

The Harder Truths Behind a “Soft Issue”

The pandemic has pushed everyone

— from C-suite leaders to individual performers
— to stress levels they likely have not experienced before. Because employees have faced heightened (and often competing) demands, isolation, and other challenges, their mindset and wellbeing tend to be at the forefront of companies’ decision making. Organizations that prioritize supporting their workforce today and in the future, especially those in newly remote or hybrid arrangements, will realize enduring benefits. While initially these may seem more like “soft issues” that do not have a business impact, there are some real truths to consider.

[A McKinsey article](#), originally posted by the World Economic Forum, suggests that employers prioritize employee wellbeing to strengthen their workforce for this year and beyond. It defines wellbeing as “the state of being comfortable, healthy, or happy,” when people are moved to feel good about their lives. According to McKinsey, companies should treat this as a critical business factor that can be regularly nurtured and measured. Also, [an International Foundation of Employee Benefits Plans report](#) shows that “employers continue to make changes to support their workforce through the COVID-19 pandemic.” Participating employers indicate that an average 56 percent of their workforce currently work remotely (versus 14 percent pre-pandemic).

Wellness-related factors naturally surface as concerns inherent in a primarily remote environment. Gallup data, cited in [Employee Benefit News](#), shows that 28 percent of full-time employees “always” or “very often” feel burnt out at work. Another 48 percent say they “sometimes” feel the same. This makes it increasingly important that companies pay genuine attention to the wellness element of employee experience — to ensure their teams

feel sufficiently at ease to remain productive, confident, and satisfied with where they are.

There will be talent-related implications for companies that handle this well — and for those that do not. [A Novarica blog post](#) explores what may be next for working from home, as it has become “the new norm” throughout the pandemic. In terms of employee retention, Novarica’s Nancy Casbarro notes that it may be difficult for insurers to “take away” the work-from-home option; they may lose some talent if they do so. Looking ahead, it is critical for leadership to prioritize employee engagement and mental health, and to maintain as much flexibility as possible. In another view, [a recent Prudential survey](#) finds that 42 percent of those currently working remotely say if their employer does not offer long-term remote options, then they will seek a job with one that does.

What about the benefits of these models moving forward? [Willis Towers Watson](#) offers guidance for organizations evaluating remote work. Many employers cite a number of factors that contribute to their reasons for providing flexible work arrangements — such as employee retention (61 percent), employee engagement (53 percent), and productivity (41 percent). From a generational perspective, [a MetLife study](#) reveals that 51 percent of employees in their 20s (Gen Z and young Millennials) believe their work/life balance is better today than it was before the COVID-19 crisis. When asked what factors contribute to the improvement, they cite the ability to spend time with their family (40 percent) and to work in a better location (30 percent). Across all employees, [BenefitsPRO](#) cites increased desire for flexibility — including control over their work schedule — as a primary trend that will define this year’s workplace benefits landscape.

Ultimately, understanding how best to support employees from a “whole person” approach — including how to help them succeed in new work models — will benefit everyone involved.

Continue to build the success of your remote leaders and teams with the [Remote PROductivity Toolkit](#). Contact talentsolutions@limraloma.com to learn more.