

Managing a post-pandemic workforce

Creating productive and informed working arrangements



Questionmark Viewpoint

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Introduction: time to thrive

The time has come for employers to focus on the future. New opportunities await as the global economy begins to resurge.

After a struggling 2020, the United States (US) economy looks set to rise from the ashes. First-quarter growth could hit 10%.¹ Thanks to a combination of government stimulus and “pent up” consumer spending, economists predict that \$4trillion will be released into the economy as restrictions are lifted.²

Strong growth is also forecast across the United Kingdom (UK),³ the Eurozone,⁴ and Australia.⁵

How can employers ensure that their workforce is set up to take advantage of the opportunities that come with economic recovery?

For the last year, employers had little choice. In many cases, asking employees to work from home was the only option.

Now, as governments look set to ease social distancing restrictions, employers have decisions to make.

For some, a year of productive remote working has proven that expensive offices are a thing of the past. Others believe that their productivity will be boosted when teams are working physically together at least some of the time.

Each employer must ensure they create the right working environment that boosts productivity, drives engagement and retains the best staff.

¹ <https://www.cnn.com/2021/03/02/10percent-gdp-growth-the-us-economy-is-on-fire-and-is-about-to-get-stoked-even-more.html>

² <https://www.nbcnews.com/business/business-news/revenge-spending-vaccinations-could-bring-millions-shoppers-back-mall-will-n1257993>

³ <https://home.kpmg/uk/en/home/insights/2018/09/uk-economic-outlook.html>

⁴ <https://www.euronews.com/2021/02/11/economic-forecast-some-eu-countries-will-recover-in-2021-others-must-wait-until-2022>

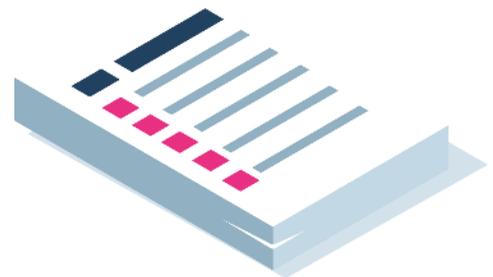
⁵ <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-australia-economy-poll-idUSKBN29Q07B>

This report shows how measuring workforce skills through tests and assessments can:

- Give employers the information they need to make the best decisions
- Ensure the workforce has the up-to-date skills to be productive in their new way of working
- Help employers explain and justify their decisions to workers, which will help retain the best staff, even if they don't like the decision

Questionmark Viewpoint

Questionmark Viewpoint is a series of white papers and reports that we produce to explore the challenges that our customers are facing, and which we help them address. These papers are based on what we are hearing from customers, and on research from other experts.



Section one: setting the right working arrangements

At one stage last year, it looked like the days of the office were numbered. Digital giants such as Twitter, Square and Facebook informed their staff they would be free to work from home forever.⁶

However, it quickly became clear that this approach would not be replicated universally. Just 13% of executives were prepared to contemplate letting go of offices for good, found a survey by professional services firm PwC.⁷

The same research discovered that there is no consensus around the optimal balance of workdays at home vs those in the office.⁸ Investment bank Goldman Sachs has announced its determination to bring staff back to offices as soon as possible. Banks such as Lloyds and HSBC are intending to cut the amount of office space they require.⁹

Each employer must make the decision that is right for them.

This decision matters. Leaders need the information to make it. Crucially, they must understand:

- Which skills are going to be important for future success?
- Which of these skills and associated tasks can be effectively executed from home?

⁶ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/jackkelly/2020/05/24/the-work-from-home-revolution-is-quickly-gaining-momentum/?sh=1091c7971848>

⁷ <https://www.pwc.com/us/en/library/covid-19/us-remote-work-survey.html>

⁸ <https://www.pwc.com/us/en/library/covid-19/us-remote-work-survey.html>

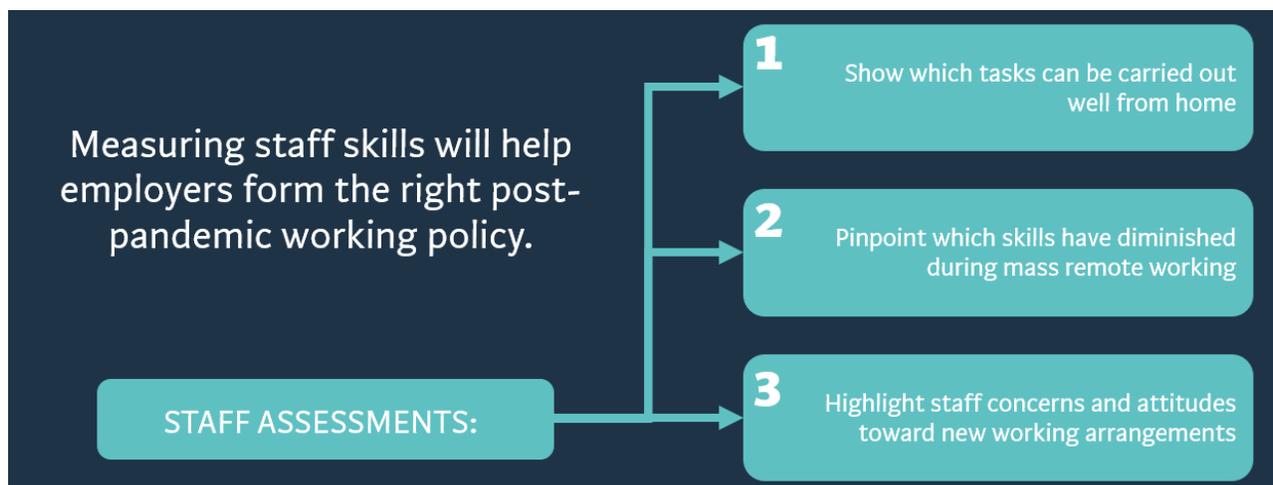
⁹ <https://www.bbc.com/news/business-56192048>

- In what situations, and with what tasks, will individuals or teams perform better in offices or workspaces?



How assessments with Questionmark can help

- **Measure the effectiveness of at-home working vs office working** – online assessments can show which tasks can be executed effectively from home and which can't.
- **Pinpoint which skills have diminished during remote working** – some skills have diminished during the year of remote working. This suggests that the “organic training” which takes place when teams meet physically is important. Assessments will identify these skills.



- **Survey staff welfare concerns** – leaders might not be able to satisfy every concern a team member may have about their working environment. But they need to be aware of those concerns.

Section two: building a productive culture in a new environment

When the world shifted to widespread remote working, employers realized that workers needed support to adjust. Many needed training in new technologies. They had to learn to communicate differently and with a greater sense of empathy.¹⁰

And new working patterns will require another new working culture. Employees will need the skills and attitudes to form that culture and ensure it contributes to productivity.

“Blended working”, in which people work remotely for some of the week and come to a physical workspace for the rest of it, is emerging as a popular choice. It is likely to mean:

- **Forward planning** – if the right people need to be in the right place at the right time, co-workers will need to think ahead. After a year of everyone being “a click away”, this will need a mentality shift.
- **Adaptability** – research for professional services firm Deloitte found that adapting technology to fit the needs of new working arrangements was easier than managing the human aspect of the transition.¹¹
- **Communication skills** – when some workers are in the office and others are working from home, remote workers may feel left out and disconnected, according to a study by the Harvard Business Review.¹² Teams need intentional support in how to communicate and work together.
- **Technology skills** – global workers have got used to Zoom, Teams and other video conferencing apps. But they now have to manage meetings where some are physically present and others “dial-in.” More thought must be given to camera angles, speaker levels and presentation techniques.

¹⁰ <https://www.pagepersonnel.co.uk/advice/career-advice/growing-your-career/how-many-these-10-skills-have-you-developed-during-lockdown>

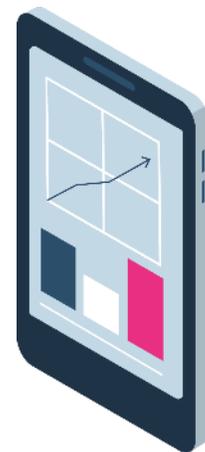
¹¹ <https://www2.deloitte.com/us/en/insights/focus/technology-and-the-future-of-work/future-of-work-research-workplace-adaptability.html>

¹² <https://hbr.org/2017/11/a-study-of-1100-employees-found-that-remote-workers-feel-shunned-and-left-out>

- **Meeting management skills** – 45% of employees report attending more meetings now than they did before the pandemic. They can find these meetings mentally exhausting.¹³ In the future meetings will combine those physically present with those that video in. Those running the meetings may have to work harder at making them a success.

How assessments with Questionmark can help

- Measure these skills among relevant workers – online staff assessments will reveal where these skills are already strong and where additional support is required.
- Identify training need – where skills are weak, assessments help pinpoint the problem. Employers can deliver training to remedy the weakness.
- Check the training is working – assessing participants during and after the training shows whether it worked. Where weakness persists, employers can improve training programs.



¹³ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/sap/2021/03/04/the-work-from-home-reality-for-the-new-era/?sh=17e1658723b7>

Section three: engaging the workforce

When employers set their new working policy, only one thing can be guaranteed: not everyone will greet it with universal approval.

Despite a range of research, there is no clear consensus on how many workers want to return to physical workplaces. In November 2020, Forbes magazine reported that workers across the US, Europe, Australia and New Zealand were reluctant to return to offices.¹⁴ A survey for technology company IBM in April found that 54% of US workers wanted working from home to be their primary way of working forever.¹⁵

Conversely, a survey by market researchers Wakefield Research revealed that 94% of employees are keen to get back to offices. Some 46% seek a full-time return.¹⁶ Research by tech company Slack found that three in four would welcome some kind of return. The same research discovered that 27% were opposed to returning to the office.¹⁷

Trying to please everyone will be futile. Nevertheless, keeping valued team members onboard and engaged will be critical to future success.

The right kind of working arrangement will influence a worker's choice of who to work for. Research shows:

- Over 60% of US workers are likely to prioritize job opportunities that allow more flexibility, according to a survey from job platform LiveCareer.¹⁸
- Almost a third (29%) said they would quit if they could not continue to work remotely.¹⁹
- One in four British workers have claimed they would resign if forced to return to the office, according to research by HR software company Personio.²⁰

¹⁴ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbestechcouncil/2020/11/18/your-employees-dont-want-to-return-to-the-officenow-what/?sh=47ab064b2345>

¹⁵ <https://newsroom.ibm.com/2020-05-01-IBM-Study-COVID-19-Is-Significantly-Altering-U-S-Consumer-Behavior-and-Plans-Post-Crisis>

¹⁶ <https://envoy.com/blog/employees-want-to-return-to-the-office/>

¹⁷ <https://fortune.com/2020/12/06/offices-covid-workers-returning-never-want-to-stats-data-2/>

¹⁸ <https://www.techrepublic.com/article/go-back-to-the-office-some-employees-would-rather-quit/>

¹⁹ <https://www.techrepublic.com/article/go-back-to-the-office-some-employees-would-rather-quit/>

²⁰ <https://www.icaew.com/insights/viewpoints-on-the-news/2021/mar-2021/uk-employees-most-reluctant-to-return-to-the-office>

These statistics probably indicate a threat rather than a promise. It is unlikely that large numbers will look to leave an employer while economic uncertainty lingers.

Nevertheless, employers should not treat the possibility that workers will leave for a better working arrangement lightly. Even at the height of the uncertainty in the pandemic, 24% claimed to be searching for new opportunities.²¹ When things look brighter, the staff with the most sought-after skills will be more likely to move on.

Employers cannot change their plans to accommodate every team member. But they can:

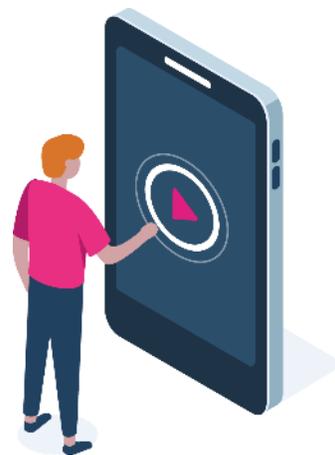
- **Ensure that they understand the concerns of the workforce** – what is it about a particular working arrangement that appeals to employees? What are their specific concerns or fears about adopting a new one?
- **Develop communications that address these concerns** – keeping everyone happy is not realistic. Ensuring that everyone feels listened to is possible.
- **Explain why decisions have been taken** – even when workers do not agree with a decision, they are likely to respond better to it when they understand why it was made. As much evidence as possible should be provided to explain why the policy has been formed in the way that it has.
- **Ensure team members have other reasons to stay** – career development is one of the main reasons that people look to leave a job. By stressing development opportunities as the organization prepares for growth, employers can demonstrate that there are good reasons to stay. Even if they are not getting their ideal working arrangement.²²

²¹ <https://www.thehrdirector.com/preparing-for-the-next-new-normal-how-to-retain-and-attract-the-best-talent-post-lockdown/>

²² <https://employeebenefits.co.uk/employee-retention-top-5-reasons-employees-leave-their-jobs/#:-:text=1.Career%20Development,to%20further%20progress%20their%20career>

How assessments with Questionmark can help

- ***Provide evidence for the decisions*** – the results of staff assessments will demonstrate that some tasks are better executed from a workplace, or conversely, that they can be done just as well from home. Employees will be able to see that leaders have made their decision based on sound evidence.
- ***Staff surveys*** – employers can only address staff concerns if they fully understand them. By surveying the attitudes and views of employees they can build an accurate picture of concern.
- ***Create meaningful career development plans*** – by getting a clearer picture of their current skill set, employers can offer meaningful and relevant training that will help team members take the next step in their career.



Conclusion: making the right decision for growth

Employers have to decide what their working policy is for the future. These decisions matter. Setting the workforce up to be as productive as possible will allow them to take advantage of new opportunities.

This decision must be based on sound evidence around what skills are important to the organization and in what working environment employees can best execute them.

Measuring the skills of workers can give employers the meaningful information they need to make a robust decision. Once the decision is made, they can use further assessments to ensure that staff have the skills and attitudes to build a working culture that maximizes productivity within the new arrangements.

This decision must be explained to the workforce. By evidencing why activities can be better performed in any given setup, employers can build trust. They can boost engagement and give themselves the best chance of retaining the right staff.

We work with employers around the world helping them make the right decisions about managing their workforce. If you would like to speak to us about how we can help, please get in touch.



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About Questionmark

We help organizations and their people unlock their potential to deliver better performance.

Questionmark provides a secure enterprise-grade assessment platform and professional services to leading organizations around the world, delivered with care and unequalled expertise. Its full-service online assessment tool and professional services help customers to improve their performance and meet their compliance requirements. Questionmark enables organizations to unlock their potential by delivering assessments which are valid, reliable and fair, which can be defended.

Questionmark offers secure powerful integration with learning management systems (LMS), learning record stores (LRS) and proctoring services making it easy to bring everything together in one place. Questionmark's cloud-based assessment management platform offers rapid deployment, scalability for high-volume test delivery, 24/7 support, and the peace-of-mind of secure, audited U.S., Australian and European-based data centers.

Working with Questionmark

To further explore how Questionmark could work for your organization, or to book a free consultation and demo, please see: <https://www.questionmark.com/request-demo/>

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