# Designing for remote employee experiences

## A refreshed approach to HR Transformation

The future of work is on our doorstep. With the arrival of the coronavirus crisis and enterprises' focus on business continuity, long-anticipated shifts in the world of work have, overnight, become the key to business survival. Digitalization, remote working, and agile workforces are now essential to organizations' capacity to operate in an age of fluctuating lockdowns and economic uncertainty. As *The Economist* noted, while the CFO was the corporate hero of the 2008 financial crisis, in 2020 company leaders are looking to CHROs to secure their business in a COVID-19 impacted world.

In this context, the HR function has to make smart choices about the tradeoffs required. Accelerating HR transformation is needed today, but so too are businesses' cost containment measures. Which investments in HR transformation, such as digitalization, are priorities to bring forward? Which HR efforts can be paused without detriment to the business' ability to rebound post-pandemic?

Among the priorities to consider is the employee experience, which deserves more attention during a period of turmoil. Prior to the outbreak, only 5% of non-self-employed US workers worked from home at least half the time. In the space of a few weeks, over half of organizations have implemented mandatory work from home arrangements for either the whole company or key departments, according to a global pulse survey of companies' COVID responses.[1] Yet, with the administrative hurdle of standing up mass remote working at speed, it is understandable that HR's focus on the employee experience may have slipped. A digital focus group in the UK/

Europe asked employees how they were coping with COVID-19. As HR continues to have multiple priorities, almost half the employees said they leaned most on teammates for support, 27% said support came from their immediate manager, and only 4% said they felt supported by HR.

Building a better employee experience matters in the near and long-term. Research from Mercer's 2020 Global Talent Trends Study shows energized employees are more resilient, more likely to stay, and more ready to reskill — all vital to helping the business return to work and thrive in the post-coronavirus reality. Indeed, delivering on the employee experience is HR's top priority this year, our findings reveal. And yet, **just 4% of HR teams globally believe they deliver an exemplary employee experience today** — falling to 0% among American HR respondents. Remote working at scale will remain a feature of work long after the pandemic has passed. Remote options will be created for jobs that were never—or almost never—remote. There are many jobs that until very recently seemed

impossible to perform remotely. But as we are seeing, there is a surprising amount that can be done at a distance, and many innovations are on the horizon that could make it even more seamless. Organizations are analyzing which jobs can be done remotely on a more permanent basis. Hence, the challenge for HR teams is to design employee experiences fit for the remote working environment — shifting from experience design in advance to experiences designed in real-time.

> We invested a lot in the new hire [programs] to make them impactful. We took the backbone of our onboarding structure to re-onboard all employees via remote onboarding.
>
> Bryan Power,
> Head of People, Nextdoor

# Rethink target interactions

Winning organizations design delightful experiences that bring out the best in their people, and never is this more vital than during times of change. Activating for impact starts with the design thinking found in a Target Interaction Model (TIM).[2] TIM redesigns talent processes through the eyes of employees — in TIM, HR services are designed around real user personas and their needs, not job roles. This increases adoption of HR processes and ensures sustainable development of the workforce. Nearly three-quarters of companies in the US are already finding value in segmenting their EVP by persona groups, but with just 17% using personas as part of their broader employee experience approach, there is room to do much more.

Targeting the desired employee experience as the starting point (from attraction and onboarding to lifecycle management and beyond), and building on end users' needs, HR will naturally create a new people-focused design and governance. The good news is that 58% of organizations globally are redesigning their organization to become more people-centric, our data show. This requires HR to treat employees more like

> **We believe that the target interaction model creates the right level of transparency (also with respect to the COVID-19 pandemic), helping us to anticipate and fulfill the needs of our HR customers. In this sense, it will enable us, as HR, to help shape the transition to a more optimal virtual/ hybrid way of working.**
>
> Claudia Pluecker, Director HR,
> ALDI International Service

customers of the organization — in how it engages them in feedback, in the services it provides, and in the technology solutions it offers.

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Adopting TIM means breaking away from traditional HR operating models in favor of dynamic ways of working that flex to business needs. This means addressing some critical questions.

**1. From operations at-a-distance to operations delivered-to-your-door.** With employees comfortable with remote working, it is time to turn attention to the experience of other operational aspects.

- What will talent acquisition, performance and career management look like in a remote environment?
- Which interactions are crucial in delivering an excellent talent management experience from home or in a blended environment?
- How does HR prioritize the various leadership and workforce demands in this new normal?

**2. Cultivate collaboration during remote working.** The challenge for many organizations will be how to reinvent the office water cooler experience for a blended workforce. Networking and collaboration, regardless of the given platform, are becoming a key competency for the organization.

- How can HR communicate and implement a blended interaction model consistently across the organization?
- What are the most effective ways to monitor employee engagement, as well as company culture and purpose?
- How can HR offer interactive and dynamic virtual employee events that connect employees and strengthen collaboration?
- What tools and platforms (EX portal, communities, etc.) would be the best in their respective context?

**3. Rethink the role of people managers.** People leader, advisor and manager roles are changing as teams have to be managed from afar. Which interactions will enhance the experience? As remote working gains traction, managing remote workers may become part of people leaders' job description.

- How can HR teams support people leaders and managers?
- What changes will be required within shared services to make the experience more effective and blended-workforce friendly?

**4. Understand new leadership needs.** An agile mindset and behaviors will enable business leaders to transition to the new normal and thrive.

- How can HR drive value for the business and its leaders through customer-centricity and human-centered solutions for all employees?
- Which new leadership capabilities will rise in importance? How can HR support this?
- Will HR need to create new roles focusing on new capabilities — or get rid of old ones — to support business leaders' needs?

[2]For more on the Target Interaction Model, see *Transforming HR: Why a Target Interaction Model (TIM) is the Key to Unlocking the Employee Experience* at https://www.mercer.com/our-thinking/career/transforming-hr-why-a-targetinteraction-model-tim-is-the-key-tounlocking-the-employee-experience.html

# Accelerate your future people-service portfolio

The key to adapting the TIM model is to assess the current situation quickly and develop a picture of the interactions that will deliver delightful employee experiences whether in the context of remote and/or blended working. By quickly identifying and defining people's pain points with remote working, organizations can focus on the initiatives and programs most likely to deliver impact in the new environment, and how to deliver them cost-effectively.

**A rapid approach to jump-start HR:** *HR Accelerator*

🕐 **Speed is of the essence; fast results are needed and must be implemented quickly to keep momentum**

🧭 **Start**

**Align key stakeholders** on guiding principles, must-win battles and project goals

🚀 **Drive**

**Develop a comprehensive workplace transformation roadmap** and manage change forward

**1** **2** **3** **4** — HR Transformation Accelerator

🎚 **Discover**

**Analyze current state** across technology, roles, organization structure, processes and content to determine areas of focus

🔧 **Shape**

**Define the future people-service portfolio** and new workplace interaction model along with role optimization

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🧭 **Start**

- Launch an agile plan-ahead team that can offer quick responses to rapidly changing circumstances

- Assess corporate, HR and IT strategies to find a pragmatic strategy alignment between all three and identify future must-win battles

- Make work prioritization transparent and create real-time data collection to identify precisely where problems are occurring

- Manage business continuity and employee health and well-being

🎚 **Discover**

- Rapidly evaluate the current lay-of-the-land in core areas of HR transformation: business impact, process, people experience, technology and organization

- Identify changes in work priorities, processes and interactions, including digital ways of working

- Assess what jobs are going away and start to align people toward new roles quickly

- Design remote and/or hybrid support models for the workforce

🔧 **Shape**

- Define and shape the future people service portfolio

- Redesign co-located interactions. Rethink how these interactions are conducted

- Adapt and redeploy roles to maximize their contribution and potential for rapidly evolving organizational must-win battles

- Reskill at speed and scale

- Determine workforce composition implications and skill requirements in a remote or hybrid environment

🚀 **Drive**

- Plan ahead capturing all activities and phases in a comprehensive people transformation roadmap, to allow for informed and robust decisions and to support implementation

- Accelerate HR transformation by realigning the people function with the organization's must-win battles and people priorities

- Implement a remote support model and balance remote and onsite work

A successful transformation to an employee-focused target interaction model calls for a fundamental shift in mindset — one that HR leads, the C-suite supports and the entire organization embraces. This shift will succeed when HR makes decisions and transforms the function with a primary goal to positively impact the remote employee experience — committing to a rapid human-centric iteration of processes. In this crisis, all eyes are on the CHRO. Shaping the HR function to deliver for the remote working environment that is here to stay is the critical first step.

## Authors

**Johannes Maechtel**, International Region
HR Transformation Program Manager
johannes.maechtel@promerit.com


**Armin von Rohrscheidt**, International
Region HR Transformation Leader,
armin.von.rohrscheidt@mercer.com


**Mary Tinebra**,
North America HR Transformation Leader,
mary.tinebra@mercer.com


**Dr. Avantika Tomar**,
Principal and Global Solutions Lead,
Workforce for the Future,
avantika.tomar@mercer.com