will benefit all stakeholders. “If used properly, employee monitoring can be a very powerful tool to boost productivity and security” (Blaisdell, 2021, para. 7), while dealing with incoming or unexpected problems as they surface based on data in a timely manner.

Overall, there are many best practices to monitor employees’ work legally and ethically (see Figure 9), while respecting their rights to privacy.

| ✓ Create a clear and concise monitoring policy. | ✓ Practice monitoring, not surveillance |
| ✓ Comply with legal requirements. | ✓ Respect the privacy of employees |
| ✓ Notify employees of the applicable policies. | ✓ Remain transparent and inclusionary |
| ✓ Block undesired content so workers cannot access them during work hours. | ✓ Use dedicated software to keep data updated and safe. |

Figure 9. Best Practices in Employee Monitoring


At a minimum, a firm should create a comprehensive, respectful, and updated employee monitoring policy on and off the job as relevant for all their workers, including remote, hybrid and telecommuters.

CONCLUSIONS

Human resources professionals in this study have confirmed that most of them prefer a future workplace and positive organizational culture that offers flexibility to work as telecommuters, hybrid or in remote modalities. Despite the limitation of a small population, the findings from these working professionals are aligned with previous studies, thereby confirming the desire of modern workforce for remote and hybrid work options. Consequently, employers that offer work schedule flexibility, fairness and digital equity will be in a better position to attract and retain the best talent for their workplaces. Additionally, integrating the workplace with nature can benefit employees in ways that go beyond sustainability. Employees that are connected to nature may experience better overall well-being and increased productivity. Connecting employees with nature is a valuable competitive advantage which supplements well-designed jobs that include meaningful work, equitable compensation, and supportive leadership.

Technological advancements, particularly data analytics and artificial intelligence, are increasingly being leveraged by experts to predict performance, employee behaviors, and manage turnover trends. Consequently, researchers have provided many practical recommendations to make the workplace an attractive and appealing place for all. Slatinsky (2023) and other experts offer the following suggestions for an appealing and sustainable workplace that attracts more employees to come to the office so they can be part of more face-to-face discussions and fruitful spontaneous collegial interactions:

1. It must foster collaboration and engagement. The modern and future workplace should be built on a foundation of community, culture, and human engagement. There should be enough space for team-building and social gatherings for all employees, including remote and telecommuters, to strengthen each
worker’s overall sense of belonging. These spaces should also reach into the digital realm, connecting workers in the office, home and on the roads across locations.

2. **Nurture growth in the workplace.** The modern office should become a hub for continuous learning, skill development, socialization, and camaraderie among colleagues. Learning opportunities through cafes, knowledge libraries, or workshops for in-person as well as digital learning must become the norm for creative thinking in a relaxing organizational culture. Collaborations through informal settings can encourage creativity and open discussions through inclusion, where everyone can grow and feel appreciated.

3. **Embrace flexibility and diversity in work arrangements.** Flexibility is a practical response to the changing needs of the modern workforce. Personalized agile workspaces should provide flexible arrangements to accommodate the diverse preferences and creativity of all professionals. Modern workplaces do not have to be confined to brick-and-mortar physical buildings. Rather, the work design arrangements can be a staging area where the remote work, flexible schedules, and personalized workstyles harmonize with the unique preferences of each employee for privacy, collaboration, social spaces, and even quiet zones for reflection.

4. **Integrate nature with work.** Integrating nature with work, using smart technologies help to breathe life into various spaces to spark creativity and productivity. The combination can lead to an environment that connects humanity and the natural world. Biophilic elements (i.e., indoor plants, greenery, a calming atmosphere) enhance employee satisfaction, reduce stress, and promote a more positive and productive workplace culture. Integrating nature with workspace beautifies the work environment and contributes to the physical and mental well-being of employees.

5. **Tomorrow’s workplace must be human-focused.** Modern workspaces should be designed with a holistic approach to combine sustainability, community, learning, flexibility, and nature integration for the creation of a dynamic, engaging, and sustainable environment that attracts top talent while nurturing the well-being and growth of a diverse workforce. Tomorrow’s workplace should transform the mundane into a transcendent work environment that resonates with humanity (Slatinsky, 2023).

Overall, to the extent possible, modern workplaces wishing to attract and retain top talent should have an organizational culture that is designed to remain agile, nature-friendly, sustainable, human-focused, and flexible to accommodate diverse employees based on their preferences for wanting to work remotely, in a hybrid structure, or onsite at the office.

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**Conflicts of Interest**

There are no conflicts of interests to declare.

**Data Availability Statement**

Not applicable.

**Informed Consent Statement**

Informed consent was implied in the study as the respondents were all volunteers.
REFERENCES

**Appendix A: Work Preferences for Onsite and Remote Modalities**

1. *What is your gender?*
   1. ____Male    2. ____Female    3. ____Other
2. *What is your age?*
   1. ____18 - 25    2. ____26 - 39    3. ____40 - above
3. *How many years have you worked - years of work experience?*
   1. ____Never worked    2. ____1 - 5 years    3. ____6 - 10 years    4. ____11 - 19 years    5. ____20 or more years
4. *What is your current working modality?*
   1. ____Onsite    2. ____Remote    3. ____Hybrid    4. ____Not working
5. *Would a nature-friendly workplace design help you to be more productive?*
   1. ____Yes    2. ____No    3. ____Maybe
6. *I believe employees’ work should be monitored,*
   1. ____Regularly    2. ____Periodically    3. ____Never
7. *In the coming 10 years, I would rather work,*
   1. ____Onsite    2. ____Remotely    3. ____Hybrid

**Open-ended Questions:**

A. What are your top five workplace characteristics for attracting and retaining top talent in the modern workplace?
B. How would you describe your ideal future work environment?