



Is your business ready for remote work?



Extract from recent Gartner article.

Ready or not, many coronavirus contingency plans will require remote work. Seize the opportunity to prepare for future workplace and employee needs.

Thanks to the spread of COVID-19 coronavirus, remote work is suddenly a new choice for many employees — and an overnight requirement for some. Few organisations feel prepared for large-scale remote work, but you can take steps to make the experience productive for both employees and your organisation.

“We’re being forced into the world’s largest work-from-home experiment and, so far, it hasn’t been easy for a lot of organisations to implement”

“In a recent webinar snap poll, 91% of attending HR leaders (all in Asia/Pacific) indicated that they have implemented ‘work from home’ arrangements since the outbreak, but the biggest challenge stems from the lack of technology infrastructure and lack of comfort with new ways of working” says Saikat Chatterjee, Senior Director, Advisory at Gartner.

Success factors for remote work

1. Communicate openly and often

The first imperative in any crisis is to keep employees informed, but how and what you communicate are critically important. This is especially the case when employees are working remotely and may otherwise receive less information from organisational channels than if they were in an office with their manager and peers.

Remote-work success depends heavily on whether you trust employees to do their work even if you can't see them. Share openly and often what the real impact of the crisis is on your business, and normalise what to expect. If you don't, employees will simply turn to the distributed network of information — websites, social media, etc. — to fill the void. Make sure managers are informed so they can cascade information as needed.

Candor and two-way communication help to establish the trust you need to make your remote-work policies a success.

2. Trust in employees to be productive

Whether your remote-work initiatives are routine or urgent, trust is the foundation of their success. "Remote-work success depends heavily on whether you trust employees to do their work even if you can't see them," says Aaron McEwan, Vice President, Gartner.

Managers often worry about the lack of visibility into the workflows and routines of their direct reports when they work remotely. In our snap poll, 76% of HR leaders reported the top employee complaint during the coronavirus outbreak as "concerns from managers about the productivity or engagement of their teams when remote. "But worries about employee productivity are often overblown," says McEwan.

Employees who work from home often manage their time so as to leverage the time of day when they feel most productive, and they don't suffer unnecessary interruptions to the degree they do in the office.

54% of HR leaders in our snap poll indicated that poor technology and/or infrastructure for remote working is the biggest barrier to effective remote working. Still, it's pivotal to guide managers to focus on outcomes in performance and productivity reviews. Set accurate expectations with employees and enable supportive interactions among employees.

"When the dust settles, we'll likely see that our remotely working employees were just as productive during this crisis — if not more so," says McEwan.

3. Bolster technology enablement



Technology plays a key role in enabling communication and remote work.

Cloud-based productivity tools and other employee-facing technologies are increasingly prevalent in today's workplaces, but this sudden large-scale remote-working experiment will definitely surface additional lessons learned — and opportunities for improvement. To increase utilisation and improve the effectiveness of remote-working tools and technologies, communicate best practices and ideal use cases.

Even if your technology or infrastructure is inadequate, guide employees on effectively leveraging email, instant messaging and internal social media platforms to drive better and more consistent usage.

“The first lesson learned from the coronavirus situation is to accelerate the development of a technology infrastructure that can support alternative types of working,” says McEwan. HR leaders can leverage this opportunity to measure the impact on employee performance and productivity to build a business case for technology investment and more progressive policies for effective remote/flexible working.

Get ready for the remote-work future

This vast remote-work experiment is also a great opportunity to prepare for the future — when automation has expanded the role of knowledge workers and the preferences of younger generations demand that organizations provide remote-work options.

Consider some data from recent Gartner research:

By 2030, the demand for remote work will increase by 30% due to Generation Z fully entering the workforce.

64% of today's professionals say they could work anywhere and remote work policies are common (in place at 71% of organizations).

Remote work is already attractive to employees who need greater flexibility. It eliminates commuting time for those with family obligations; these employees are nearly twice as likely to work remotely at least sometimes as those without such responsibilities. And the workforce segment supporting aging family members continues to grow, adding to demands for flexible work arrangements.

But notably, while remote work is being increasingly demanded by employees and enabled by technology, most organisations (93%) defer to managers to decide who can and cannot work remotely. Due in part to the lack of trust, only 56% of managers actually let their employees work remotely — even when policy allows it.

The mandatory use of remote work for business continuity should signal to all organisations that it's time to revisit their remote working policies and redesign them for wider application as business as usual.

Source –

<https://www.gartner.com/smarterwithgartner/with-coronavirus-in-mind-are-you-ready-for-remote-work/technology-enablement>