
**IDENTIFYING JOB SATISFACTION AND EMPLOYMENT TRENDS
DURING THE COVID 19 PANDEMIC**

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Abstract

The global workforce has endured numerous changes during the COVID-19 pandemic. Shelter in place orders and social distancing orders from governments have altered the organizational leadership approach to strategic operations. Millions of workers have endured substantive changes to the parameters under which they perform their job functions. As a result, the impact on workers has been considerable across a broad spectrum of industries and sectors. One common challenge for leaders seeking to manage change during and beyond the pandemic is to effectively attract and retain talented workers that provide a strategic advantage towards the efficient attainment of organizational goals. Leading change effectively within the organization will necessitate creating an environment conducive to increased job satisfaction. The method and model that organizations are using as they seek to enter a post-pandemic existence varies greatly.

This paper utilizes theoretical investigations into current literature and seeks to identify the major components of job satisfaction while integrating and consolidating existing research with contemporary literature to distinguish current trends in employee satisfaction. The result of this paper is that it can serve as a bridge between existing areas of research and practices through the application of applied leadership aimed at cultivating positive workplace relationships that are essential components to attracting and retaining talented workers. This includes organizational leadership and management efforts that embrace remote and hybrid employee relationships which tend to lead to a successful work-life balance. These efforts can lead to satisfied workers with increased job engagement, thus resulting in a stabilized workforce that increases organizational performance and a creates a competitive advantage.

Keywords: Job satisfaction, employment trends, leading change, leadership in modern organizations, organizational leadership, employee engagement, job performance, strategic management

1. Introduction

The turmoil of the global pandemic has led to affects within the job market that necessitate monitoring and ongoing evaluation as national workforces seek pathways to recovery. It is

essential to identify trends within the workforce, and the effect of these trends on the job satisfaction of workers.

As organizations of all sizes forge ahead towards a post-pandemic existence, the question of workforce development is at the forefront of competitive advantage in both public and private organizations. However relative an industry's effects can be to a firm's success, the constant across each sector has been the paramount importance of an efficient workforce. Therefore, the question of labor composition becomes vital. The pandemic has forced most organizations to redefine the approach to human capital development and workplace arrangements. Struggling to not only survive the pandemic induced recession but thrive in the face of adversity has led some firms to previously uncharted territory - the virtual workplace.

Millions of Americans were displaced at the beginning of the pandemic in the U.S, with unemployment reaching 14.8 percent, the highest level observed since the statistic began being tracked in 1948 (Congressional Research Service, 2021). As firms adapted to a socially distant model of operation, wages and workload were impacted. Job satisfaction and burnout has been reported in every sector from manufacturing to education, small businesses to government agencies (Chitra, 2020; Dwyer et al., 2021; Griffith, 2020; Patil & Gopalakrishnan, 2020; Sadiq, 2020; Spagnoli et al., 2021).

Effective leadership of an organization's workforce is essential in successfully and efficiently attaining a firm's strategic goals. Organizational leadership practices that embrace a proper culture and attractive work environment components tend to attract the most talented employees. This paper addresses a contemporary issue in organizational leadership today: how to lead employees beyond the systemic and cultural changes imposed upon organizations during the COVID-19 pandemic. As organizations attempt to lead their workforce through a transition to a post-pandemic existence, there have been extreme variations in the methods and results of work structures. Remote, hybrid, and in-person examples have all led to various job satisfaction outcomes for different organizations across a multitude of sectors. This paper takes a theoretical and collective approach to identifying significant factors for leaders to consider when attempting to increase job satisfaction of existing workers, and the eventual attraction of coveted talented workers that give an organization a strategic advantage.

This paper will begin by identifying key components for leaders to consider when trying to identify contributing factors to job satisfaction, such as job stress and burnout, job abandonment, and job engagement. The paper will then identify trends in employee job satisfaction, effective work structure, and compensation that have occurred during the pandemic as organizational leaders continue to adapt to a world coping with the impacts COVID-19. The result of this paper is that it can serve as a bridge between existing areas of research and practices through the application of applied leadership aimed at cultivating positive workplace relationships that are essential components to attracting and retaining talented workers.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Job Stress and Burnout

The number of people who experience psychological strain within their workplace culture has been growing steadily over the past few decades (Schaufeli & Maslach, 2017). Nearly every industrialized country reported an increase in absenteeism and turnover rates within the workplace as occupational stress and burnout are the result of ever-increasing emotional demands on the job (Schaufeli & Maslach, 2017).

Job stress is “defined as the harmful physical and emotional response that occurs when the requirements of the job do not match the capabilities, resources, or needs of the worker” (Marzabadi & Tarkhorani, 2007, p. 225). This can result in poor employee health, a sub-par work product, and an employee’s ability to work efficiently or safely. There are multiple sources of workplace stress, and the organizational stressors that are most reported include ineffective leadership from management, the possibility of losing employment, and lack of support/training for advancement (Marzabadi & Tarkhorani, 2007). Poor leadership and supervision are the top-ranking stressors indicated by dissatisfied employees (Marzabadi & Tarkhorani, 2007).

Job burnout is the extensive strain and mental exhaustion experienced by an employee within the parameters of the workplace, it is “a syndrome of emotional exhaustion and cynicism that occurs frequently among individuals who do ‘people-work’ of some kind” (Maslach & Jackson, 1981, p.99). Increased feelings of emotional exhaustion can be a key indicator of employee burnout, and as employees become more emotionally strained their contributions to the work product are depleted and unsatisfactory (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). This type of emotional strain and stress can lead to the development of a negative and cynical approach to the work approach, and a feeling of unhappiness about themselves as well as their accomplishments at work (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). Burnout can also lead to deterioration of job engagement for stressed out employees (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Burnout is effectively the consequence of prolonged exposure to stress within the workplace (Maslach & Jackson, 1981).

The result of job stress and burnout can be detrimental to an individual, and the organizational culture where the individuals are employed. Burnout can reduce an individual’s ability to perform tasks at a satisfactory level and reduce the employee’s overall effectiveness within the organization (Schaufeli et al., 2002). It also leads to a lack of worker concentration and effort, as individuals who experience burnout often have difficulty being fully absorbed or engrossed in their work (Schaufeli et al., 2002).

Increased stress and burnout within an organization’s workforce can be problematic for organizational efficiency and long-term goals. It is not always the employees who dislike their jobs that experience stress and burnout, “organizational commitment may insulate those who form a strong bond with the organization from experiencing burnout, or it may create burnout among those employees who are highly committed to the organization and who put forth greater effort” (Griffin et al., 2010, p. 243). Employees that report high levels of job-related stress often

indicate low levels of job satisfaction, which can eventually result in the employee withdrawing from employment responsibilities (Griffin et al., 2010, p. 243).

2.2 Job Abandonment

The avoidance of work responsibilities and a slow withdrawal from normal interactions within the workplace construct and established relationships can be early indicators of an employee's lack of job satisfaction, and subsequent intent to quit their job. This is especially true if normal routines are interrupted. An early phase of organizational withdraw is evident when employees begin to avoid workplace responsibilities or communication, which should lead organizations to recognize and consider non-typical behaviors such as lack of communication, tardiness, or excessive absences as possible indicators of an impending employee resignation (Hom & Kinicki, 2001, p. 984). Although personality and significant life events are factors that should be considered and can have an impact on anyone's routine, there are several indicators that an employee may be preparing to leave their current organization. Behaviors such as tardiness, a decline in job performance, and irregular absenteeism can foreshadow job abandonment and the employee's intention to quit (Griffeth, Hom, & Gaertner, 2000).

It is recommended that organizations avoid reacting negatively towards employees that exhibit withdrawal symptoms or other signs of an intention to quit, as this may provoke or accelerate the job abandonment efforts of dissatisfied employees (Krausz, Koslowsky, & Eiser, 1998). Krausz et al. (1998) indicated that absence from work or other organizational relationships may not escalate into employee turnover or job abandonment unless the issues causing the withdrawal persists or increase in severity, the authors' research demonstrated "that absence and satisfaction are significantly related so that the effect of absence on turnover intention is mediated through job dissatisfaction" (p. 69). In essence, withdrawal indicators in the form of lateness and absence are not necessarily indicators of an employee's intention to quit. However, job satisfaction is significant in an employee's long-term decision-making process as the majority of employee turnover models indicate satisfaction as an essential component to employees' long-term commitment, whereas tardiness and infrequent absences can be mild withdrawal behaviors that do not necessarily indicate impending turnover (Krausz, Koslowsky, & Eiser, 1998).

2.3 Job Engagement and Satisfaction

At the other end of the spectrum, "engagement is defined as the opposite experience of burnout, it is expected that all burnout and engagement scales are negatively related" (Schaufeli et al., 2002, p. 75). A positive workplace culture can lead to a strategic advantage through increased productivity and efficiencies. Yet the impact of culture can be undervalued as organizations do not adequately understand the vital role the workplace environment plays in employee job satisfaction, the result of which can lead to an unnecessary increase in stress and frustration as employees seek to manage professional responsibilities (Raziq & Maulabakhsh, 2015).

Job satisfaction is subjective, a reflection of how much an employee likes their job and can be viewed as an individual feeling that indicates the level to which that employee's individual needs are being satisfied or met by their current role within the organization (Griffin et al., 2010, p. 242). Although subjective, job satisfaction can be defined as "a pleasurable emotional state

resulting from the appraisal of one's job, an affective reaction to one's job, and an attitude towards one's job" (Marzabadi & Tarkhorani, 2007, p. 225).

Lack of opportunity and reciprocal positive relationships from management can lead to lower job engagement and satisfaction when leadership does not effectively communicate, or if individual expectations are unmanaged so that individual outcomes fail to align with employee expectations (Griffin et al., 2010). Shahu and Gole (2008) found that the higher an employee's stress level, the lower their level of performance, while employees who reported higher job satisfaction often performed at a higher level. Efficiency, production, and overall job performance is closely related to job stress and job satisfaction, as individuals who are satisfied tend to outperform their dissatisfied counterparts, and individuals who report high levels of stress and burnout tend to seek new employment opportunities to lower stressors (Marzabadi & Tarkhorani, 2007). Aspects of the work environment that include relationships with coworkers and supervisors, job role, physical working conditions, and compensation are the largest contributors to low job satisfaction and can play a significant role in an employee's intention to quit (Griffeth, Hom, & Gaertner, 2000). An unsatisfied workforce is unproductive which leads to employee turnover, a constantly changing workforce is inefficient for an organization and can cost time, money, and negatively impact culture.

3. Current Trends

At the height of the pandemic during 2020, the United States lost 30 million jobs. The number of employed U.S. citizens fell sharply at the onset of the pandemic, with aggregate employment dropping 21 percent at the end of April 2020 (Cajner et al., 2020). In the middle of 2020, there were three jobs created for every 10 employees that were laid off, and an estimated 42 percent of all pandemic-related layoffs would result in a permanent job loss (Barrero, Bloom, & Davis, 2020).

As the United States workforce continues to rebound while companies slowly add back jobs and wages, the aggregate nationwide payroll continues to trail behind pre-pandemic figures. The nominal wages for almost 7 million workers have been cut by businesses as millions of other employees have experienced freezes on regularly scheduled wage increases (Cajner et al., 2020). Using data from one of the United States' largest payroll firms, ADP, employment losses during the early stages of the pandemic in the private sector "were disproportionately concentrated among smaller firms and lower wage workers" (Cajner et al., 2020, p. 26). Although the pandemic led to a historic decline in economic output during the first half of 2020 (Thorbecke, 2020) millions of Americans who were sheltering in place drove an increase in revenue for some national chains, which led to large job creation figures to assist in the influx of sales. In 2020, Amazon hired more than 100,000 new employees and sought to hire another 75,000 by the end of 2021 (Koetsler, 2020), and Walmart hired 235,000 new employees in 2020 as online sales rose 74 percent (Selyukh, 2020). Yet in 2021 smaller employers have struggled to find adequate workers. Despite reported increases in sales and revenues, firms have reported struggles filling vacant positions with an absent workforce, in March 2020 nearly 42 percent of companies surveyed reported that they had open jobs that they could not fill with 91 percent of those companies reporting that they received few or no qualified applicants for their advertised open

positions (NFIB, 2021). Dollar General failed to fill the 50,000 open positions the company reported (Ghosh, 2021).

The balance of wages and compensation towards high levels of job satisfaction has been a formulaic quest that firms sought to identify long before impacts of the pandemic impact were felt in North America. Yet the delicate balance is key to organizational commitment and firm efficiency as employees have experienced new work arrangements over the past year. For some, the increased workload due to a lack of structured timeframe defined in traditional office settings is not worth the freedoms found in virtual work arrangements (Hom & Kinicki, 2001). For a large percentage of employees, the reported satisfaction derived from virtual work arrangements increased organizational commitment (Grover and Crooker, 1995; Roehling et al., 2001). The persistent presence of the global COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in an unprecedented shock to the labor market in the United States (Albanesi & Kim, 2021).

The pandemic has contributed to the loss of millions of jobs to the U.S. workforce, and the resulting recession negatively affected the earnings of workers who remained employed (Cajner et al., 2020). In early April 2020, 95 percent of Americans were forced home by shelter-in-place orders, forcing organizations to rapidly alter their approach to operations and productivity by allowing employees to work from home (DeFilippis et al., 2020). Finding quality employees continues to be one of the largest challenges for businesses in the United States, and the lack of a talented workforce can slow economic growth (NFIB, 2021). The global pandemic has specifically severely impacted the parental supply of labor as lack of access to childcare and in-person education options have led to a steady and significant reduction in labor force participation for women (Albanesi & Kim, 2021).

By mid-2021, social distancing requirements slowly relaxed, several states allowed fully vaccinated organizations to discontinue masking requirements, and the economy began to reopen. However, calling employees back to the office presented a different challenge than was present for companies looking to hire in 2019s pre-pandemic environment. There was already evidence emerging “that today’s much higher replacement rates are discouraging a return to work” (Barrero, Bloom, & Davis, 2020, p. 21). Anecdotal evidence offered by Prang (2020), Kullgren (2020), and Huffman (2020) highlighted the challenges faced by the employers struggling to find consistency amid pandemic employee retainment efforts.

The issue of a workforce unwilling to return to work, or finding willing employees to hire, is a problem that may increase as the economy reopens, and individuals are recalled by their employer to an in-person workplace (Barrero, Bloom, & Davis, 2020). In April 2021, the US Bureau of Labor Studies reported a significant increase in job openings to a record 9.3 million vacant positions (BLS, 2021). In June 2021, the US Bureau of Labor Statistics (2021) reported that total employment rose by 559,000 and unemployment fell to 5.8 percent, with the most significant job gains in education, healthcare, and leisure and hospitality. Yet as businesses work to recover from the pandemic in mid-2021, they still reported difficulty finding workers (Fox, 2021; Morath, 2021). With a record number of vacant jobs and millions of unemployed workers choosing not to apply, the issue becomes not a question of the quantity of jobs available to the

individuals looking to move within the workforce, but a question of the quality of opportunity for these individuals. Job satisfaction trends in research indicate that employee decisions are not necessarily financially motivated, but rather these decisions trend towards work-life balance, development opportunities, and non-monetary benefits (Hom & Kinicki, 2001).

The limited supply and increased demand aspects of the current workforce within certain sectors of the United States has resulted in a shift in hiring practices. One way in which employers are attempting to recruit employees has been to increase wages. As customers return to businesses faster than workers, some within the retail and restaurant industries are offering hiring bonuses or higher hourly rates: Amazon offered new employees \$17 an hour with a \$100 bonus for those who received Covid-19 vaccinations, Sheetz announced a \$2 per hour increase with an additional \$1 per hour in the summer, Costco raised their minimum hourly pay to \$16, Chipotle increased minimum pay to \$15 an hour with a \$200 employee referral bonus for crew members and \$750 for management referrals (Rugaber, 2021).

World-wide employer McDonald's has also shifted their approach to staffing amid the COVID-19 pandemic. With 800,000 workers and 13,450 United States locations, the fast-food restaurant has announced entry-level employees will make \$11 to \$17 an hour (an average of \$15 per hour by 2024), and shift managers will be paid between \$15 and \$20 an hour (Haddon, 2021). Indicating labor is one of the largest post-pandemic challenges, the company has also announced that corporate locations will seek to attract new employees through additional incentives aimed at increasing the company's appeal to potential employees by providing childcare assistance, paid time off, education/tuition reimbursements, and a retirement plan (Haddon, 2021).

3.1 Working from home

At the onset of the pandemic, significant job losses were experienced across the U.S. and in Europe. An estimated 20 percent of employed individuals in the U.S. lost their job in April 2020, 17 percent of individuals in the UK, yet only 5 percent of individuals in Germany due to an existing short-time work scheme that allowed employers to reduce employees' hours without layoffs (BLS, 2020; HMRC, 2020; Adams-Prassl et al., 2020). The percentage of tasks that an employee is able to complete at home was a significant predictor of job loss, regardless of industry or occupation, with those employees who were able to complete a large majority of their responsibilities outside of a traditional office space more likely to retain their employment (Adams-Prassl et al., 2020).

The swift transition to remote work, or working from home, signaled another significant trend that impacted millions of Americans since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. While the transition to working from home may have been difficult for some, the new work arrangement led to a perceived increase in productivity for American workers in professional settings (Bartik et al., 2020).

The number of employees working remotely had become an increasing trend prior to the workplace impacts of the global pandemic. The onset of shelter in place orders throughout the world forced organizations to allow temporary remote work arrangements. However, what began

as temporary accommodations to the pandemic could become permanent arrangements due to the increased productivity and positive feedback of employees. Bartik et al. (2020) noted that the accelerated nature of organizations learning to cope with remote workers has already been addressed by many companies, and one reason that these new work from home arrangements could be a permanent situation is that “firms have now paid the fixed costs of learning how to make remote working functional and having paid those fixed costs it is now optimal to have more remote working” (p. 13). As the United States attempts to transition back to some form of pre-pandemic living, the long-term impact within organizations could be permanent. Of the thousands of organizations that pivoted to telework during the pandemic “expect that forty percent or more of their workers who switched to remote work during the crisis will stay doing remote work after the crisis” (Bartik et al., 2020, p. 17).

Flexibility in how and where employees perform their responsibilities is becoming more common for contemporary employees that have successfully managed to navigate pandemic induced remote work arrangements. In the first half of 2021, tech giant Google began to open voluntary in-person work locations, and they reported that roughly 60 percent of employees had returned to their offices, indicating 40 percent of employees chose to work remotely when given the alternative (Pichai, 2021). In May 2020, Twitter CEO Jack Dorsey announced on the social media platform that all Twitter employees with job functions compatible with remote work have the choice to work from home or return to the office (Dwoskin, 2020).

For employees that were able to adapt and thrive within a remote work arrangement, this arrangement to work in a flexible workplace has become a feature valued by a firm’s more talented employees. In early 2021, Apple announced that it would be bringing employees back to its offices at the end of the year. However, 1,743 Apple employees responded to an informal survey in June 2021 that the company posted on a Slack channel with nearly 90 percent of respondents indicating that location-flexible work options were very important (Schiffer, 2021). In the same survey, 58 percent of respondents indicated they were concerned that their colleagues would leave Apple due to a lack of location-flexible work options and 36 percent of employees indicated that they might resign due to the same lack of location-flexible work arrangements (Schiffer, 2021).

The largest perceived challenge with a remote work arrangement has been the shift in organizational dynamic. There has been a drastic increase in meetings and time spent working for a large percentage of workers during the pandemic. DeFilippis et al. (2020) studied more than 3 million people in 16 cities worldwide and found that the number of meetings rose by 12.9 percent per person during the pandemic, but the average length of those meetings decreased by 20.1 percent for a net effect of an 11.5 percent decrease in the amount of time workers spent in meetings during the average workday. The researchers also noted that the average workday seemed to expand during the pandemic by 48.5 minutes, or 8.2 percent.

Expanding work weeks and unregulated hours can be hazardous to employee productivity, and more importantly, the employee’s health. A joint study through the World Health Organization (WHO) and the International Labour Organization (ILO) indicated that the longer workdays that

occurred more often during the pandemic can lead to significant health issues. A study, conducted from 2000 to 2016 and accumulated data from 194 countries, reported that working 55 or more hours a week is associated with a 35 percent higher risk of stroke, and a 17 percent increase in ischemic heart disease compared to employees working 35 to 40 hours a week (Pega et al., 2021).

The transition to remote work, however temporary it has been for each individual organization and industry, has not been without adverse effects. The social and cultural changes that precipitated from the pandemic caused a shift in the approach of the current workforce to consider aspects of job satisfaction beyond financial compensation. In March 2021, Microsoft released a study it had conducted on trends in the workplace. Studying more than 30,000 employees in 31 countries, Microsoft aggregated data into a report that found that more than 41 percent of employees from around the world were considering quitting their job as they reassess priorities following the Covid-19 pandemic, and 73 percent of workers wanted flexible remote work options to continue after the pandemic. Overall, Microsoft's (2021) first annual Work Trend Index reported:

- 44 percent of employees were considering a career change after the pandemic
- 40 percent felt their productivity levels had remained the same during telework
- 39 percent were exhausted
- 42 percent were overly stressed
- 59 percent indicated they felt overworked
- 40 percent felt there was a decrease in interactions with co-workers
- 44 percent felt working from home allowed them to be more authentic
- 50 percent had employers that prioritized their work-life balance
- 46 percent were more likely to relocate now that they can work remotely

The report warned that employees were experiencing exhaustion with a digital approach to productivity, and a remote work arrangement could lead to silos that suppress the impromptu approach to collaboration (Microsoft, 2021). To remedy the possible hurdles of remote work, Microsoft (2021) suggested that employers adopt a hybrid approach, allowing workers the flexibility to work when and where they want while supporting employees with the tools necessary to combat digital exhaustion. The report by Microsoft (2021) indicated that 42 percent of employees felt they lacked essential office supplies at home, 10 percent did not have sufficient internet connection to perform their job functions, and 46 percent of employees stated that they had not been offered financial reimbursement for their remote work expenses.

Consulting firm McKinsey & Company confirmed an increase in employee anxiety and burnout. A survey of nearly 5,000 employees by McKinsey indicated that 49 percent of employees felt some degree of burnout, and 47 percent were anxious about the future due to the lack of a clearly communicated post pandemic plan for work arrangements (Alexander et al., 2021). However, the survey also indicated that 74 percent of employees would prefer to work from home two or more days a week, with more than 52 percent of employees preferring at least three days working from home (Alexander et al., 2021).

3.2 Alternative Work Arrangements

An organizational approach to work relationships is not necessarily a decision between working full-time in a physical office or just working from home. Another trend surfacing as companies begin to resume pre-pandemic operations at a physical location is a flexible schedule or part-time remote work. Organizations with successful cultures often find it beneficial “to provide flexible working environment to employees where they feel their opinions are valued and they are a part of the organization” (Raziq & Maulabakhsh, 2015, p. 718). The possibility of a hybrid schedule could be appealing to workers that have commitments outside of the workplace during typical business hours. It is estimated that “at least 16 percent of American workers will switch from professional offices to working at home at least two days per week as a result of COVID-19” (Bartik et al., 2020, p. 17).

Google CEO Sundar Pichai announced in May 2021 that Google would be adopting a series of changes to increase flexibility for its workers as the tech company strategically approaches a post-pandemic culture. Pichai stated that Google would allow its employees to adopt a hybrid workweek where workers would apply to spend three days in the physical office and two days working remotely, and around 20 percent of the company could work entirely remotely (Pichai, 2021). The announcement also addressed workplace fatigue, stating Google employees would continue to be offered extra “reset” days (organization-wide days off aimed at increasing employee mental health), focused hours with restrictions on internal meetings so employees could be more productive, and up to four weeks a year where Google employees could apply to temporarily work from a different corporate location to accommodate summer and holiday travel (Pichai, 2021). Fellow tech companies Microsoft and IBM have also embraced a hybrid remote work approach, respectively stating that working from home less than 50 percent of the time for Microsoft and 80 percent of the IBM workforce will be working three days a week in the office (Clayton, 2021).

The hybrid approach is not only being embraced by tech companies. In 2021, Swiss investment bank UBS announced that it had studied the productivity of its employees during the pandemic, and after determining working from home would not have a negative impact on productivity. The bank decided to allow roughly two-thirds of its staff to adopt a hybrid work schedule as an employment perk (Patrick, 2021). Finance companies Vanguard, Deutsche Bank, and Lloyds adopted similar hybrid approaches for a vast majority of their employees (Duffy, 2021). Citigroup also announced flexible workplace policies for employees, specifically stating that the company believes the increased flexibility approach on a permanent basis will boost employee morale and give the company a hiring advantage over rivals such as Goldman Sachs and Bank of

America that ordered employees back to the office towards the end of 2021 (Arons & Dickson, 2021).

Another trend that had been gaining traction even before the pandemic forced employees out of the office was a growing shift towards a four-day work week. In 1930, British economist John Maynard Keynes predicted that within 100 years technology would have improved to a standard that enabled a 15-hour workweek (Keynes, 2010). While 15 hours a week might be difficult to achieve for most companies, there have been productivity increases associated with a 20 percent reduction to the five-day standard workweek.

Even before the pandemic crippled the economy in the United States, national chains were moving to an abbreviated work week. Shake Shack shortened the workweek of managers to four days in some locations and reported a positive increase in recruitment, particularly among women (Noguchi, 2020). Microsoft made a similar shift in schedules at their office in Japan in 2019, reducing the number of days in a typical work week from five to four while maintaining the pay of employees. The company reported a boost in productivity of 40 percent, and an electricity bill that fell by 23 percent, because of the new four-day standard (Chappell, 2019). Perpetual Guardian, a New Zealand-based financial services firm with 240 employees, made a permanent switch to a four-day work week in 2018 after a two-month trial monitored by the University of Auckland demonstrated a reduction in stress levels and greater job satisfaction ratings from employees, while overall productivity increased 20 percent (Booth, 2019). Following Perpetual Guardian's productivity increase, multinational firm Unilever, employer of more than 155,000 individuals and owner of brands such as Lipton tea, Heinz ketchup, Dove beauty products, and Ben & Jerry's ice cream, announced a yearlong four-day work week trial at their New Zealand offices beginning in December 2020 (Elegant, 2020).

The four-day workweek trend has maintained traction as the United States begins the slow transition to post-pandemic corporate culture. Kickstarter executive Jon Leland, political advocate Jon Steinman, and corporate consultant Alex Soojung-Kim Pang have planned a nationwide campaign beginning in June 2021 that will promote awareness for the shift to the four-day workweek (Pinkser, 2021). A trend that the group believes will lead to employees that are happier, healthier, and have a better work-life balance (Pinkser, 2021).

More than half of 5,000 employees, 52 percent, surveyed by McKinsey & Company in early 2021 stated they would value a post-pandemic work arrangement that utilizes flexible schedules with at least some form of hybrid model centered around remote or virtual work (Alexander et al., 2021). In addition, of the 41 percent of workers that reported they were considering a job change in the Microsoft study (2021), 30 percent of workers indicated they would switch jobs if their current employer forced them to return to full time on-site work (Alexander et al., 2021).

3.3 Work-Life Balance

Work often expands to the time an employee gives it. If the remote work or hybrid approach continue to evolve as companies strive to enter the post-pandemic world, employees working from home need to learn boundaries for productivity. Historical trends indicate that working

hours have increased because of previous economic recessions, and a similar expansion has occurred as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic (Pega, 2021). While this has led to an increase in productivity during the pandemic, employees continue to report anxiety and burnout (Alexander et al., 2021; Galanti et al., 2021; Microsoft, 2021). The intersection of employees' personal and professional lives centers around a proper work-life balance, the successful achievement of which revolves around a relationship of shared responsibility with organizations and the individuals that they employ (Hite & McDonald, 2020). Effective work-life balance relies on the policies and cultures of the organization, as "employees need a working environment that allows them to work freely without problems that may restrain them from performing up to the level of their full potential" (Raziq & Maulabakhsh, 2015, p. 718).

Organizations need to promote occupational cultures that protect employees' health and safety by reducing excessive hours within the workweek that create a hazardous environment for employee health (Pega et al., 2021). The successful employee will thrive in a sustainable post-coronavirus career by learning and evolving from experiences endured during the pandemic by adapting to changes reflected in the new organizational dynamic (Hite & McDonald, 2020).

Although some organizations have perceived a drop in productivity during the pandemic and remote work arrangements, the responsibility may not be on the individual employee. Organizations that fail to properly support remote workers can adversely cause productivity issues as workers deal with technology and defined role challenges while working from home (Galanti et al., 2021). Companies that embraced and accelerated the implementation of remote work through organizational support often experienced an increase in productivity, whereas organizations with inadequate support systems may have caused a decrease (Galanti et al., 2021).

Increased stress associated with a perceived lack of organizational support for remote workers can cause family-work conflict when unorganized or excessively structured professional responsibilities, such as late meetings or sporadic after hour emails, encroach on family obligations. Organizations that can properly support their remote employees decrease their worker's family-work conflict that would otherwise limit productivity (Galanti et al., 2021).

Organizations that prioritize attracting and retaining talented individuals will need to foster a sustainable culture that emphasized support while exploring ways to engage and develop employees throughout their career (Chudzikowski, Gustafsson, and Tams 2020). Companies that embrace remote work arrangement where possible stand to broaden their applicant pool beyond a regional approach that office-bound positions typically experience. The impact could be both an increase in talented workers for the company and ancillary effects on communities as "an increased ability to work from home would likely influence decisions ranging from where people live to where companies locate and has the potential to reduce demand for and reshape the nature of commercial real estate" (Bartik et al., 2020, p. 17).

4. Conclusion and Suggestions

The trends outlined in this paper indicate a strategic shift in the current workforce of the United States. Employees are valuing flexible work arrangements differently than pre-pandemic. The

result has been the identified shift in workforce alignment, and vacancies across numerous sectors. This demonstrates the need for organizations to foster positive engagement and employee satisfaction at all levels through organizational culture.

High employee turnover is costly for any organization and should lead companies to make strategic adjustments in their culture and the development of their workforce. Throughout the pandemic, employees that were on defined contracts were less likely to experience a loss in employment compared to at-will or temporary employees (Adams-Prassl et al., 2020). In the U.S., those employees receiving a salary were also less likely to be displaced compared to non-salary or hourly employees (Adams-Prassl et al., 2020). One way to try to ensure stability within a workforce is to offer valued employees limited job security through an employment contract that requires the employee stay within an organization for a defined period while receiving certain benefits (Griffeth, Hom, & Gaertner, 2000).

When recalling or rebuilding a workforce as the global economy attempts to transition from the pandemic to a new normal, flexibility and security are job characteristics that talented employees value. Considering alternative work arrangements will be essential to retaining and cultivating an efficient and productive workforce that provides a strategic advantage to any organization. Talented workers who are considering leaving a company are not necessarily dissatisfied with their job, but instead they are considering leaving due to work-related travel or inflexible schedules that prevent them from meeting the expectations or needs of non-employment related responsibilities (Hom & Kinicki, 2001). The lack of consistent, transparent communication about a post-pandemic plan has also created a high level of anxiety for employees wanting to continue to work from home (De Smet et al., 2021).

Human capital is an organization's most valuable asset. Talented workers are essential to productive and efficient organizations, therefore the "existence of efficient and self-motivated human resource is one of the important issues of great importance in professional environments" (Khalatbari, Ghorbanshiroudi, & Firouzbakhsh, 2013, p.860). There are several factors that contribute to an employee's withdraw and eventual job abandonment, thus it is essential to study predictors that include organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and comparison of alternative or similar positions that could all contribute to an employee's quit intentions (Griffeth, Hom, & Gaertner, 2000). Organizational trust, built through reliable and clear communication, can go a long way towards allaying employee concerns (Alexander et al., 2021).

These trends outlined above identify a clear shift in the role alternative work arrangements play as a component of job satisfaction. The goal of any organization should be to cultivate positive attitudes within the workplace. Attitudes can be utilized for a functional purpose, "directing one's motivation and attention toward desirable ends" (Judge et al., 2007, p. 364). Employees with a positive job satisfaction tend to be more effective and productive, where negative attitudes lead towards withdrawals from situations that create stress (Judge et al., 2007). With more than 40 percent of remote workers worldwide considering quitting their current jobs if they are forced back into the office, organizations need to consider the best path forward to attract and retain

talented workers as industries and sectors try to identify a clear path through the effects of the global pandemic.

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