

The Future of Work

The African Talent Landscape Reimagined
One Year into the COVID-19 Pandemic



FUZU

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Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic fundamentally changed the way companies and employees work, flipping the notion of working from home on its head. By April 2020, many organizations had already set aside measures to allow for remote work. Globally, 88 percent of organizations made it compulsory for their staff to work from home when the pandemic hit. For many, this transition raised questions about the need to maintain office space, the organization's ability to attract talent and even the productivity of employees when doing remote work. Big tech companies such as Microsoft and Twitter have allowed employees to choose whether they want to continue working from home or returning to the office after the pandemic. In contrast, numerous industries have struggled to move to remote work given the nature of their businesses, particularly hard-hit sectors such as tourism, hospitality, and manufacturing. Moreover, many organizations were reluctant to abandon the office space given the perceived impact on collaboration and company culture, with preferences leading more towards hybrid workweeks.

In Africa, the pandemic brought similar turmoil. In a survey of 7,500 leading professionals in May 2020, [Fuzu's research](#) showed that the unemployment rate was almost 60 percent across all professions; 30-40 percent of which was directly attributable to COVID-19. For those fortunate enough to retain employment, almost 20 percent of these professionals were put on unpaid leave. On top of the overall impact on employment, severe lockdown measures implemented in March / April 2020 led most businesses to shut their doors or move to nearly full-time remote work.

Now one year into the pandemic, with vaccines slowly starting to trickle into Africa -but a third wave upon us- we wanted to better understand what the impact has been for employers across the region and where they see the talent landscape going as the world gradually returns to normal. To better answer these questions, Fuzu surveyed over 400+ business and HR leaders from across 6+ industries on the continent to get a clearer picture of how companies are adjusting.

Happy reading!

Jussi Hinkkanen, CEO Fuzu, April 2021

Chapter 1: Re-envisioning working models across the continent

Overall, 43 percent of organizations are currently employing flexible working models, but there are large variations by industry

The rollout of COVID-19 vaccines has seen things slowly begin to return to a new normal globally. Many companies have already begun to ask their employees to return physically to the workplace. [A global survey](#) showed that 40 percent of companies that were working remotely indicated an intention of having their staff either fully or mostly back to the office as from March 2021. This is the same case in Africa as 67 percent of survey respondents reported to be either fully or mostly back to the office.

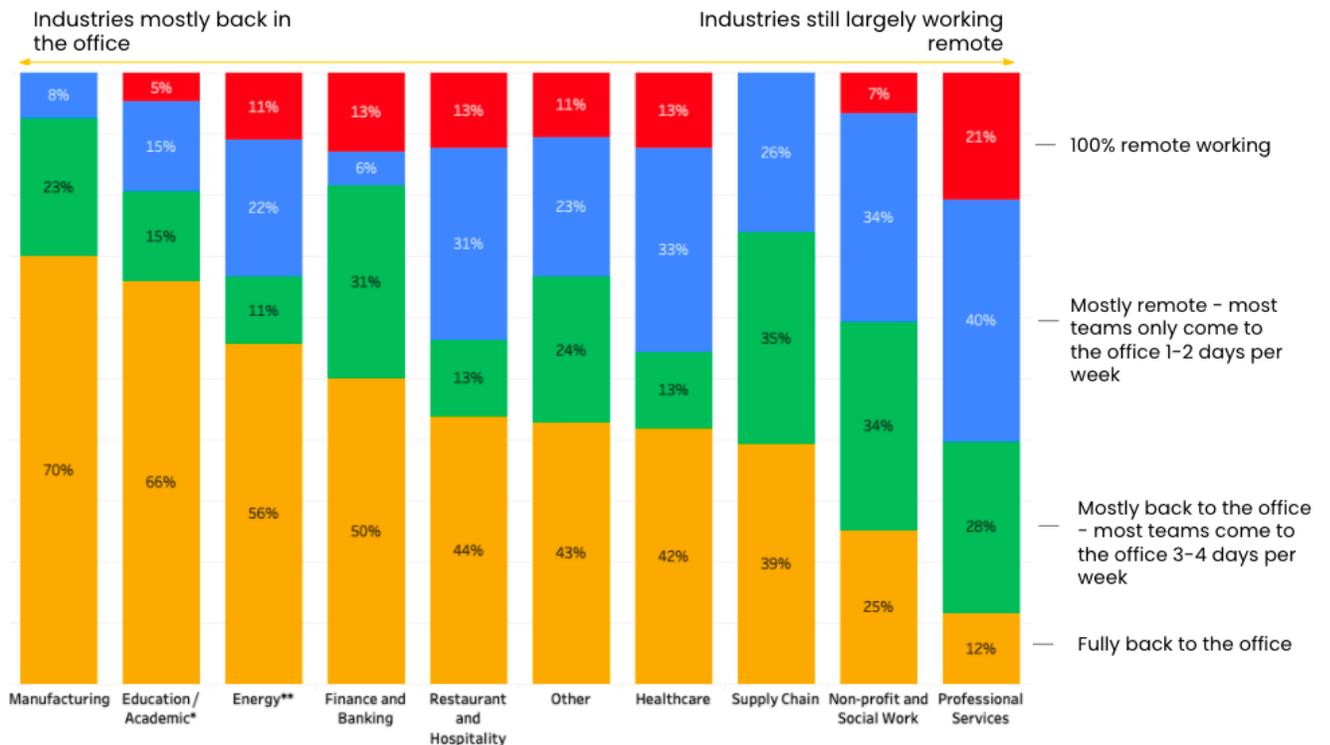
The extent to which employees have so far either fully or mostly returned to the workplace varies by industry. The manufacturing industry has 70 percent of its workforce returning fully back to the office and 23 percent returning for most of the week (Exhibit 1). This can be explained by the fact that many [manufacturing jobs are usually on-site](#) and cannot be carried out remotely. According to a 2020 [study by a global consulting firm](#), for many Western companies, COVID-19-related risks meant that they automated many of their manufacturing jobs so that many employees in the manufacturing sector were laid off. This does not seem to be the observed trend in African companies. It may be interesting, however, to monitor whether this automation trend will expand to African companies even post-COVID. The numbers within the education sector are closely related to those in the manufacturing sector. [Schools in Kenya have recently reopened](#), after months of closures. As such, educators have mostly returned to work physically, with nearly 70 percent making a full return and only 5 percent in the education space working remotely.

On the other end of the spectrum, professional service firms (think accounting, financial advisory, consulting) continue to embrace more flexible working models, with most of the staff in this space working either fully or mostly remotely. These roles, in which workers require extensive cognitive thinking and problem solving, managing and developing people, and data processing have the [greatest potential](#)

[to work from home](#). In fact, only 12 percent of employees in this space have returned fully to the office. This is expected to be a long-term trend, with a [Deloitte study](#) projecting that 67 percent of the professional services workforce will transition to remote working arrangements within the next two years.

Exhibit 1

Current operating models are greatly influenced by industry of organization



* Education/Academic industry include higher education institutions, private schools and public high schools
 ** Energy industry include solar energy companies and petroleum product distributors

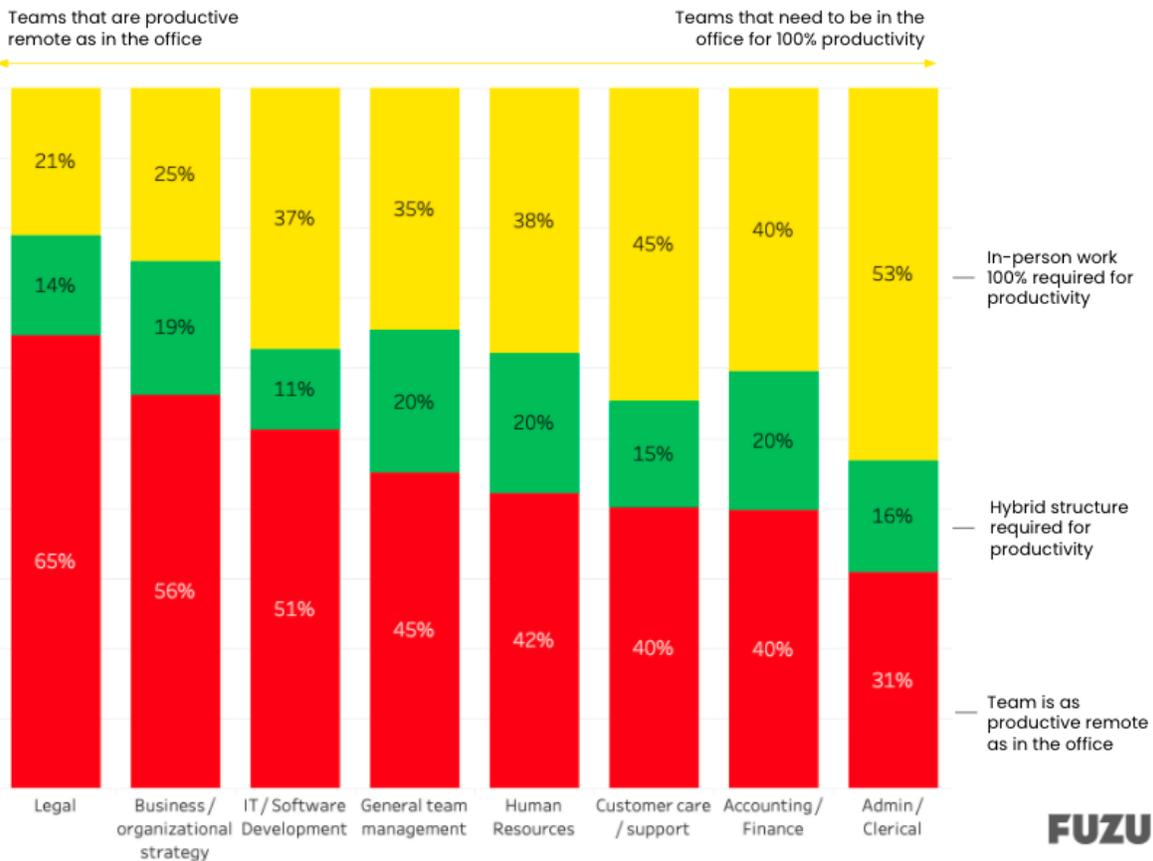


Survey respondents were ~2x more likely to say legal and business strategy roles (“knowledge workers”) can work as productively from home as clerical roles

Much like the variations seen in the operating model by industry, a professional’s job role has a significant impact on their perceived ability to maintain productivity while working at home. In Africa, customer-facing roles such as administration and customer service seem to demand teams to be back at the office for 100 percent productivity (Exhibit 2). Globally, the trend is different with administrative and clerical jobs comprising a large share of roles that allow working from home. On the other hand, for roles that do not require direct contact with customers, teams are just as productive remote as they are in the office. Survey respondents were ~2x more likely to say legal and business strategy roles can work as productively from home as clerical roles. “Some job functions that involve technical work require employees to be in the field. However, job functions that involve the review of documents, writing of papers, or collection of data can be done remotely,” a manager of an international development agency told us. A smaller but significant portion of the workforce is working on a hybrid basis to ensure productivity. McKinsey anticipates that a hybrid model of remote work is likely to persist well beyond the pandemic, mostly for a more highly-educated, well-paid minority of the employees at the workplace.

Exhibit 2

Operating models are dependent on the team



Despite the prevalence of remote work, professionals still face many barriers that prevent 100 percent productivity when working from home. The survey revealed that internet connectivity and inaccessibility of work tools ranked as the highest barriers to productivity by creating a poor remote-work environment (Exhibit 4). “Most households lack hardware such as printers and scanners and this is a problem with working from home,” a manager of an international development agency reported. However, some companies identified these challenges from the onset and made decisions to upgrade technology to support working from home. “Our employees can access our technology from wherever they are (through digital tools such as our ERP system and VPNs for cyber-security) and this eliminates the hindrance to

providing exemplary customer service when working remotely,” said Hannah Karuru, Head of Human Resources at Chloride Exide.

From the survey, 29 percent of respondents identified that company culture suffered when employees transitioned to remote work. New members recruited during the pandemic have found it difficult to adapt to the company culture. A member of an HR team in an international agency told us that he is yet to meet some new staff who joined in 2020 because working from home has made social interactions among employees more difficult.

[Social connections and collaboration are the primary benefits of "time in the office"](#), which is essential in improving efficiency and harnessing innovation. In response, many organizations have designed activities to motivate teams to connect with each other and maintain the company culture. “We designed outdoor social-distanced events to allow employees to have a personal touch with each other. This improved the situation a lot,” said Hannah Karuru. Companies are also proactively checking on the mental well-being of team members, and ensure that they are fully supported as they adjust to new working spaces. At Fuzu, we provide mental health support through Wazi to ensure employees have access to counseling services. Pulse surveys to various Fuzu teams allow us to identify challenges that members are facing when working remotely. Collection of regular feedback has been used by companies to identify ways in which employers can offer support to employees as best as possible.

Some HR professionals also saw a rise in disciplinary cases stemming from poor communication from team members. Too many distractions at home hindered employees from meeting deadlines, joining video calls on time, and even completing work deliverables. This situation compelled HR personnel to pay closer attention to barriers that were specific to different people. “We became more cognizant of diverse environments from where employees are working. This allowed us to understand their specific challenges more,” said Hannah Karuru. Additionally, scheduled deliverables, regular check-ins, reward schemes, and professional development training have been used by African companies to keep employees engaged and motivated when they work from home.

At Fuzu, we shifted our focus more towards work outcomes rather than face-time in the office. Moreover, we tailored our meeting cadence to ensure:

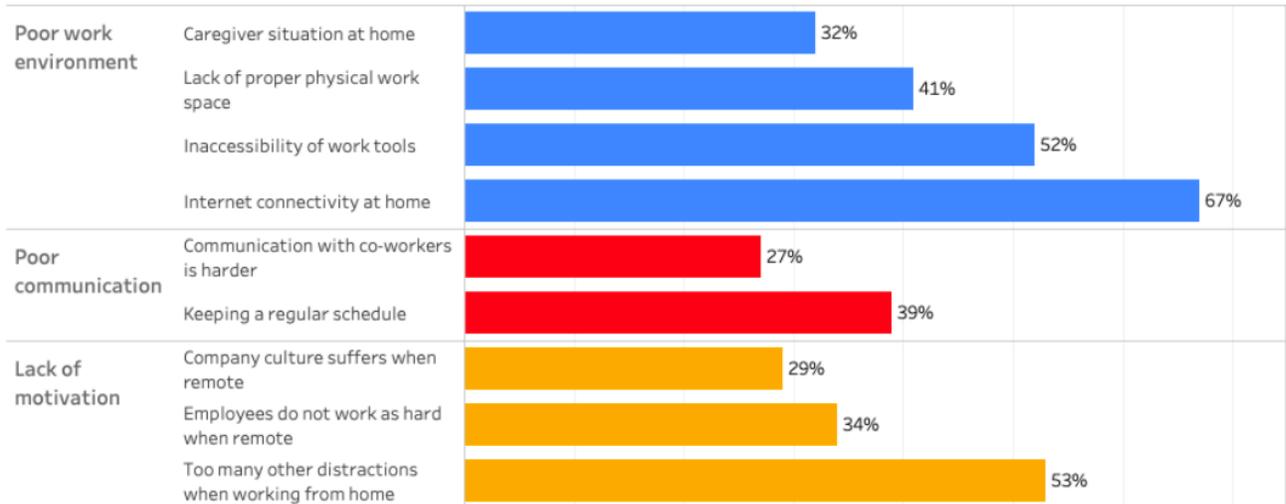
- I. There is a full team meeting at the start of every week where (a) new hires are introduced, (b) targets and performance is discussed, (c) there is a breakout session focused on living our values, and (d) other weekly announcements are discussed
- II. There are daily check-ins within teams to ensure focus on the right areas and productivity in addition to weekly 1:1s between team leads and team members
- III. There are multiple “team learnings” and training sessions each month to build hard and soft skills and share knowledge

While companies continue to strive to eradicate many of the barriers to working remotely, many HR professionals recognize that there is a long way to go in this process (see Exhibit 3). In discussing challenges with business leaders, we see three broad categories of barriers affecting productivity:

- I. Poor work environment at home - This is the single largest challenge impacting organisations and includes challenges with internet connectivity and work tools (printers, scanners, software), to physical space. The impact is most acute for more junior professionals who do not have access or the means to easily rectify these challenges. In fact, at many companies surveyed, employees have been the ones requesting to return to the office to remedy these challenges
- II. Communication challenges - whether due to missing out on informal “office place” discussions or connectivity issues
- III. Lack of motivation and impact on organisational culture- Culture, team cohesion and motivation have been challenges to maintain with the shift to remote work

Exhibit 3

Poor work environment, poor communication and lack of motivation are among the barriers that hinder working from home



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Barriers to working remotely notwithstanding, [Harvard Business Review suggests that working from home can raise the productivity](#) of employees in a firm. Some African companies identified 2020 as one of their most productive years, citing an increase in general output. “We did 20 percent over our target last year. The pandemic was a blessing in disguise,” said Hannah Karuru, Head of Human Resources at Chloride Exide. Possible reasons for this outcome could be the satisfaction of employees from working from home, time saved when employees don’t need to commute, or flexibility over time, and working pace enjoyed when working remotely.

Additionally, employees working remotely find themselves working after-hours without being incentivized by their managers. “People tend to work more hours when working from home. Employees have also opened their minds towards working during the weekends. But as a result of this, work-life balance has been affected,” said Milkah Mboche, HR Consultant for Ponea Health.

Nearly 100% of organisations employing flexible models today will continue to do so in the future

Most of the organizations indicate intentions of having some form of a hybrid arrangement when things go back to normal. For companies that are currently working remotely, 46 percent of them indicate intentions of maintaining a flexible operating model when the pandemic ends (Exhibit 4). The majority of companies that are employing a hybrid system (having some employees working on site and some working remotely/having employees that alternate between working from the office and working from home) will persist with this model even in the post-pandemic world. "In my perspective the hybrid working arrangement is unlikely to change even after COVID-19 subsides," said Chris Karani, a HR professional at Telkom. It is clear that hybrid working models are here to stay.

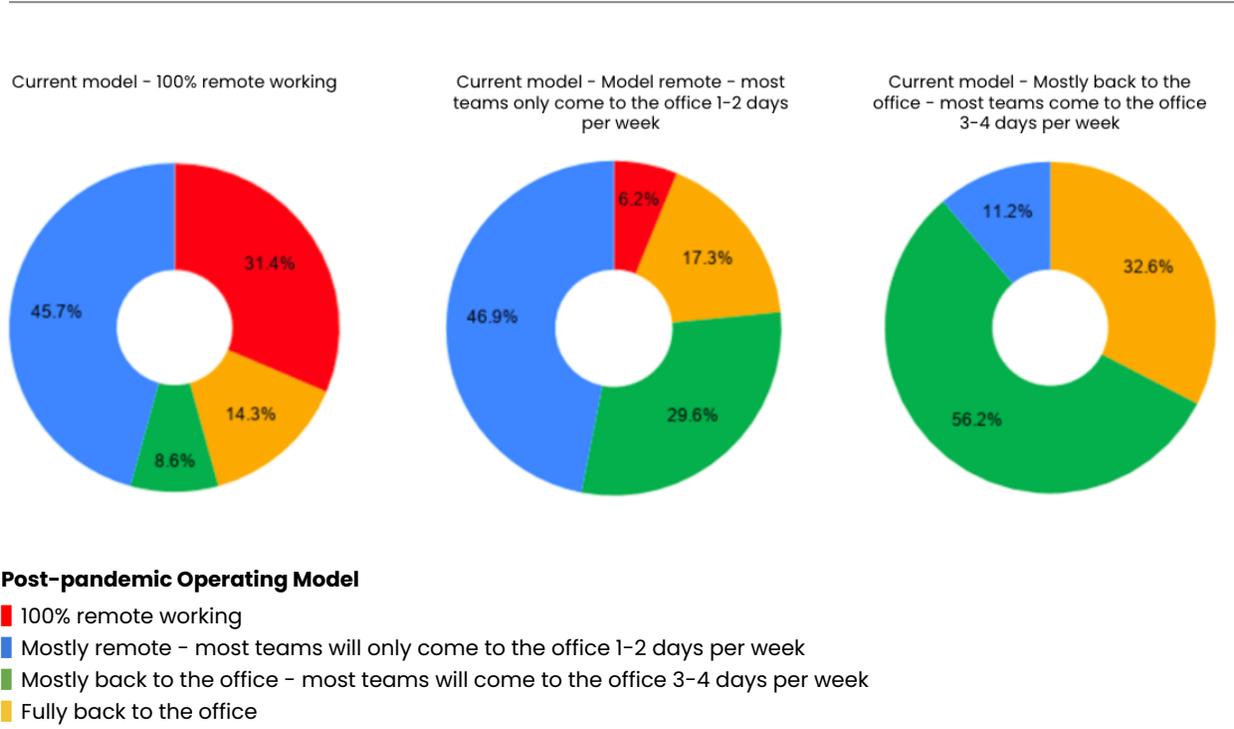
Hybrid working models afford employers the benefits of working remotely as well as the strategic importance of managing teams working in the same physical location. Having teams that alternate between working remotely and working from the office reduces the amount of office space required to house the entire company workforce. According to a PwC survey on employers, 31 percent of respondents anticipated that they'll [need less total office space in the next three years](#) due to the increased prevalence of remote work. This reduction in office spaces decreases the real estate fixed costs for organizations. With a hybrid model, companies are able to recruit talent globally while evading immigration hassles. This allows employers to leverage the skills and expertise of a diverse workforce. Additionally, the flexibility of working both from the office and from home increases the productivity of employees. A research study on employees showed that team members that opted into work-from-home policies [saw a 22 percent improvement in productivity](#).

Employees have also seen the ease that is brought about by working from home. The inconvenience caused by traffic snarls when commuting to the office has been eradicated with remote work. In Nairobi for instance, before COVID-19 struck, study reports indicated that the [average travel time from one point to another in the city was about 57 minutes](#), resulting in overall economic losses estimated at more than Kshs 50 million daily. With employees working remotely and commuting less, time that was previously lost in traffic is redirected to work. What's more, employees get

more time to spend with their families and enjoy having command over their own space. In fact, some employees do not desire to ever go back to the office in the future. A study by a global firm showed that [close to 30% of employees would rather quit](#) than go back to fully working from the office in a post-pandemic world.

The aforementioned benefits hint towards hybrid working models being the new normal in an ideal world. The onus is therefore on companies to figure out how to reduce barriers to productivity as much as possible for employees, especially those related to internet connectivity, accessibility of work tools, and presence of distractions at home.

Exhibit 4



The covid-19 pandemic accelerated the need to adopt working remotely, which has brought with it particular barriers. Companies have been forced to rise to the challenge and come up with strategies to support their employees who are working

from home. Even though the distribution of vaccines suggests that things are likely going back to normal, employers should recognize some potential benefits of remote work. If some job roles do not require individuals to go to the office for 100 percent productivity, it may be wise to entertain the idea of a hybrid / fully-remote work model even after COVID-19.

Company Highlight: Chloride Exide



CHLORIDE EXIDE

Chloride Exide (CE) is a manufacturing company that produces and distributes storage batteries. The company embraced a hybrid working model during the onset of coronavirus, allowing employees to follow a one-day-in-one-day-out operating model. The company has implemented significant strategies over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic. Chloride Exide:

Performance management



Automated employees' performance reviews, allowing managers to get a real-time snapshot of the employees' performance.



Introduced a self-evaluation system that allowed employees to comment on their work progress, creating a more objective understanding of the employee's performance.

Culture



Conducts monthly town hall meetings to get regular feedback from employees.



Offers funds to finance team activities such as Friday virtual parties

Connectivity



Leaped into the digital arena when COVID -19 hit, fully moving into remote operations. Employees are able to access the company's ERP system from wherever they are.



Embarked on training staff on computer skills and opened an IT help desk to assist employees troubleshoot technical issues

Chapter 2: Investing in Future: Insights into Spending Patterns Across the HRs in Africa

With the persistence of the COVID-19 crisis, companies are 50% more likely to be cutting monetary compensation than increasing it over the next 12 months - similar trends persist for non-financial benefits

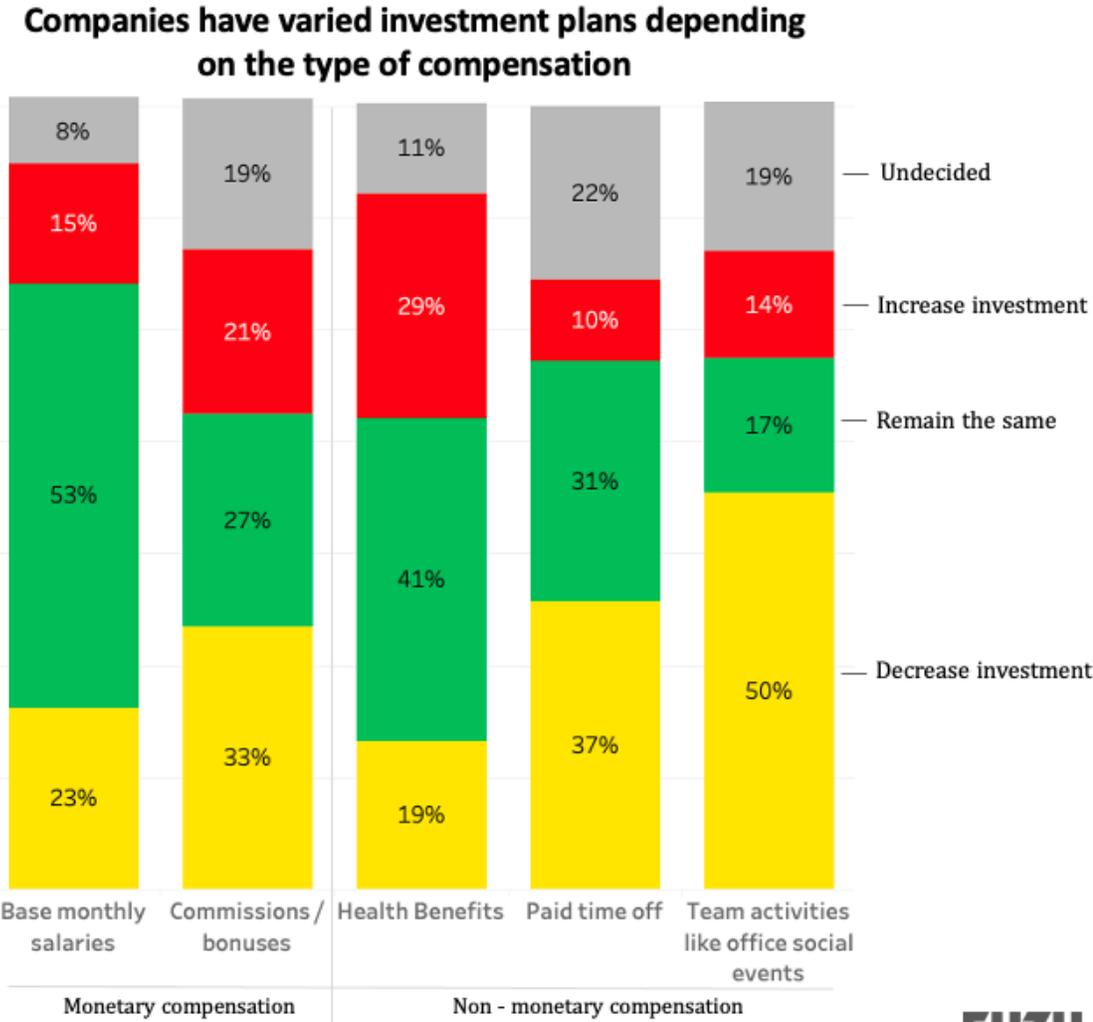
As companies continue to track the evolving state of work amid the coronavirus pandemic, the future of investments in employees' compensation benefits become a key topic of interest. [A multinational advisory firm conducted a survey](#) that revealed that 35 percent of employers globally planned to reduce their projected 2021 salary increase budgets in 2021. This shift suggests that companies are anticipating slow to no growth this year. However, retention of talent was seen as indispensable, with 68 percent of the executives surveyed projecting an increase in annual bonuses this year.

In Africa, companies forecast different investment plans across both monetary and non-monetary areas. More than half of the survey respondents project base salaries to remain the same this year, and 23 percent indicate plans to decrease their investment (Exhibit 1). Additionally, African employers are reluctant to increase monetary compensation in this difficult environment with 1/3 of companies cutting commissions and bonuses, and only 21 percent set to increase them. However, [annual short-term bonuses are projected to remain on track](#) among international companies, according to a survey conducted by The Society for Human Resource Management.

37 percent of companies also intend to decrease paid time off, most likely as employers see a need to find ways to address cost-management-related concerns and get as much productivity out of their existing workforce before making new hires. Health benefits are more likely to remain the same and where there is a change, companies are more likely to increase than to decrease their investment towards this. COVID-19 is the biggest contributor to this trend as some employers see the need to dedicate some funding towards regular testing of employees, particularly in a hybrid-working environment. "There are measures in place to protect teams that

have come back to the office. We conduct regular COVID-19 testing for these employees,” said Milkah Mboche, HR Consultant for Ponea Health. While half of the companies surveyed have made plans to decrease investments in team activities, some organizations are embracing the funding of virtual social events. “We hold virtual parties and send funds to employees to facilitate this,” said Hannah Karuru, Head of Human Resources at Chloride Exide.

Exhibit 1



65 percent of organizations are set to increase investment in digital solutions to better connect employees, part of a continued wave of “digital transformation”

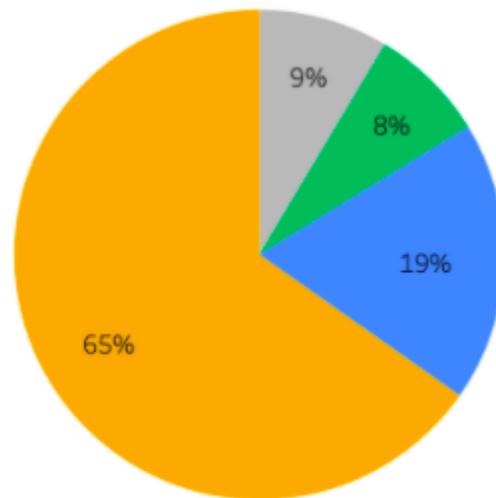
For many organizations, investment in digital transformation had been a focal point for a larger discussion about productivity and growth before the pandemic, but in recent months has been spawned by the ubiquity of remote work. Companies have been forced to develop a digital business model strategy in order to remain competitive and attractive to their consumers. Consumers on the other hand are craving for efficient digital solutions in sectors such as retail, agriculture, entertainment and more. The International Data Corporation estimates that a whopping \$2.3 trillion will be spent by organizations on digitalization by 2023.

We see this trend towards digitization in Africa accelerating significantly, with 65 percent of companies projecting an increase in digital spending in 2021 (Exhibit 2). In the current pandemic state, employers acknowledge the importance of digitizing their systems, as the need to raise productivity in a progressively globalized world. Additionally, we see that the presence of software and technologies that enable companies to make more informed business decisions make the shift towards digitization inevitable. Globally, a recent study by Twilio reported that [97 percent of executives revealed that covid-19 accelerated their digital transformation efforts](#). Moreover, 79 percent of respondents further added that COVID-19 increased their budget for digital solutions. We expect to see this trend of embracing digital advancement even in a post-pandemic era.

Technological advancements have in recent years caused angst over the possible loss of jobs due to robot-enabled processes. [Low-skilled jobs face the biggest threat of replacement](#) as companies strive to automate the majority of their operations. However, many experts have cast aside these concerns about automation, maintaining that more jobs can actually be generated. New technology can result in increased productivity that helps companies grow, which leads to increased job positions. Digital enabled independent work has also increased over the years, supplementing the wages from regular 9-5 employment. With the rapid spread of technology accelerated by the pandemic, the increase in job opportunities could be an upward trend.

Exhibit 2

65% of companies are increasing their investment in digital solutions to improve productivity - the single largest area where HRs are investing



Investment
■ Undecided
■ Decrease investment
■ Remain the same
■ Increase investment

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51 percent of African companies intend to increase their investment in upskilling current employees, as internal mobility rises as an effective alternative to hiring new employees

Data suggests that [internal mobility is up 20 percent since the onset of COVID-19](#), likely due to reduction in hiring efforts by most companies. This shift has seen the

need for employers to upskill and re-skill workers in readiness to take up potential future vacancies within the company. Additionally, the shift towards automation and technology warrants employers to train employees to adapt to these changes. The inclination towards upskilling, however, did not fully result from the pandemic, seeing that in 2018, the World Economic Forum estimated that more than 1/2 of employees would require relevant upskilling by 2022.

Interviews with HR professionals revealed that many companies embarked on training programs to equip employees with the necessary computer skills to facilitate remote work. "COVID-19 has forced us to explore digital solutions that have eased communication and saved us time. As much as tools such as zoom were there pre-COVID, we didn't utilize them. But now, we have been forced to explore these technologies," said Milkah Mboche, HR Consultant for Ponea Health. "We had to increase the funds allocated towards internet access of employees. We provided employees with airtime bundles to facilitate remote work," a manager in an international development agency in Kenya told us. At Fuzu, we provide internet stipends to employees working from home without reliable at-home connections. [Investment in digital infrastructure and collaboration tools](#) is necessary to facilitate hybrid work models as companies decide on their post-COVID-19 plans.

Research shows that [employers who embrace upskilling programs are more prepared](#) to meet evolving business needs and accommodate skill gaps within the company. "I have come up with a talent pool whereby I identify employees who have the potential to take up certain responsibilities within the company. I have been training these employees such that when critical positions become vacant, I can reassign current employees to fill these roles," said a hiring manager of an energy company in Kenya. The shift towards internal hiring could be good for companies, as it would lead to higher employee retention. According to LinkedIn's [Global Talent Trends 2020 report](#), employees stick around 41 percent longer at companies that regularly hire from within.

Exhibit 4

Investment in upskilling current employees is expected to largely increase this year



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As companies adjust to a new way of working in 2021, we see an increase in investments moving more towards digital solutions. The pandemic has amplified the adoption of new technologies worldwide, and we expect to see this trend persist even in a post-pandemic era. African companies might do well to elevate their digital channels in order to drive productivity and growth even as they prepare to adapt to the work environment in 2021. Tight hiring budgets have led employers to finding ways to tap into current employees who may have additional skills that may support the company. As this trend continues to ascend, employers might find it functional to push for professional development and bridge any skill gaps so as to make employees more prepared to take up higher roles within the organization.

Chapter 3: Africa's Hiring Outlook in 2021 and Beyond

What's the future of hiring in Africa: An analysis of 400+ companies across 10+ industries

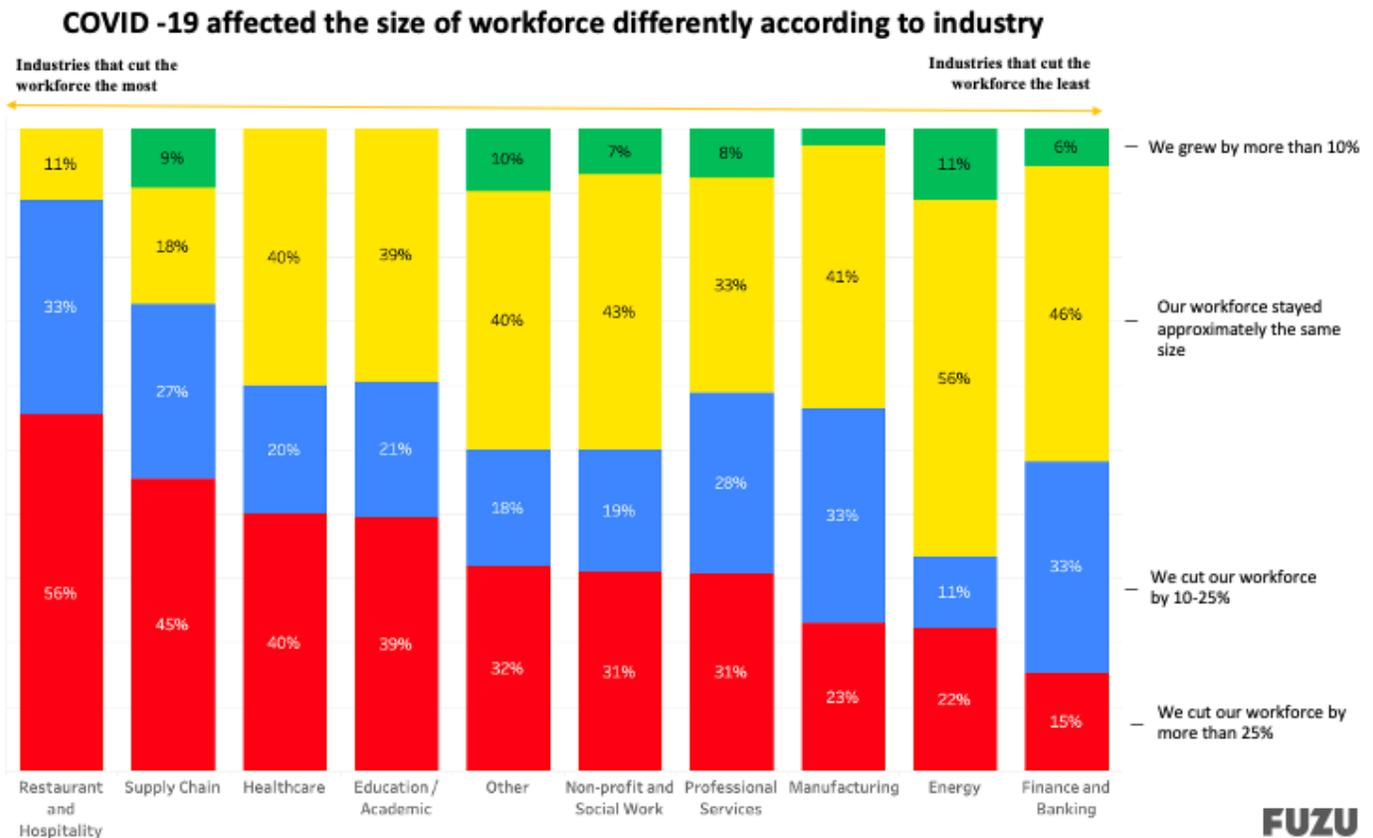
The hiring industry has seen a change over the last few months, as employers continue to analyze the current and future state of their companies. Since the pandemic hit, we have seen an explosion of articles, blog posts and news reports about the future of employment. On one hand, few industries such as high-tech and e-commerce have thrived and increased workforce during the past year mostly due to the push towards a digital revolution. On the other hand however, many industries were brought to their knees as they tried to face off horrid pandemic impacts. Unemployment skyrocketed for employees in these sectors. In the wake of budget restraints and cuts, industries such as hospitality, airlines and retail were forced to lay off employees in 2020 as they struggled to remain in business.

Concerns about COVID-19 effects on employment were raised as early as March 2020. By mid-April, a global management consulting firm estimated that a striking [57 million](#) jobs in the US and [59 million](#) jobs in the European Union were at risk of dissolution. Several factors were attributed to these observations such as the inability of employees to remain effective after transitioning to remote work in those jobs and the evolving changes of the demand for these roles.

In Africa, a staggering 56 percent of companies surveyed reported cutting their workforce by more than 10 percent in 2020. Lockdowns across the continents shuttered various industries and led to increased uncertainty over future waves of the virus and associated policy measures. A significant global slowdown ensued. A closer analysis revealed that restaurant and hospitality, supply chain and healthcare are the top three industries with the highest reduction in workforce (Exhibit 1). 89 percent of African companies in the restaurant and hospitality industry reported losing more than 10 percent of their workforce. Data on global companies indicate that jobs in leisure and hospitality, education and health services industries were the hardest hit in 2020. By May 2020, [47 percent of job positions in the leisure and](#)

[hospitality industry had already been lost](#). The enforcement of stay-at-home and social distancing policies resulted in reduced demand for indoor dining services around the globe. In East Africa, [mandatory curfews and the ban of selling alcohol](#) in restaurants in efforts to curb the spread of coronavirus also led many night-life establishments to go out of business. Additionally, the government in Uganda imposed the closure of bars and restaurants during the height of the pandemic. The supply chain and transport industry was also affected, with the governments banning the commute between major cities and rural areas. This cessation of movement affected small to medium business owners who were transporting goods in and out of the major cities.

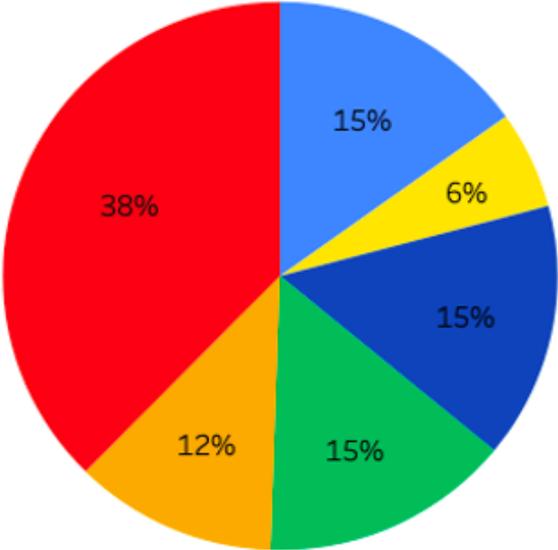
Exhibit 1



Looking ahead, the perception about hiring among African companies remains tepid at best, with only 21 percent of organizations believing that recruitment has gone back to normal (Exhibit 2), with 38 percent believing that hiring will not fully pick back up until 2022 or beyond. While there is growing enthusiasm towards an economic resurgence in the coming months, global reports indicate that hiring is yet to get back to normal. In the US alone, [9 million fewer people were reported to be working in February 2021](#) as compared to February 2020. This observation suggests that the hiring market has a few steps to go before regaining a complete bounce-back. Earlier on in this chapter, we saw that the pandemic affected industries disproportionately, with customer-service oriented industries facing the full brunt of lay-offs and furloughs. The trend is expected to persist this year as different industries anticipate varied shifts in hiring during 2021. While the majority of industries anticipate maintaining the same size of the workforce, 22 percent of companies in the restaurant and hospitality space and 21 percent of companies in healthcare foresee a reduction in the workforce by more than 10 percent in the coming 12 months. Evidently, the restaurant and hospitality industry in Africa is a few steps behind recovery. The healthcare industry will also experience cuts in the workforce as the pandemic persists.

Exhibit 2

Only 21% of companies believe that hiring has gone back to normal



When hiring will get back to a pre-pandemic normal?
■ It already has
■ Q1 2021
■ Q2 2021
■ Q3 2021
■ Q4 2021
■ 2022 and beyond



Last year, 56% of the survey respondents cut their workforce by at least 10 percent. For these organizations, the vast majority are still on a hiring freeze or will continue to shrink their workforce this year. The companies that were able to weather the worst of the pandemic either remained relatively flat or grew by at least 10 percent. For the companies that remained the same size, 44% percent expect to grow by at least 10 percent this year. 72 percent of the companies that expanded their workforce last year expect to remain in growth mode, predicting to grow their employee size by at least 10 percent (Exhibit 3).

Exhibit 3

Only ~25% of companies who cut staff in 2020 are poised to rebound, however this jumps to 44% to 72% of companies who successfully weathered the COVID crisis



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The demand to fill tech roles is set to increase, as the push towards digitization intensifies

IT/software development teams are projected to see the highest number of new hires for companies planning to expand, owing to the fact that firms are in a race to be more technologically agile. This race has created a flooding demand for individuals with tech skills (Exhibit 4). In February 2021, [LinkedIn reviewed the roles with the most job postings](#), revealing that tech roles occupied 4 positions in the top ten list. Roles in customer support will also require staffing for companies intending to grow their workforce in 2021. With the burst of online services in Africa during the pandemic, companies may need to invest in their customer service department, which would help their consumers better access their services. Also, the growth in the

use of social media has forced companies to be more vigilant in their interaction with customers and brand image.

For African companies that plan to cut their workforce, general team management positions will receive the highest layoffs, followed by admin/clerical positions. In the first chapter of this report, we found out that admin/clerical positions are examples of job roles that require to be in the office for 100 percent productivity. With the shift to a more hybrid working model, companies are adopting more digital solutions such as data entry and processing systems that reduce the need for as many admin/clerical employees. Consequently, African companies project to cut the workforce in the admin/clerical departments. Individuals in these roles might find it beneficial to grow their skillset beyond their current offering in order to remain attractive and more indispensable in the space.

Exhibit 4

In what areas are companies growing or cutting their workforce?



While recruiters and candidates continue to navigate the barriers to recruiting remotely, studies show that virtual hiring may be here to stay

Like various business processes in general, hiring has been vastly affected by the shift to remote work. Many African companies remain apprehensive about virtual interviews as they seem to take away from the traditional in-person screening process. "Face to face interviews allowed us to develop a personal touch with candidates and get a clearer idea of their personality and character. Hiring virtually has made this very challenging," said a HR manager of a development agency firm. Some HR professionals in Africa further revealed that hiring seems to take longer than expected as recruiters and candidates try to navigate virtual interviews. Just like working remotely, hiring remotely brings with it some barriers such as internet connectivity, power outages and distractions at home.

Despite these challenges, virtual hiring might be here to stay, with 70 percent of talent [professionals in international companies saying that virtual recruiting will become the new standard](#) moving forward. Digital solutions are accelerating in the recruitment space to drive a more seamless process and improve the quality of candidates. Companies around the world are seeking a wider talent pool, warranting the adoption of automation tools and artificial intelligence in the hiring process. With the Harvard Business Review reporting a more than 25 percent improvement by online talent platforms than by humans alone in identifying talent, hiring technologies are now disrupting the market. Digital labour tools not only boast of hiring but also of managing, retaining, and developing employees. Additionally, [companies that leverage digital labor platforms could have a 275-basis point improvement to their profit margins](#). African companies have the potential to raise their output by up to 9 percent and reduce employee-related costs by up to 7 percent when they employ digital hiring tools.

“I changed my recruiting strategy. I stopped recruiting to fill a position, and I am now recruiting according to the candidate’s performance and potential”

- Head of HR at Chloride Exide on the need to find highly adaptable team members who can succeed in the “new normal” companies face

Hiring markets and labor trends have forced HR managers to adopt new strategies when it comes to finding the right talent. The pandemic has forced both employees and employers to become more flexible when transitioning to new modes of working. Recruiters have thus recognized the value of having an adaptable workforce that can be relied on in the event of future changes. “I changed my recruiting strategy. I stopped recruiting to fill a position, and I am now recruiting according to the candidate’s performance and potential,” said Hannah Karuru, Head of Human Resources at Chloride Exide. Hiring employees according to their potential for growth and adaptability has helped companies like Chloride Exide recruit reliable and competent employees who can fully adjust to departmental changes with minimal training. Background checks, company referrals and assessments tests have been mentioned as critical when adopting these new strategies. [Reassessing the core-capabilities that make a workforce successful can have a positive impact](#) on employee satisfaction and retention in the long-run.

In this new age of rethinking ways to improve work, recruiters might also be required to increase their skills, which would help them remain adaptable and indispensable. Aligning HR professionals with the company's strategy and structure is a core principle that will ensure the right talent is shortlisted and selected. Aside from that, talent professionals will be required to constantly build skills to adapt to ever-shifting hiring trends. According to a [LinkedIn survey](#), adaptability was rated as the number 1 skill for a recruiter in 2021. “I enrolled in a three month course to ensure I am now more able to keep up with different trends of employees and build a workforce resource plan to track hiring in the company,” said Hannah Karuru. Recruiters have also been forced to be more technologically apt in the recent months as they explore more efficient channels of recruiting remotely. Hiring professionals in Africa may be needed to grow their skills in areas such as HR strategy, decision making, people management and talent pipelining in order to succeed in the hiring department.

Hiring in Africa remains slow, as the demand to fill roles in most industries remains low and growing uncertainty sweeps the recruiting market. Organizations that are currently recruiting have learnt to embrace virtual hiring tools, a move that emphasizes the shift towards digital transformation. Accordingly, virtual hiring may persist well into the future, and may demand recruiters and candidates alike to build their technological competencies in order to participate in the hiring market. In light of progressive talent trends, HR professionals may also find it useful to build on their skills in order to thrive in their roles.

Chapter 4: Navigating the Current Hiring Market: Advice from Africa's Leading HR professionals

The COVID-19 crisis has forced HR professionals to make profound and immediate changes to how they approach and respond to the hiring market. Many have been involved in strategizing the rapid shift to remote work, accelerating companies towards digital transformation and restructuring the workforce in order to meet changing organizational needs. To usher in a new way of working, individuals and organizations need to remodel their approach towards recruiting that is more in line with current trends. In this section, we highlight some of the insights from seasoned HR professionals on how job seekers and other HR personnel alike can navigate the recruiting space more effectively.

Recent graduates / Job seekers- You need to stand out

Many organizations will continue to face tight hiring budgets this year. Recruiters that are currently seeking talent are looking for candidates that stand out from the crowd, and whose skills can justify the need to increase the workforce in the current pandemic crisis. It is up to jobseekers to look for ways to be more attractive to recruiters and effectively demonstrate why they are the best fit for the job role.

Critical thinking skills and flexibility are your keys to success – HR managers are beginning to reimagine the structure of the workforce and are looking for more flexible and adaptable employees. This means that job candidates will be required to build on both hard and soft skills. The accelerating pace of technological change is demanding the workforce to possess a wide range of capabilities that can support a new age of digitalization. HR managers are thus seeking candidates that offer the most to the company- skillswise, and also those that can easily respond to organizational needs with minimal training. Competency in the hiring market will require jobseekers to diversify their skills and complement what they already have so as to have an edge in the eyes of recruiters.

Develop effective communication skills - The bulk of the job application process requires a candidate to coherently communicate why they should be picked over all the other qualified applicants. Recruiters expect candidates to be able to explain their professional qualifications, work history, personal interests and more either during interviews or in writing. Candidates are also expected to carefully listen to interviewers and respond to questions accordingly. Thus effective communication skills are paramount and job seekers should strive to develop them.

Be authentic during the application process - Oftentimes job candidates feel the pressure to portray a version of themselves that they perceive will better their prospects of getting the job. A discussion with HR professionals however revealed that recruiters usually can see through this inauthenticity. Lack of sincerity during the application process rubs off negatively on recruiters and can affect your chances of getting hired. Moreover, virtual interviews have prompted HR managers to be more intentional in understanding the candidates personality and character, as they are unable to be with them in the same physical location. Job candidates should seek to be their most genuine self in front of hiring managers and strive to answer interview questions as candidly as possible.

Advice for HR professionals

HR Professionals have by and large been among the movers and shakers behind companies' hiring and growth decisions. They have been required to reimagine new ways of attracting and retaining talent, while remaining within company budgets. Even though some have been able to pick up these responsibilities with ease, many have seen the need to step outside their comfort zone in order to survive in their roles.

Develop strategic thinking and critical reasoning - The role of HR in the company has evolved from mere implementers to critical decision-makers. Employers are now seeking input from HR when making strategic decisions about the trajectory of the company. This shift has made strategic thinking and critical reasoning more of a requirement than a nice-to-have. Current HR professionals should develop critical thinking skills so as to be more impactful and valuable in the company.

Sharpen your technological skills - The acceleration towards digital transformation has forced HR to adapt to new technologies when seeking the talent for the company. Moreover, the shift towards virtual hiring has demanded recruiters to amass tech capabilities in order to participate in the hiring market. HR professionals should actively seek out ways to be more tech-savvy so as to engage more effectively with job candidates and company staff.

Communication is key - HR professionals are the representatives of a company and build the brand for organizations. What's more, they are the first point of contact when people are joining the organization. Knowing how to sell the company when attracting and onboarding talent is imperative. Additionally, HR professionals should develop effective listening skills particularly during virtual interviews so as to pick up more on the candidates character and personality.

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