No organization could have seen either the coronavirus or its economic disruptions coming, leaving leaders unprepared for a barrage of unprecedented revenue losses and uncertainties. Now, with little choice but to hit the brakes in the spring of 2020, leaders are stepping into a new unknown—trying to figure out how to get their workforces back to normal.
This of course means determining which employees should come back and under what conditions. It also means establishing a secure, sanitary, and safe environment as a top priority. But there’s a strong case to use this time to not only bring back the workforce but transform it.

Doing this type of workforce transformation isn’t easy at any time, and it may not seem like a high priority now, when survival may be the goal of each day. But the most forward-thinking organizations will recognize that “business as usual” after the pandemic will not look like it did before. There will be new opportunities and challenges. Whether a company succeeds post-COVID will depend greatly on having the right people, with the right skills, aligned to the work that needs to be done. And all of that starts with a clear view of what their most important capabilities should be going forward.

In short, organizations can accelerate through the turn.
Creating a secure environment

For the past few months, organizations have tried to create efficiencies for workers they haven’t been forced to lay off; manufacturers have set up social distancing for those in factory settings, while the agriculture sector established new shifts with fewer people. Now comes the unique challenge of how to handle the enormous group of employees who left offices and worked at home. In this category, there will be two major groups: those staying off-site and those coming back.

For employees on-site

For those coming back to the primary workspace, organizations need to make them feel comfortable returning, whether the workplace is a factory, a warehouse, or an open office space. This will not be an easy task. Employees around the world have seen how easily the coronavirus can spread. They justifiably will want assurances that their workspace is safe, secure, and sanitary.

Organizations should break this returning workforce into three separate groups:

**Group 1**
The people who never left.

**Group 2**
The returning vanguard, those in the first wave back to the office.

**Group 3**
Remaining employees who return to the workplace in future waves.

In many cases, figuring out who belongs in each group is straightforward. A machinist at a restarted auto assembly line would be in Group 2, for example. But it can soon become murky. Who needs to be in that first wave of returnees? Who might not be able to return to the office at all?
Organizations must modify their workspaces before these employees return en masse. Otherwise workers may not trust that they won’t bring the coronavirus—or any other illness—back to their homes and families. Employers may need to rejig shifts so that fewer people are in the workplace at the same time. Importantly, workspaces must create more physical distance between people.

There are some ethical considerations as well. What should be done with employees who cannot work at the old office? Should those in workplaces where the virus can spread easily (hotels, airports, shopping malls) get additional compensation? Finally, there’s the engagement factor: Is the office still a comfortable—or, depending on the culture—fun place to work?

(For a list of things to consider, see the “Back-to-the-Office Checklist” on page 40.)

For employees at home

Deciding who will not return on-site—and how to handle them—will be complex. Sometimes there will be individual health or personal reasons that an employee won’t return. However, there might be many organization-related reasons. The pandemic, while awful in so many ways, may have shown that some work roles can be done as well, if not more effectively, away from the primary workplace. Companies must properly identify who is in this critical group.

Certainly, companies can use their current experience with off-site workers to both optimize how to engage them and train leaders on how to work with them. This likely involves developing new policies on communications, work hours, security, privacy, and other issues that were probably devised when most employees were working on-site. Any lapses in security would need to be addressed, as would video calls. And special training should be created to optimize managers’ ability to work in this entirely new virtual world.
Making workers feel safe and engaged

Organizations should consider these actions for their various work groups. For actions common to all groups, see the “Back-to-the-Office Checklist” on page 40.

For employees on-site

Group 1:
The people who never left
- Listen to employee safety concerns and make adjustments before more workers return.
- Engage employees who may be fatigued or dealing with the trauma of working through the pandemic.
- Recognize and reward the group’s service.

Group 2:
The returning vanguard, those in the first wave back to the office
- Identify who can return quickly, based on their role and personal circumstances.
- Modify workspaces and communicate new and existing health/safety policies.
- Create recognition and reward systems for this group.
- Create a feedback system to learn and understand initial employee experiences.

Group 3:
Remaining employees who return to the workplace
- Develop explicit criteria about what health and business conditions need to be met before these employees return.
- Modify workspaces and communicate new and existing health/safety policies.
- Create a feedback system to learn and understand employee experiences.

For employees who may not come back on-site

- Properly identify who is in this group (or what roles).
- Create long-term policies and accommodations for working remotely.
- Use any learnings from the pandemic time to improve the working environment for those who continue to work remotely.
- Determine whether reskilling or redeployment in other work areas is necessary.
- Determine any legal ramifications of privacy, security, communications, and other critical issues.
Employee and customer preferences were already changing before the pandemic hit, but they may change even more dramatically now. How much business travel will there be, for example, if countries or cities ask travelers to quarantine themselves or provide documentation that they are not sick? Will organizations be willing to have all their products developed in a single country or region? Will consumers buy as much luxury clothing now if they’re worried about another pandemic eating into their savings? These questions and countless others will be answered over the coming weeks and months, but it’s imperative that organizations start making changes to their workforces now so they will be ready to capitalize on these shifts.

Workforce scenario planning now will help you to plan and develop the roles, skills, and structures your organization will need in the post-pandemic future. Korn Ferry calls these “the six rights.” And we are already seeing how COVID-19 is reshaping them.
Right source

What it means:
Work is efficiently and appropriately distributed between humans and technology.

The impact of COVID-19:
A shift from human to machine work to protect human workers and mitigate productivity loss.

Example:
Starbucks has created a “contactless experience” using a combination of digital ordering and redeployed store employees to reduce potential virus spread and the time a customer spends in a store.

Right site

What it means:
Availability of people with the right capabilities at the right locations to meet changing requirements.

The impact of COVID-19:
Creating a safe, productive environment and shifting work across workplaces around the world as needed.

Example:
Knowing its business had to continue but fearing for the health of its personnel, Citadel Securities rented a hotel in Florida. It then flew dozens of personnel, tested their health, and set them up to work.

Right size

What it means:
The appropriate number of people with the necessary skills for the jobs needed to achieve your strategic goals efficiently and effectively.

The impact of COVID-19:
Increased ability to flex up or down to respond to disruption.

Example:
Amazon is quickly hiring tens of thousands of workers in full- and part-time roles to account for increased demand.
Right shape

What it means:
The right composition of workforce, in terms of structure and purpose, as well as the appropriate demographic mix.

The impact of COVID-19:
Structures focused at the team level to drive remote work and innovative collaborations.

Example:
Many global corporations have deployed people between seemingly disparate divisions, as some work is declared essential and other work not.

Right skills

What it means:
Clarity about the capabilities necessary to meet future goals and bridge current gaps.

The impact of COVID-19:
Reskilling for virtual, more technologically enabled work and redeployment.

Example:
Verizon is training thousands of currently remote-working employees so they can provide customer support and sales from home even after the pandemic fades. At Korn Ferry, we’re seeing an increase in recruiting in five key categories: digital, cloud computing and agile, information security, mobile, and data/analytics. And its not just the technical skills that are in high demand. Learning agility its more important than ever as we move forward into uncertain times.

Right spend

What it means:
An effective staff/cost ratio generating the desired profit and growth.

The impact of COVID-19:
Reducing overall spend while engaging talent and building future capabilities.

Example:
One financial services company guaranteed employment to all of its staff through 2020, managing costs with short-term hiring freezes and curtailing other expenses.
This type of planning is not as simple as adding or subtracting head count. In many cases, the pandemic has altered or even completely upended how an organization does business, eliminating the need for an entire array of roles and creating new ones that might have been unthinkable at the firm. Under this scenario, some employees may be able to shift to new positions and adjust skill sets accordingly. Others may not. Only a truly systematic analysis can help organizations determine if their workforce is truly the right fit.

### How jobs are changing

- **A job is created**
  
  **If:**
  
  An organization needs a capability it currently doesn’t have.
  
  **Example:** Blockchain analysts, machine learning specialists and scrum masters.
  
  **Then:**
  
  Define and level the new accountabilities and the skills and behaviors truly needed for these new roles with great clarity. Then search for those skills and behaviors among job candidates, both internal and external.

- **A job is eliminated**
  
  **If:**
  
  An organization determines that certain work is no longer essential to the organization’s purpose.
  
  **Example:** Jobs replaced entirely by technology or leaders of business units that are disassembled.
  
  **Then:**
  
  Provide thoughtful outplacement support, reassemble new teams, and offer re-skilling opportunities where appropriate.
### A job evolves

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>If:</strong></th>
<th><strong>Then:</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Work is still core to the organization, but how it’s done has changed.</td>
<td>Identify the accountabilities, skills, and behaviors that have shifted. Offer reskilling support to employees. Use analytics to identify where redeployment may be needed.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Example:**
Sales people are still selling, but connecting with customers differently. The skills are often still core but mindset and behaviors need to change.

### A job is contingent

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>If:</strong></th>
<th><strong>Then:</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Work is needed by the organization, but not consistently.</td>
<td>Create the mechanisms to let a contract employee do the work. Monitor to ensure that the contingent label remains relevant.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Example:**
Retail scaling the workforce with contingent workers to meet changing demands.
A job is elevated

Current job:
Supply Chain Leader

Why it needs to change:
Supply chains need to be reimagined after the pandemic has exposed geographic vulnerabilities. At the same time, digitally transforming the supply chain can help predict when parts need to be repaired, improve inventory management, and even create more effective manufacturing processes.

New job:
Centralized Global Superplanner

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>‘Old role’</th>
<th>‘New role’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accountable for having material and products delivered on time to the right place.</td>
<td>Accountable for designing process transformations and growth of the business.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

New Skills Needed:
• Knowledge of demand/supply plan process, employee networks, and lean/agile methodologies.
• Management of data scientists.
A job shifts in focus

Current job:
Field Salesperson

Why it needs to change:
Business travel almost certainly will become more difficult after the pandemic. At the same time, many organizations are more interested in creating deeper relationships with their own customers, not just being the provider of a good or service.

New job:
Hybrid Inside + Field Salesperson

‘Old role’

Visiting clients and prospects to generate more product revenue.

Sales and delivery focused. Deals are sealed with a handshake. Independent of other colleagues. I drive my client.

‘New role’

Gathering data and building a compelling value proposition for clients and prospects.

Customer and postsale focused. Interdependent with colleagues. The client is my partner.

New skills needed:
• More acute business acumen.
• Analytics knowledge.
• Empathy and higher emotional intelligence skills.
**A job is created**

**New job:**
Data Scientist

**The role:**
- Data analysis.
- Complex Problem Solving.
- Mathematics.
- Computer Science.
- Automation.
- Data interpretation.

**Options to fill the role**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Options to fill the role</th>
<th>Key considerations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. Hire</strong></td>
<td>Market scarcity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Get clear on role purpose - how the job adds value, how it fits into teams.</td>
<td>High cost to hire.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Align skills and capabilities to the work</td>
<td>Fills the gap quickly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2. Reskill (Marketing analyst)</strong></td>
<td>Engages and develops future stars.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Start with roles that have similar responsibilities</td>
<td>Could cause pay challenges moving across functions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Clearly define and level new skills</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3. Upskill (Qualified accountant)</strong></td>
<td>It’s a risk moving someone to a bigger job.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Look for roles with related capabilities</td>
<td>Use job architecture to measure stretch and manage pay differences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• There may be more of a stretch from the future role</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Taking action to transform your workforce

An organization’s post-pandemic people priorities will be shaped both top down (the business imperatives and organizational capabilities needed) and bottom up (the current workforce and the speed at which it can be altered).

What’s challenging in the current business environment is that needed capabilities are changing faster than it’s possible for organizations to shift their workforces. Large-scale hiring is off the table for many organizations on a cost basis, especially with the economic environment around the world so uncertain. Instead, companies must reskill their existing employees or members of their communities. This means expanding people’s capabilities and employability, often using adult learning and training tools.

Reskilling is only part of the answer. In the postpandemic world, organizations also need to redesign the workflow, combine some positions, add others, and probably eliminate some. They also will need to be more creative in finding and onboarding people, including through acquisitions, partnerships, gig economy-style freelancing arrangements, and talent pools oriented to flex work. Finally, they must fill their enterprises with opportunities for continual self-renewal via modern learning strategies and digital technologies, so that becoming adept in new technologies is just part of everyday life.
Ultimately, the transformation of the workforce should answer three primary questions:

1. What’s the work that needs to be done?

Answering this question means examining every role at the firm against what the organization has mapped as its most critical capabilities going forward. It involves defining the critical roles for the future workforce, the skills and behaviors needed in the employees who fill those roles. Define what good looks like for a future workforce and redefine the success profiles for roles that are changing. This type of planning will clarify which jobs are created, eliminated, elevated, reshaped, or replaced with technology. Organizations also need to do this on the assumption that the coronavirus pandemic is not the last such massive disruption.

2. How do we close the gap between today’s and tomorrow’s workforces?

This involves segmenting the current workforce by skills and behaviors. Supply chain leaders, for instance, will have to anticipate how future market scarcities will impact talent needs. Only then can an organization determine whether it has the people to fill the critical roles of the future workforce already in-house or if it has to go out and acquire them.

Once an organization understands its populations in terms of future skills and behaviors, the next step should be figuring out how to reskill or upskill workers on a targeted basis for more technology-enabled, automated, or remote work. What this looks like will vary hugely by organization. On one end of the spectrum, some organizations will opt for large-scale upskilling programs, such as Amazon’s efforts to retrain thousands of warehouse workers to become programmers. On the other end of the spectrum, Chinese beauty company Lin Qingxuan redeployed a select group of beauty advisors to become online influencers, and with a bit of light reskilling around social media for that group of employees, actually grew sales during the Wuhan pandemic period. Both cases support not just short-term needs but a long-term, secular transition toward greater digitization. Finally, any look at tomorrow’s workforce should also include a review of leadership succession so the organization has a steady pipeline of purpose-driven, agile leaders.

3. How do we make the transition successful?

Workforce transformations can look excellent on paper, but they will only have any staying power if they are executed well. To improve the odds of a successful transformation, organizations must be maximally inclusive; that is, there is a role—and support—for everyone. Companies need to allow employees to give feedback, which can ensure that any issues involving the transformation are identified early. To do this currently, many organizations have added weekly or biweekly pulse surveys, with an eye toward monitoring employee sentiment and identifying challenging issues. These should stay in place, perhaps with slightly reduced frequency, as the overall transformation progresses. Finally, there needs to be serious consideration of the right performance and reward systems.
Rewarding people through the transition

Organizations need to continue to carefully monitor compensation spend against business performance as they bring people back from furlough and secure the talent they need. Some of the key points they will need to address include:

**Recognizing critical talent.**

Organizations may be looking at retention awards for business critical talent or spot incentives to reward front line employees who have been working harder than ever -and in some cases risking their health. Finding a way to recognize today’s everyday heroics is critical to building the trust and engagement that you will need to harness people’s energy and move forward.

**Focusing on fairness.**

Jobs are changing, people are taking on new roles -and they need to know their pay is fair. This is a time to pay attention to internal equity and make sure job grades accurately reflect what you are asking people to do. And remember that base salary is critical. People need stability right now and base salary is the core of the reward mix that people count on to make ends meet.

**Reviewing incentives.**

Organizations may or may not need to restructure the entire plan, but re-calibrating targets, payouts and especially plan funding are key in the short term. Incentives are meaningless when the goals and targets are no longer relevant.

**Ensuring you are rewarding for the right things.**

This is a time to step back and ask yourself if you are rewarding the right things. Reward strategy needs to be revisited anytime there is a change in the business and talent strategy. But this isn’t any ordinary change. We’ve all had the opportunity to re-examine what’s important to us. Rewards that engage people need to be meaningful. It may mean taking a close look at your performance equation -how you define performance and tie it to pay. Team based incentives can help rally people around a common goal; shorter-term spot rewards can build momentum and encourage agility.
Hit the gas

There are several short-term steps that leaders can take to get the workforce transformation started. The more specific the step, the less uncertainty employees will have.

1 Customise “return to work” plans for each employee population.

Segment your workforce and make sure each population has a customized return to work plan. Particularly appreciate the difference between full time work from home and returning to office.

2 Capture real-time learning via employee listening.

We believe that there will be an increase in frequency of employee surveys and the focus and value will be on driving change not benchmarking. Use these to capture learnings on newly remote roles and temporarily transformed on-site environments and have leadership teams periodically digest and align around these learnings. Which jobs have been most affected, and how? What perceived skills and efficacy gaps are arising from new ways of working? Which populations are disconcerted, and which are thriving? Answering these questions is crucial, as it get leaders aligning around a common account of the truth on exactly what lessons the organization will take away from the immediate crisis period and carry forward.

3 Support your managers to lead new ways of working.

Give your managers a robust tool kit to lead populations with a higher proportion of remote work or changed on-site circumstances. Managers need immediate support around the technical “what” (platforms and tools) and the behavioral “how” (showing empathy remotely, for instance) of leading virtually or in changed on-site circumstances. More near term they will need development in strategic agility and inclusive behavior. They also need wellness support for both themselves and their teams. These are hard jobs with long hours. And many managers would have had to make tough decisions about their staff in recent weeks which would have taken an emotional toll.
Determine whether your current job architecture is fit for modern roles of the future.

Start with a clear perspective on purpose; be clear about how you want to transform through the turn and what that is going to look like. Anchor change in the work people do, not only in the organizational chart but also through a modern job architecture that helps you level the work, align capabilities, and reassemble career paths. When jobs change, it’s important to have the right tools to ensure that changes are seamlessly connected to talent management and compensation.

Perform a quick hire / reskill/ upskill assessment of your critical jobs.

Start identifying gaps, especially in critical roles. The most common mistake organizations make on reskilling journeys is not properly understanding their current state of play and strategizing according to their population’s unique strengths and challenges. It’s quite common to either underestimate how current skill levels transfer to new work (a work group tinkering with robots doesn’t mean it has the skills to automate a supply chain, for instance) or overestimate behavioral willingness or affinity for new tasks (and then pile on too much training without enough behavioral reshaping and incentives). Getting this balance right is critical to success.

Align your reward to recognize people for things you need them to focus on now.

There is a good chance organizations will want to reward for different things post-pandemic, and a good chance that existing incentive plans will not pay out as planned. Get clear on what you need to reward for, ramp up recognition, and align pay to focus individuals and teams on what is most critical in the near term. Don’t forget to revisit benefits packages to accommodate new needs to support both on-site and remote workers.

Ask for help.

Remember that your change plan starts today. Lean on your change management experts to help you align messages, anticipate hurdles, and engage people in the journey ahead.

In a sense, nearly every organization is on the same track right now, emerging from the worst disruption in decades. The forced work experiment brought on by the coronavirus pandemic is causing all organizations to adapt culturally and technologically. Most will muddle through and be content to get employees back to the worksite.

Agile organizations and leaders, however, will recognize that things are not going to go back to what they were before the coronavirus. They are proactively taking steps to prepare. A major part of those preparations is remodeling the workforce, creating an efficient, productive, and engaged group of employees who will help the organization accelerate through the turn.
Back-to-the-office Checklist

Before you open

Preparing the office and working environment

- Work with local officials on timing
- Check with building management
  - Feasibility of return date
  - Ability to accommodate adjusted building layouts and other changes
- Determine which roles will benefit from returning
- Explore “at will,” “encouraged,” and “must” work-from-office scenarios
- Assess employee readiness to return—e.g., health of employees, contact with infected people, mental readiness

Policy review and action plan for return

- Address privacy concerns, including the use/dissemination of health data
- Consider necessary legal actions, such as compliance policies and waivers of immunity
- Refine policies around sick leave, PTO, and working from home
- Review provisions for daycare reimbursement
- Determine/assign groups for alternating work schedules
- Determine date of return
- Map communication strategy
- Establish protocols for workers who have, or are exposed to coworkers with, COVID-19
Making the office and working environment safe

☐ Ensure that building management has hygiene and engineering controls in place

☐ Explore temperature checks as a function of building management

☐ Discuss visitor control and monitoring services with building management

☐ Ensure that office is equipped with soap/sanitizer

☐ Ensure nightly deep cleaning of high-volume/common areas

☐ Assess seating proximity changes and determine A/B seating assignments

☐ Provide masks to employees and visitors as instructed by CDC guidelines

☐ Provide wipes/sanitizer in common areas and to visitors

☐ Encourage in-office social distancing of six feet

☐ Close common areas where possible and enforce social distancing in common areas if unable

Policy changes and making the return work

☐ Track visitors in terms of who and when they are meeting employees

☐ Cancel large gatherings or hold them via call or video

☐ Discourage shaking hands and other physical greetings

☐ Encourage employees to hold meetings outside when possible

☐ Encourage employees to bring their own lunches/meals

☐ Provide initial counseling or resiliency training for staff

☐ Establish mechanisms for sharing healthcare information with staff

☐ Devise mechanisms for sharing information around support services within the organization

☐ Review/revise policies to accommodate alternative work schedules

☐ Cross-train workers to allow for more flexible scheduling and completion of work

☐ Create contingency/succession plans for those in leadership roles

☐ Redefine goals and expectations for employees

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