# Humanyze

# 2021
# Future of Work Report

## PART II: FALL 2021

The Impacts of Remote Work on
Employees & the Future of Work
Post-Pandemic

# Contents

# Executive Summary

## INTRODUCTION

The abrupt shift to remote work in 2020 majorly impacted how work gets done and how companies think about the workplace. In April 2021, Humanyze conducted a survey of nearly 1,500 U.S. knowledge workers to better understand how work and employee needs have evolved since then, as well as what these findings mean for the post-pandemic future of work.

With the Delta variant prolonging the pandemic's uncertainties and delaying many return to office plans originally slated for the fall, Humanyze conducted a second follow-up survey in October 2021 to uncover how workforce challenges and sentiments have shifted over the last 6 months. The fall survey was also expanded to a larger demographic of employees and managers, in an effort to compare the perspectives and experiences of both individual contributors and team leaders.

To provide a holistic view of remote work's impacts and their implications for the future of work, survey responses from the spring and fall were measured against the Humanyze Platform's science-backed collaboration insights and workplace analytics from before and after the start of the pandemic. By combining these subjective and objective datapoints, this report seeks to draw connections between employee and manager sentiments and how work is getting done across leading global organizations.

Survey results and Humanyze data findings around remote work's impacts and the future of work were grouped into four categories for this report:

The Evolution of Work

Top Work Challenges

Future of Work Planning

Workforce Sentiments

# Behind the Data

## October 2021 Survey:

**1,000**

People / Team
Managers

**1,265**

Knowledge Worker
Employees

18 ⟷ 60

| | |
|---|---|
| **39%** | Ages 45-60 |
| **28%** | Ages 30-44 |
| **21%** | Ages 18-29 |
| **12%** | Ages 60+ |

**74%**

Worked **in the office** full-time
pre-pandemic

**13%**

Worked **remotely full-time**
pre-pandemic

**13%**

Worked **flexibly** in-office or
**remote** pre-pandemic

## The Humanyze Platform:

**1.2 Million+**

Workplace interactions
measured during the
pandemic

**20 Billion**

Workplace interactions
measured at global
organizations over the
last decade

**11+ Years**

of MIT research using
Behavioral Science to predict
workplace outcomes

# Findings:
## The Evolution of Work

## Employee Collaboration: Before vs. During the Pandemic

**16%** increase in **collaboration with closest teammates**
(*"Core Connections", those you rely on most and interact with regularly* )

**11%** increase in **collaboration with colleagues outside of core team**
(*"Secondary Connections", those you interact with semi-regularly*)

Humanyze Platform insights reveal that both after the start of the pandemic and now, employees communicated more with their immediate teams and colleagues they collaborate with semi-regularly. These increases are likely a response to the absence of being able to communicate seamlessly in-person, forcing a greater reliance on more frequent collaboration through virtual means.

**27%** increase in **collaboration across different levels of the company** (*"Cross-Level Collaboration", measures how hierarchical or flat an organization's communication structure is*

Another aspect of collaboration that has remained consistent since the start of the pandemic, is a less hierarchical communication structure. Pre-pandemic, employees were less likely to interact with more junior or senior colleagues. A "flatter" organization structure gives employees more access to management and leaders, and can positively impact culture, knowledge-sharing, and opportunities for development and growth.

**21%** of employees **collaborated less with peripheral colleagues** outside of their immediate, close networks
(*"Weak Connections", those you interact with infrequently - typically in informal, unstructured settings*)

Compared to pre-pandemic, however, employees now collaborate significantly less with peripheral colleagues that they interact with less frequently and don't rely on directly to do their jobs. Research shows that these types of interactions, while usually infrequent and unstructured in nature, are vital to organizational health and effectiveness, as they can directly impact innovation, job satisfaction, and knowledge-sharing.

# Findings:
## The Evolution of Work

## Work Patterns & Trends: Before vs. During the Pandemic

**24%** increase in **"Knowledge Diffusion"**, meaning improved sharing of knowledge and access to information

**10%** increase in "Alignment" *(how easily information can travel across an organization)* due to improved communication flows

Likely as a result of the aforementioned increases in employee collaboration with direct teammates, closer colleagues, and colleagues across different levels, Humanyze data also revealed improvements to the flow of information and organizational alignment. While the shift to remote work during the pandemic hindered new connections from being made and communication between colleagues that collaborate less frequently for work, the increased reliance on collaboration tools and technology has helped improve the spread of information and alignment between different groups across companies.

**57%** increase in # of **employees working 10+ hours per day**

**57%** decrease in **work on the weekends**

Consistent with the findings from April 2021, employees appear to be working across longer parts of the day, but this does not always equate to working more than pre-pandemic. When looking at the data more closely, employees are working more flexibly across a larger portion of the day, often taking breaks in between longer stretches of work (possibly to tend to personal or family matters).

While it's important to ensure certain groups aren't being negatively affected by longer working hours, it's encouraging to see employees enforcing better boundaries based on the significant decrease in working happening on the weekends. A healthier, more flexible approach to work-life balance leads to more engaged, fulfilled, and successful employees.

# Findings:
## Top Work Challenges
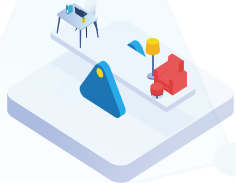
### For Employees:

**39%** of employees said **work-life balance** has been their top work challenge during the pandemic **(compared to 58% of employees surveyed in April 2021)**

**38%** of employees said the **inability to interact or collaborate in-person with their immediate team and manager, or colleagues outside of their team and leadership from other departments** has been their top challenge

### For Managers:

**25%** of managers said "**employee attrition and disengagement**" has been their top work challenge during the pandemic

**17%** of managers said "**less productivity and efficiency**" has been their top work challenge during the pandemic

**17%** of managers said that "**communication with their team and colleagues across the organization**" has been their top work challenge.

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# Findings:
# Future of Work Planning

## Lack of Employee Confidence & Transparency:

**63%** of employees said they **lack full confidence** that their company's post-pandemic strategy will be well thought out and the best decision for employees **(compared to 46% in April 2021)**

**53%** of employees said they **do not feel fully informed** about their company's post-pandemic plan or how decisions are being made

## Lack of Data-Driven Approach & Manager Involvement:

**70%** of managers said that, besides employee surveys, their company is **not leveraging workplace data or technologies to inform** post-pandemic decisions

**20%** of managers said they **have not been included, had any involvement, nor been asked to provide input** around post-pandemic strategies or decisions

**25%** of managers said that **only executive leadership** influences these decisions

**15%** of managers said **they aren't sure** how their company is informing post-pandemic decisions or planning

# Findings:
## What Employees & Managers Want

## Employee Preferences & Sentiments

**Most employees are open to returning to the office in some capacity,** with only **37%** of employees responding that they **prefer not to return to the office at all**.

Employees listed **(1) In-person collaboration with teammates and their manager** and **(2) informal social connections with colleagues** as their top reasons for returning to the office.

**20%** of employees said **they would look for a new job** that offers remote work options if asked to return to the office full-time without flexibility

**43%** of employees said **they would speak with their manager about working remotely a few days a week** or as needed if asked to return to the office full-time

**40%** of employees prefer a **fixed office schedule where they see the same people every time** they are in the office if their company chooses a scheduled approach for returning to the office *(top response)*

## Manager Preferences & Sentiments

**45%** of managers prefer a **fixed office schedule where they see the same people every time** they are in the office if their company chooses a scheduled approach for returning to the office *(top response)*

# Conclusion

By taking a closer look at both objective data on how work gets done and subjective insights about how employees have been affected and feel about the future of work, we are able to gain a more complete understanding of the impacts of remote work during the pandemic.

Employees and managers seem to be adapting to remote work and collaborating more with their teammates and closer colleagues since the start of the pandemic, but it's crucial to address the interactions that have been hindered with more peripheral colleagues outside of their immediate networks. Driving interactions between employees and these "Weak Connections" should be a priority, as research shows that they are key drivers of innovation, creativity, information sharing, and employee engagement.

These latest findings also raise concerns about the notable decrease in employee confidence around post-pandemic plans, transparency and communication from leadership, and the absence of objective data to inform and tailor effective strategies. Organizational success requires employee trust and confidence as much as it requires the right data to support and validate decisions.

Work-life balance is another area that requires close attention given the notable increase in workday length for employees on average. However, the data also shows encouraging signs that many employees are simply working more flexibly throughout longer spans of the day and working less during the weekends compared to pre-pandemic.

Lastly, the Fall 2021 Future of Work Report reveals that both employees and managers want continued flexibility post-pandemic, but in a way that's thoughtfully coordinated. In scheduled hybrid scenarios, both employees and managers prefer a consistent, predetermined approach that has them in the office with the same people each time.

Looking ahead to the post-COVID future of work, employees and managers want the continued advantages of being able to work remotely in some capacity, but still value the benefits of working in-person with their colleagues. Every organization and team is unique, and leaders looking to shape a successful future of work must tailor data-driven, people-centric strategies that balance team needs with business objectives.

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