

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

United  
Kingdom

## 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.<sup>1</sup> 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 the **United Kingdom** and suggests next steps for HR leaders as they plan for the years ahead. The findings show that UK employers expect to expand their remote working capabilities in the coming year—but may be overlooking the importance of long-term planning for employee reskilling.

## UK 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. The United Kingdom has struggled to control the virus, but has kept unemployment down by supporting business to retain their workforces, and, in certain sectors, injecting much-needed financial assistance.

The UK executives in our survey expect that flexibility around remote work will become much more important to attracting and retaining employees in the future, but they are less likely than other countries to say that work/life balance and compensation will be important, suggesting a perception gap. And just over a third plan to invest in employee reskilling, a potential oversight.

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

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<sup>1</sup> 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>

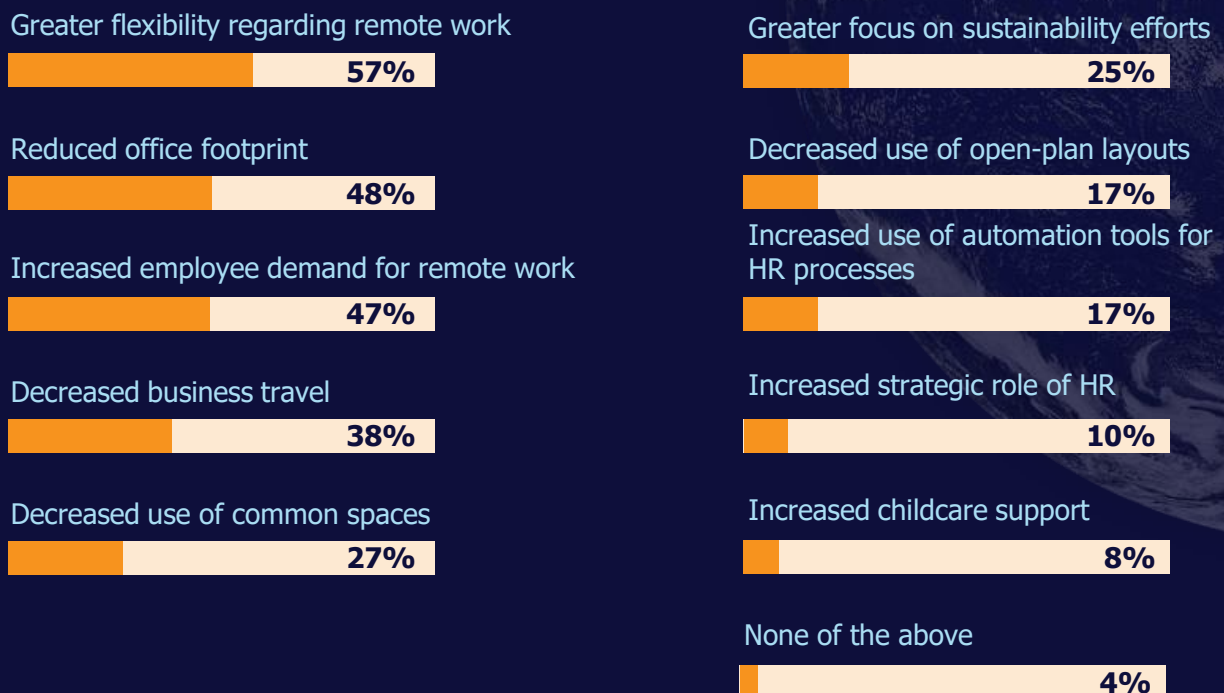
## REDEFINING THE WAY WE WORK

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

- A large majority of UK respondents say their organization has effectively handled new ways of working in response to COVID-19 (84%) and is well-prepared to address the changing work environment (73%).
- But with change comes challenges. More than half (57%) expect COVID-19 to increase flexibility for remote work over the next year; unsurprisingly, maintaining productivity given new ways of working (57%) and establishing a culture that supports more remote employees (45%) are expected to become top challenges for businesses.
- Most respondents are increasing sanitation and cleaning (67%) and implementing social distancing guidelines and precautions (54%) to keep employees safe and engaged at work. However, far fewer are staggering the number of employees in the workplace at once (45%) or conducting regular pulse surveys to gather employee feedback (19%), and just 17% plan to invest in return-to-work technologies (e.g., testing and tracing) over the next 12 months.

### FIG. 1: UK 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 (61%) believe COVID-19 will make flexible work more important to attracting and retaining talent, with the financial stability of the company also top of mind. However, UK leaders might be underestimating the importance of work/life balance (52%) and compensation (38%)—both of which take precedence for respondents in other countries.
- Reskilling must be viewed as a long-term talent investment, but just 35% expect to invest in learning programs for reskilling and upskilling over the next year (vs. 38% internationally).

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

- Almost three-quarters (72%) say their company has the technology it needs to navigate the changing work environment. This could explain why just 38% expect to invest in remote collaboration tools.
- Yet only a quarter say most of their workers can work remotely *and* have the necessary technology and environment to do so effectively, with customer service (55%), general staff (52%), and service/field workers (50%) the least likely to have the technology and environment to work remotely.

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

**38%** Remote collaboration tools

**35%** Learning programs for reskilling and upskilling, as well as new procedures

**33%** Listening tools/employee surveys