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HR SOLUTIONS

HR in a hybrid workplace:

Reimagining your workplace benefits in a virtual workplace

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In the past few years, the world of work has changed irrevocably. Much to the relief of many employees, the days of being chained to the desk for at least eight hours every day have become a thing of the past.

As business leaders and HR managers look toward a more progressive, more mobile approach to employee engagement, employers call out to retain their new-found flexibility for the long term.

What does the future of HR look like?

Like many other business disciplines, HR teams have had to upskill, and pivot to successfully make the necessary changes mandated by a global health crisis.

One key theme that many organisations have embraced, is hybrid working. A hybrid work model enables employees to choose the environment in which they work. Many may opt to split their time between home working, and their original office routine, with many adopting 2 days in the office as a sweet spot for effective hybrid work productivity.

That means technologies and workplace infrastructures has evolved to enable a more decentralised, more mobile future workforce. Now, looking forward to the next decade of HR and beyond, organisations put plans in place to provide the right tools, training, effective and flexible line management, and pastoral support for employees in this increasingly virtual version of the workplace.

The challenges of a remote workplace

While for most employees, this more flexible way of working is a welcome relief, for HR teams, managing the changes has come with its challenges. Here are a few of the ways in which organisations have changed, and how HR could step in to overcome some of the key challenges.

Managing disparate teams

Managing remote and disparate teams requires a more flexible approach than traditional line management.

Those that may have been inclined to micro-manage, may need additional support and training to adopt more trusting daily management practices. What's more, with team members spanning different locations, and working on different tasks, workload planning takes on even more significance. Improving management training or tailoring professional development programmes to cater to remote workplace needs, HR teams can provide the support to help underpin a more focused, efficient, and productive digital workplace.

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Mitigating loneliness and promoting mental wellbeing

One key challenge for remote workers during the pandemic has been the problem of loneliness. Without the social network of their colleagues, the day-to-day routine can become monotonous, and isolating, depending on their circumstances. Being able to maintain a pipeline of social activity (whether online, in-person or a balance of the two) while workers conduct their projects from home can help to keep teams connected and engaged.

Keeping on top of employee engagement

Without having staff on-site in a physical office environment, employee sentiment and morale becomes more difficult to oversee. A disparate workforce means it's necessary to check in digitally, and more often, through methods such as employee engagement surveys, and one-to-ones to help monitor staff sentiment.

Keeping work and leisure time separate

During the pandemic, the lines between work-life and home-life became increasingly blurry. With

employees using their personal devices for work purposes and team communication, workers are experiencing less of a cut-off point in terms of their working hours. What's more, without a daily commute punctuating the end of the working day, there's less opportunity to switch off, with work-related stress then stretching into employees' leisure time.

Employee data security

The increasing use of private networks and personal devices is also causing an issue in terms of cyber security, as cybercriminals have a larger attack surface to manipulate. That means keeping employees' data safe is also increasingly difficult, and organisations must focus on educating workers on the perils of cybercrime and offering safeguarding training.

In addition to all of the above, the recent cost of living crisis has added a new element to the mix. All this means life is increasingly challenging for employees as they try to find better work-life balance and keep in control of their financial health and stay focused and productive at work.

The benefits of a remote workplace

While there have been many challenges and roadblocks for HR teams during the pandemic, there have also been several advantages. As many employees have been crying out for better flexibility for years, now the health crisis has forced managers and business owners to come round to the idea of a more trusting workplace culture, with home working now being offered for most businesses.

That means, for the most part, employees have been able to find a working routine that suits them and fits around their personal commitments. For many, work/life balance has improved, and HR teams have been integral in ensuring staff stay happy and healthy while working from home.

What's more, with a more remote workplace set-up, organisations can benefit from a far-reaching talent pool, untethered to a specific location. With potential candidates spanning the entire globe, business leaders can hire talent exclusively based on skill, experience, and whether they're the right fit for the company, rather than proximity to the office.

If organisations successfully adjust to hybrid working, and cultivate a nurturing remote workplace culture, with better communication, and a trusting approach to their team working at home, they will find ways to better incentivise, engage and drive staff longevity.

Re-imagining your workplace benefits in a virtual workplace

Re-imagining workplace culture and benefits for a virtual workplace

Whether your team are working a hybrid model, fully remote, or still mostly from the office, chances are, the way you conduct everyday projects and tasks will have changed in the past couple of years. That means, as employees' priorities and desires continue to evolve, your workplace culture, values, and the benefits packages you offer may need an overhaul as well.

In the midst of a resignation crisis, whereby workers call out for flexibility and vote with their feet if it isn't granted, employers must be even more aware and accommodating in terms of keeping hold of their talent.

One of the best ways to get your workplace benefits right for your workforce is by simply canvassing opinion and listening to their wants and needs. It's no use assuming you know what workplace perks your employees want, as every individual will have different priorities, and preferences will vary depending on age, gender, and other elements of your diverse team.

Things to consider when planning your benefits strategy

There are several factors to consider implementing to ensure your benefits schemes appeal to every member of your team and provide the best opportunities for health and happiness in the workplace. Here are a few suggestions to make sure you cover all bases:

▶ Fight for better financial health

Amid the cost-of-living crisis, considering the financial wellbeing of your staff has never been so important. According to a recent PwC survey, 72% would consider switching jobs if another organisation cared more about their financial wellbeing. In the current financial climate, being able to offer financial advice, pension plans, and financial benefits that give staff better prospects for their financial future could be a make-or-break scenario for your staff longevity.

▶ Professional development

Offering a comprehensive training and professional development scheme is crucial if you want your staff to feel they're being invested in. What's more, with

remote work presenting new challenges and the need for untapped skills, training programmes in cyber safety, and remote team management, for example, could be a great way to keep staff feeling fully equipped for a more virtual working environment.

▶ Mental & physical wellbeing

With workplace stress, isolation, and burnout becoming rife as key roadblocks to a more flexible, remote working setup, it's time for organisations to put plans in place to mitigate some of these key mental health challenges. Whether it's mindfulness training, a comprehensive employee assistance programme, or discounts on mental health apps such as Headspace, there are several ways businesses can get behind the agenda for better mental wellbeing at work.

Likewise, physical and mental wellness work hand-in-hand, so perks such as subsidised gym memberships, subsidised private healthcare, or 24/7 GP helpline support could be a great way to encourage workers to take care of their physical health too.

▶ Addressing accessibility

When we think of accessibility in a workplace environment, we mostly think of the ways in which the brick-and-mortar office environment could hinder those with physical disabilities.

It's important to ensure your workplace is inclusive in every sense, both in its physicality and in a virtual environment. And in fact, a more virtual working environment could open opportunities for your organisation to hire exceptional talent from all walks of life.
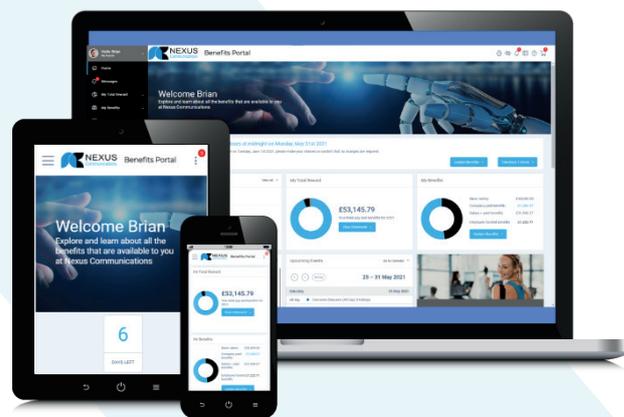
For example, is the technology you use accessible for those with disabilities, and do your benefits packages cover the more niche needs of this demographic? Does your website offer features such as screen readers, interactive tools, supportive AI, or keyboard tools so that you can attract and engage talented candidates of all abilities?

▶ Share the love for loyalty

With employee longevity becoming an enduring challenge for HR teams, building a strategy around perks to encourage loyalty might be worth considering. Whether it's an employee share scheme, sabbatical or travel opportunities after a certain number of years of service, generous pension schemes, or initiatives tailored to the individual, there are a number of ways HR can drive better loyalty through workplace culture and benefits portfolios.

Ultimately, the hybrid workplace presents a few challenges we wouldn't have anticipated a few years ago. But mostly, nurturing a wholesome, social culture and offering the best possible employee experience, with tailored, thoughtful workplace benefits is key for organisations looking to thrive in the brave new world of remote or hybrid work.

For more information on how you and your HR team could rise to the challenge, engage and retain your staff in the year of The Great Adjustment, by offering flexible, personalised benefits, get in touch today.

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