

HOW HAS THE PANDEMIC AFFECTED THE LABOR MARKET?

A “LIQUID” AND VOLATILE REALITY

We have adopted new ways of working and relating to each other due to the pandemic and have been marked by a legacy of transformation that will endure long term. These are changes that we spoke about, wrote about, and reflected on for decades; however, the spread of the virus accelerated its implementation. Since we have exhausted the 19th and 20th century-old labor paradigms and seeing that we are entering a post-industrial stage, we find ourselves in new times.

We are moving towards a knowledge and information society (with flexible schedules, less in-person attendance, and without digital disconnection). However, this process is still in its early adoption stages since the need to incorporate distinct ways of interacting within the work-

**The decade-long awaited
change occurred faster
than expected.**

Now what?

space is being adapted to the uses and structures of the stage we are leaving behind. Therefore, a period of reflection and adaption is necessary before transitioning into a new organizational model for this new phase. We are entering a new labor context that will be characterized by digitalization and big data as levers to be more competitive, by people policies aimed at developing and retaining talent, by productivity linked to schedules, and by the personalization of the labor relationship.

Until this new labor model matures and consolidates, we cannot be sure what to expect. We have faced several challenges (labor reconversion processes, technological changes, production variations, greater productivity with fewer hours worked) and, consequently, it is necessary to respond to these trials with 21st-century resources instead of those from the 20th century. We are facing a volatile, liquid reality, as Zygmunt Bau-man, author of the book "Liquid Modernity," said.


Indeed, our world is changing, and this impacts companies. They must manage new situations, such as growing urbanizations processes and greater demand for Smart cities, the accelerated outsourcing processes, the shift in ways of serving customers, new generation's concerns, digital transformations, globalization, family diversity, aging of the population...

**THE NEW PARADIGM: LITTLE CERTAIN-
TY, HOWEVER FUNDAMENTAL IN A
CONTEXT OF CHANGE**


We cannot face a liquid reality with rigid structures, but rather, by developing new paradigms, paradigms that are not yet fully defined, but that must be flexible and allow agile reactions to economic and social changes.

Apart from these uncertainties, we do have some direction about where we are headed. The new paradigm will not be determined by space-time, as in the 20th century (when people worked at a specific time and in a specific place), but by a commitment to the company's purpose and the fulfillment of specific objectives. Individuals can contribute differential value as well as time and geographical flexibility. This flexibility is a means to alleviate tensions between the old and new models.


Designing and building a flexible work paradigm requires cultural, legal, and labor relation revisions. In a webinar organized by ATREVIA, Roberto Martinez, Director of the Fundación Más Familia, highlighted three keys to ensure that the paradigm shift is successful:



- Bidirectional trust (the boss relies on the team and team relies on the boss, as well as the brand).



- Achievement orientation rather than mere presence (knowing how to measure according to objectives).



- The ability to build exemplary leadership that leads by example.

ORGANIZATIONAL TRANSFORMATION AND EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE

The employee experience permeates peer and hierarchical relationships, and, therefore, it must be consistent with the corporate culture. Oftentimes, there are “counterculture” attitudes or behaviors that many assume to be valid, and that are the main obstacles to progression and the introduction of novelties. This way of doing things favors behavioral development marked by inertia and resistance to change, which is usually expressed with phrases such as “it has always been done this way”, “well, if you don’t want to do it this way, tell the boss,” etc.

Overcoming all these impediments requires structural and comprehensive change driven by the conviction that progress must be made. Management and employee liaisons must be able to convey that the “wave” of change and the transformation of the productive matrix are facts and that they must be willing to “ride it,” learning new skills, incorporating new behaviors, and adopting a new attitude.

In fact, the pandemic has accelerated the anticipated change that has been predicted for the last 19 years: in 100 days, the transformation that has been discussed for the last decade has taken place. In the times of confinement and during the repeated waves of contagion, there have been new ways of working, leading (maintaining the connection with the team in every possible way, seeking proximity), relating, and communicating in order to maintain familiarity with people.

At a glance, it appears that these changes are due to technological advances (having laptops and a powerful Wi-Fi network at home, working in the cloud, etc.). However, in reality, the transformation has not been achieved through technology but rather by teams molding and adapting to achieve production objectives. Therefore, the new era of change begins with the individual himself and his ability to counteract stagnancy despite matters that have always been done a specific way within companies.

Companies have currently modified their story by relying on two pillars: social contribution and care for people, seeking to make the consumer proud of buying from companies that “have been standing up to adverse circumstance” and that have social vocations.

KEYS TO PROMOTE COHERENT CHANGE

To achieve this, it is necessary to consolidate institutions and leaderships that act as leverage for this transformation, and it is essential to have: strong institutions (companies) committed to the new status quo, which serve as a reference and driving force for others.

01 Flexible and socially committed companies with adaptable management systems that allow for personal reconciliation and encourage work commitment, increasing their opportunities to retain talent. Courageous companies that dare to

implement new management systems and combat fear surrounding change and uncertainty by investing in the culture and well-being of their people, will end up having greater productivity and overall well-being. A motivated team is more resistant to uncertainty and more willing to accept innovation.

02 A new company story. The story is a grand vision and purpose that does not change; it is the mission that adapts. An emotional message must be built, one that engages employees and connects with people, adopting a vision for the future.

03 Management that leads by trust and by example, with the ability to maintain a medium-term vision along with insight and understanding of employee's current reality. They must not only provide a vision for the future but also, empower the team and be able to work in another ecosystem and organizational system when the context requires it, in order to remain relevant for the consumer/customer and society.

Leaders must take on learning new skills, detect talent, be open to change, abilities, and challenges, accompanied by fluid communication and deployment of psychosocial skills (empathy, listening, and recognition).

04 Incorporate the internal communication purpose in transformation plans as a fundamental aspect to encourage cultural change.

Internal communication has made an enormous effort to draw people closer and mitigate the effects of uncertainty. Maintaining attitudes of understanding, closeness, companionship, and trust will be key to linking the corporate purpose and alignment to strategic priorities.

05 It is essential to listen to employees and create conversational spaces and co-creation to improve and renew working norms which are essential during this new context. It is crucial to capitalize on what has been learned during this "pilot project" stage.

06 A new employee experience that reinforces the corporate culture is a lever for motivation, forms loyalty, and promotes talent development.

The pandemic, and accompanying changes, are a turning point and an opportunity to implement the full scope of the workplace transformation to all areas. The companies that know how to adapt in a more agile and flexible way will be the most reliable and attractive to TODAY's talent.

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