

Future of (how we) Work Task Force Meeting

January 2022 High Level Meeting Takeaways

Topic: Staffing and Retention Amid the Omicron Surge

How are companies keeping employees safe amid the Omicron surge?

- Most companies are continuing to highly encourage or mandate all employees who can work from home to do so until further notice.
- Most companies continue to operate remotely or hybrid, with few companies making a full return to the office. There are a few companies that anticipate a full return by February 2022.
- Among companies that did not make a full return, many have encouraged staff to visit and work in the office periodically; however, staff have been reluctant to return.
- For on-site staff, companies have increased their testing frequency as an additional precaution. Other precautions for on-site staff include instituting a rotating working schedule, enacting a vaccine and booster mandate (which extends to potential hires), engaging in fully remote hiring process, requiring masks, being diligent about identifying and communicating to staff new COVID outbreaks within the company, and following strict cleaning protocols for shared on-site spaces.

As we launch into 2022, what are companies' hiring and retention challenges?

How has the Omicron surge complicated companies' staffing and retention?

- Participants shared **hiring challenges** related to:
 - Having work structures (e.g. vaccine mandate and 3-day per week work schedule) that do not align with what job candidates want, complicating hiring efforts.
- Participants shared **retention challenges** related to:
 - Hiring new people for onsite job positions but not having enough existing staff working onsite to interact with and guide new employees. This leaves new hires feeling isolated and prevents them from developing a strong relationship to the work, their team, and the company. One participant shared how they hired employees at the start of the pandemic who neither worked on-site nor met colleagues in person. These staff seem to be turning over at higher rates.
 - Building a positive culture for new staff in a remote environment and rethinking milestones to help recognize accomplishments, which helps with retention, continues to be challenging. Specifically, participants talked about how restructuring companies' onboarding processes in order to provide points of connection between current and new employees is more valuable than ever.

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Some examples include conducting the final phase of the interview process in-person and creating a buddy system for new and current staff to interact regularly have proven helpful in increasing human connectivity while companies continue to work remotely or hybrid.

- Observing third-party contractors or other companies trying to poach employees by offering them higher salaries. Participants talked about how it's easier for employees to take another job offer because many people are working remotely and have more control over how they use their time. One participant said it's hard to preempt people leaving because it's hard to know when people are looking for other jobs. Further, when staff notify managers about their two weeks, staff often have accepted the offer, and there is no room for their managers to counteroffer and try to retain them.
- Deciding whether, how, and when to bring employees back to the office. Participants talked about the fact that employees really enjoy flexible work schedules. There's a hesitation from companies to bring people back too quickly because that might create or exacerbate retention issues. However, participants also said the downside of not bringing people back could also incentivize them to leave. Participants were quick to share the benefits of in-person work, citing its importance in work that is collaborative or generative.