

Organisations Must Revisit Their Hybrid Workforce Strategy, Role of the Corporate Office and Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Initiatives, Among Others

January 13, 2021 — As HR leaders continue to address the changes in business environments as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, Gartner, Inc. has identified five future of work decisions HR must address this year.

Major shifts in macro factors, such as customer behaviours and government regulations, and in micro factors, including organisational strategy and policy, have substantially shortened HR leaders' planning horizons.

"2021 will be a year of not just recovery, but renewal and acceleration as organisations adopt new business, technology and talent strategies," said Emily Rose McRae, director in the Gartner HR practice. "Given the tectonic shifts of 2020, HR leaders will have to face decisions they must be ready to make in order to set their organisations up for success."

The five critical future of work decisions that HR leaders must make in 2021 include:

#### Triggers for Revising Workforce Strategies

At some point in 2021, organisations will need to revisit the remote and hybrid work policies written during the crisis. Successful HR leaders will establish triggers for reviewing and revisiting their organisations' remote and hybrid workforce strategies, rather than waiting for the strategies to become impractical.

There are two types of workforce triggers – talent and situational. Talent triggers ensure that business leaders can monitor threats to the organisation's talent strategy. With situational triggers, HR leaders identify challenges emerging from strategic decisions, such as having teams in different regions and at one-off locations.

#### Emerging Technologies for Onsite Employees

HR leaders will need to look for opportunities to reduce the necessity for employees to perform tasks onsite, and emerging technologies will play a key role in this.

Robotic process automation (RPA) and immersive technologies – such as virtual and augmented reality – are two categories of technology that are likely to help reduce the need for onsite work. RPA addresses barriers to create more efficient workflows; as a result, organisations have turned to this technology as a solution for business recovery and renewal. A 2020 Gartner survey revealed that nearly a quarter of senior finance leaders plan to increase investments in RPA as a direct result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Immersive technologies will help organisations create new channels for high value digital interaction, experiences that would be otherwise difficult to replicate in a hybrid workforce. HR leaders should consider how investing in these technological tools will create demand for new roles or skill sets.

#### Redefining the Office Space

In 2021, employees will work at home, onsite and potentially in third-party spaces. Corporate offices will now compete to serve employees' physical and emotional work needs. Organisations must decide what their corporate offices can offer employees that other spaces cannot.

To do this, HR leaders must understand employees' emotional needs and identify opportunities where the workplace can meet these needs. This requires HR to work with other business leaders to make decisions about the purpose of corporate spaces and how to evolve them, while also determining how and when to reduce the organisation's real estate footprint.

#### Employment Model Innovations

Many organisations experimented with innovative employment models as a pandemic response, such as offering 80% pay for 80% of full-time hours to employees who needed more flexibility, bringing in gig workers for pilot projects or setting up formal talent sharing arrangements with other employers to make up for low talent supply.

Organisations need to decide whether to continue using these employment models going forward. This will be particularly relevant for organisations with a high percentage of older employees in critical roles – offering greater flexibility in not just when employees are working, but how much they work, can help retain employees who otherwise might retire.

#### Commitment to Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI)

Many organisations made new or heightened commitments to create more diverse, equitable and inclusive workplaces during 2020. A 2018 Gartner survey found that 74% of employees expect their employer to take a stance on current societal or cultural issues, even if those issues have nothing to do with their employer. Those demands have only become more urgent during recent protests demanding social equity and justice. In 2021, HR leaders need to evaluate their organisation's talent strategy to ensure it will meet their commitments to DEI.

"Recruitment, compensation, performance management and workforce planning strategies all need to be evaluated to ensure they are in alignment with the organisation's goals and values, particularly if those shifted during 2020," said Ms. McRae.

Gartner HR clients can learn more in the report “5 Decisions About the Future of Work HR Leaders Must Make in 2021.”

#### About the Gartner HR Practice

The Gartner HR practice brings together the best relevant content approaches across Gartner to offer individual decision makers strategic business advice on the mission-critical priorities that cut across the HR function. Additional information is available at <http://www.gartner.com/en/human-resources/human-resources-leaders>. Follow news and updates from the Gartner HR practice on Twitter and LinkedIn using #GartnerHR.

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