

The Future of Work Arrives Early: How HR leaders are leveraging the lessons of disruption

Australia

RESEARCH OVERVIEW

Oxford Economics and the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) partnered with SAP SuccessFactors to understand the realities of a post-pandemic workplace for both employers and employees in 10 countries.¹ Our research offers a glimpse of the various workforce strategies adopted by organizations in response to COVID-19, including insight into hiring and layoffs, expectations for future employment changes, readiness for remote work, and investment plans around digital technologies.

This brief report highlights research results for **Australia** and suggests next steps for HR leaders as they plan for the years ahead. The findings show that Australian employers are less likely than other countries to expect to make major operational and strategic changes in the coming year—and as a result may be overlooking long-term employee reskilling.

AUSTRALIA'S RESPONSE TO COVID-19

Experiences with COVID-19 vary from country to country, based in some part on the scale of the virus spread, national responses to controlling the pandemic, and local economic realities. So far, Australia has done much better than many other countries to control the spread of the virus, while at the same time expanding healthcare coverage and supplementing lost pay—but these supplements are set to reduce in the coming months.

Our survey shows that executives in Australia are less likely than many other countries to say that flexible work policies and healthcare and other benefits will grow in importance over the next year, a potential oversight. Australians are also among the least likely to say they will invest in testing and tracing or remote worker management technologies, which could spell trouble in the year ahead.

Understanding regional and local differences will be critical for HR leaders in Australia and across the world as they make plans for their global workforces.

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¹ Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, Germany, India, Mexico, Spain, United Kingdom, United States. To learn more about the research, including a detailed overview of each country, visit: <http://www.sap.com/human-experience-shrm-oe>

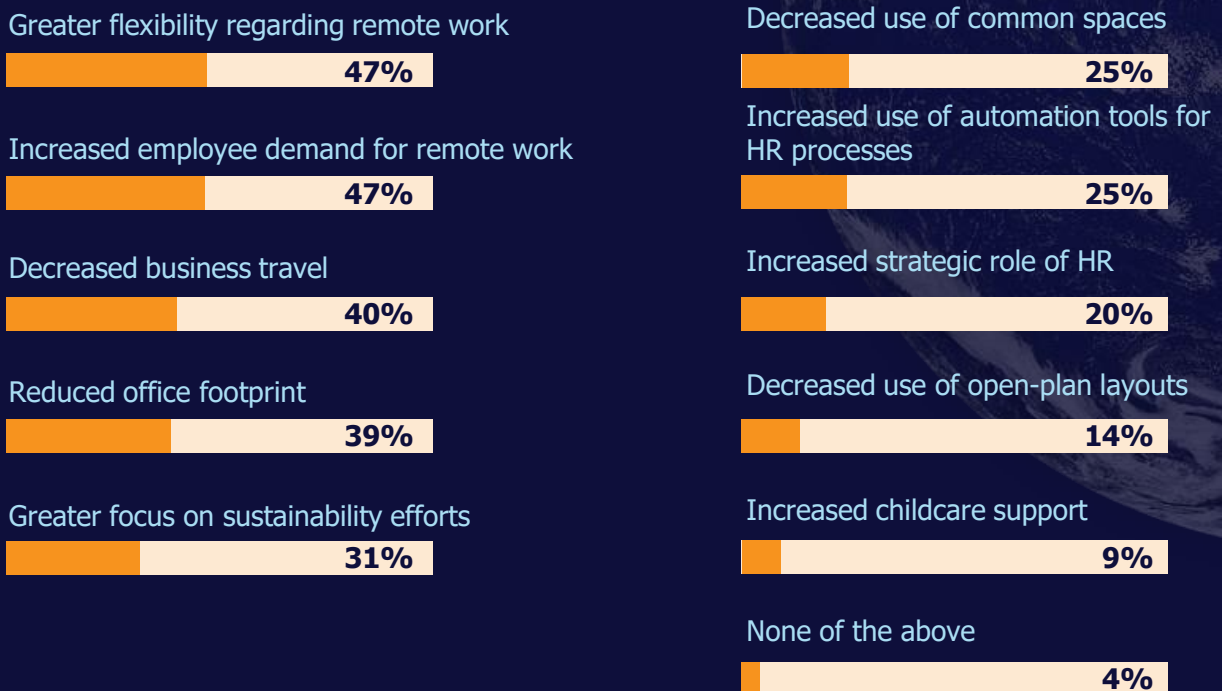
REDEFINING THE WAY WE WORK

The pandemic has redefined work and altered workspaces for millions of Australians, forcing leaders to adapt to unexpected disruptions, anticipate future challenges, and plan for strategic changes.

- The vast majority of Australian respondents say their organization has effectively handled new ways of working in response to COVID-19 (80%) and is well prepared to address the changing work environment (78%).
- But Australian executives may be underestimating upcoming challenges. Less than half (47%) expect COVID-19 to increase flexibility for remote work over the next year; unsurprisingly, maintaining productivity given new ways of working (49%) and establishing a culture that supports more remote employees (44%) are expected to become top challenges for businesses—less than many other countries in our survey.
- Most respondents are increasing sanitation and cleaning (65%) but far fewer are implementing social distancing guidelines and precautions (43%) to keep employees safe and engaged at work. Australians are significantly less likely than others to be staggering the number of employees in the workplace at once (34%) or conducting regular pulse surveys to gather employee feedback (25%), and just 14% plan to invest in return-to-work technologies (e.g., testing and tracing) over the next 12 months.

FIG. 1: Australian leaders expect greater flexibility for remote work

Q: Which of the following long-term changes (12+ months) do you expect COVID-19 to have on the workplace? Top-three ranked



THE POST-PANDEMIC TALENT CRISIS

Securing and retaining top talent remains a concern for leaders around the world, and many acknowledge the need to strategize for the new work paradigm.

- Nearly two-thirds (64%) believe COVID-19 will make flexible work more important to attracting and retaining talent, with the financial stability of the organization also top of mind (62%). However, Australian leaders might be underestimating the importance of compensation (43%), which takes precedence for respondents in other countries.
- Reskilling must be viewed as a long-term talent investment, but just 34% expect to invest in learning programs for reskilling and upskilling over the next year (vs. 38% in other countries).

FIG. 2: Flexible work will not be the only talent differentiator

Q: To what extent do you expect the following to become less or more important in an organization's ability to attract or retain talent, given the effect of COVID-19?
"Somewhat more important" and "Much more important" responses



MIXED MESSAGES ON TECHNOLOGY

Most Australian organizations are satisfied with the technology they have for new ways of working—but are they accommodating all workers?

- More than three-quarters (79%) say their company has the technology it needs to navigate the changing work environment. This could explain why just 39% expect to invest in remote collaboration tools.
- Yet less than a quarter (23%) say most of their workers can work remotely *and* have the necessary technology and environment to do so effectively, with customer service workers (54%), general staff (51%), and service/field workers (51%) being especially disadvantaged in this area.

Q: Which technologies do you plan to invest in the most over the next 12 months? Top three technologies

39% Remote collaboration tools

34% Learning programs for reskilling and upskilling, as well as new procedures

30% Performance management