

A Look Ahead: Workforce Challenges and Trends

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Over the past two tumultuous years, our **Center** has dramatically altered our value delivery system in order to meet the needs of **our corporate partners**, many of the country's most respected employers, during a time of unparalleled change. In March of 2020, we switched to virtual offerings in order to meet member needs, and were able to do so while continuing a very high level of member satisfaction and engagement.

In spite of the lack of face-to-face contact, we maintained a clear focus and set of offerings by picking objectives that mirrored the concerns of our organizational members. We focused on three issues that were the critical and urgent concerns of those employers. First, was the challenge of **addressing race in the workplace** which came to the forefront following the killing of George Floyd. Second was **striving to achieve gender equality** which had always been a mainstream concern for the work-family field. But COVID's impact on working women / caregivers made this more challenging than ever as women took on the lionshare of not only caregiving but also homeschooling through most of 2020 and 2021.

Our third objective was to, at least try, to envision **the workplace of the future**. The massive shift that had occurred in March of 2020 to remote work, especially for "white collar workers," proved to be a long, global experiment in working differently. As COVID raged, then waned, then spiked again, it was unclear in what ways these 20+ months of working differently would affect how people saw the workplace. Even today, nearly two years after the initial global shutdown, it is difficult to say how the workplace will look going forward as this remains a moving target.

As we begin 2022, it's clear that many of the same issues that we have been focused on will continue to have currency in the year ahead. Our research team has been tracking the many complex issues that face both employers and employees and has developed a new document outlining **2022 Trends** that will help guide our research, programming, and resource development in the year ahead.

One of the most obvious and compelling issues that is calling for greater attention is **providing resources and forums that address employee mental health and well-being**. As COVID has progressed since 2020, there has been a corresponding rise in the incidence of mental illness. Initially, the focus was on the loneliness and isolation that many were experiencing due to work-at-home and lockdowns. Later the focus broadened to include the dramatic rise in the incidence of extreme anxiety, depression and suicidality. **Burnout** is also a major concern, especially for working mothers, single parents and caregivers.

Second, we see a need to more fully explore **new work models and ways of working**. Organizations are reshaping themselves and incorporating increased flexibility, remote, and hybrid working into their standard operating approaches. How successfully these changes will take hold and how that will impact our understanding of work and the workplace is still in process. If it does indeed become the norm, it will dramatically affect the ways we view human resource practices (e.g. recruitment, on-boarding, supervision and performance management) as well as how leadership nurtures and maintains organizational culture.

Finally, we see a greater emphasis on **more individualized approaches to career and talent management**. Taking a "whole person approach" to managing the workforce encompasses a wide range of challenges that come with managing, supporting and developing an increasingly diverse workforce. This diversity comes in many different forms including gender, racial, ethnic, religious, generational, as well as sexual orientation and gender identity, caregiving status, life stage, ability, and increasingly, those with widely differing social and political views (think for example about how people's views on the vaccine and mask mandates is impacting the workplace.) Creating a culture of inclusion and belonging means developing an appreciation for all the different facets employees bring with them into the workplace.

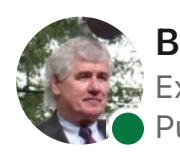
As we grow in our understanding of diversity in all forms and new ways of working, we face a much more complex and nuanced understanding of how to create and customize a truly rewarding employee experience. That represents an enormous challenge for today's organizational leaders and human resource professionals and our Center looks forward to contributing to this noble effort.

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Thanks for this synopsis Brad. I look forward to working with you on all of these important topics!

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