PAVING THE WAY FOR FLEXIBLE WORK AFTER THE PANDEMIC

Organizations and employees have faced significant struggles during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, one positive that's developed from the pandemic is that many organizations, even those historically against flexible work, have adjusted to employees working remotely and flexibly. Now is the time to collect data and build a business case for flexible work to continue after the pandemic ends. Monitor experiences and measure employee productivity, satisfaction, and effectiveness to understand what worked and what didn't in order to pave the way for the future of flexible work:

1. **Survey to Understand Experiences & Needs.** Survey employees to collect data around flexible work during the pandemic. The survey should include questions specific to why things worked or why they didn't so you can make improvements: What types of technology would have made remote work smoother? Did supervisors help balance work and personal obligations? Did managers maintain connections during this time? By gathering this type of data, you can make changes, as necessary, to improve employee productivity and effectiveness. You'll also have a better understanding of challenges specific to the pandemic so you can address these matters with flexible work skeptics. For example, if an organizational leader states that hours were down in his/her department, you'll be able to show this was related to less work available in that area due to the pandemic rather than issues with telecommuting.

2. **Conduct Insight Interviews to Understand Experiences.** While surveys are a great way to collect data, Talent and D&I professionals should meet with employees to secure more detailed and personal feedback so major issues can be resolved right away. For instance, if a manager mentions that parents can't be staffed on a particular project, raise this matter with an ombudsperson or have a direct discussion with this manager. By conducting one-on-one meetings, you gain a deeper understanding of challenges, can provide solutions, and assess whether challenges were specific to the pandemic or individual employees (i.e. were certain employees unable to effectively perform remote work due to childcare needs during the pandemic? Would technology or other resources have made remote work smoother? Could training have helped employees/managers work flexibly more effectively?).

3. **Make Real-Time Improvements & Monitor Results.** Don't wait to make corrective changes. As you collect data, you may receive important feedback on what needs to be fixed. Implement changes as soon as possible, and measure the impact of those improvements on employee productivity and satisfaction. This way, you can fix issues, improve experiences, show that these challenges can be resolved, and most importantly, show they are *not* intertwined with flexible work. Look at utilization/hours reports before and after changes were made to assess any impact on employee

productivity. Review employee experiences from insight interviews before and after these improvements to understand any effect on workplace satisfaction. By doing so, you'll be able to develop strategies that make flex most effective.

4. **Build Your Unique Business Case for Flexibility.** Analyze data carefully to see important trends you should highlight after the pandemic. Did productivity increase for any department(s)? Did certain groups feel more connected to their teams than before? Did any improvements such as technology or availability trackers help with employee productivity and satisfaction? By laying the groundwork for your flex business case now, you'll convince organizational leaders of the need for holistic flexible work in the future.

The Alliance is here to provide you with expert advice on monitoring employee experiences during the pandemic to build your business case for flex and make improvements in flexible work. Also take a look at our action step Monitoring & Measuring Flex Success to get more ideas on ways to collect data during this pandemic. Members also have access to several Alliance resources as part of their benefits: the Resource Library, Strategy Calls, Policy Reviews, Advisory Hours and Signature Seminars. To further discuss ways to collect and use data during the pandemic, contact Manar Morales.