

A MINI CASE STUDY

We've Virtualized Our Workforce—Now What?

Client Demographics

Nonprofit Practice Area: HR Outsourcing

Location: Silver Spring, Maryland

Sector: Nonprofit

Mission Type: Health & Nutrition Advocacy

Staff Size: 21 Full-Time Employees

Annual Budget: \$5 Million

Scenario

A Maryland-based health and nutrition advocacy nonprofit wanted to virtualize but still had many years left on their lease. The Nonprofit HR client conducted a return-to-workplace staff survey and the results indicated that most staff wanted to remain remote or shift to a hybrid model. The CEO wanted to accommodate staff, however, there were costs for continuing to rent office space that would go unused.

Considerations

The CEO took into account five critical considerations when making the choice between remaining remote, shifting to a hybrid model or returning to the physical workplace completely.

- 1 Understanding how to navigate balancing the budget with staff satisfaction and not being locked into a long-term lease.
- 2 Reviewing the roles and responsibilities of staff and if in-person work was necessary to perform the position.
- 3 Accounting for employee preference and continuing to engage with employees by letting their voices be heard.
- 4 Thinking about projects, workflows and planning specific instances for in-person gatherings appropriate for the organization.
- 5 Ensuring diversity, equity, inclusion and fairness by implementing procedures, policies or guidelines that apply to all staff.



Solutions

Culture and communication were imperative to the implementation of a new way of work for the organization. It was important for the CEO to reinforce or refine the organizational culture as a result of this decision. The CEO continued to intentionally communicate the norms, the values and any assumptions to the staff in order to build a shared understanding and vision for what the future of work would look like at the organization. This included the rules of engagement for the new work model. Staff remained informed through a reliable communication cadence that was established to foster productivity and trusting relationships.

The CEO strove to remain empathetic and lead by example. Given the differing degrees of impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on each employee, it was critical for the leader to maintain compassion, ensuring that decisions were borne from empathy, fairness and equity. The CEO also communicated that work would stop at 2 p.m. on Fridays and did not send emails to staff after that time.

Recap & Reflect

Walk through this scenario in your organization by reflecting on the following questions.

- 1 What kind of impact would establishing a fully remote, hybrid or fully in-person workforce have on your organization's budget? Explore each option.
- 2 Are there staff who are mainly operational, such as an office manager or finance staff, who need to be in the office or new employees that need to get acclimated to physical workspace? Consider specific roles.
- 3 If staff preference is not to return to a physical workplace, are you fully aware of your employees' work-life styles? How can you cater to their needs through your decision making? Examine what solution(s) would be a win-win for the employees and organization.
- 4 If shifting to partially or fully virtual work, what types of events would warrant in-person gatherings for your organization? Since your workforce is not going into an office every day, consider annual meetings (or another cadence) to provide an opportunity for in-person connection.
- 5 What can your organization do to ensure no employee is singled out as having a special circumstance? Acknowledge ways in which leadership can access unique scenarios from a diversity, equity, inclusion and fairness lens.



Final Point to Ponder

What does your current company culture look like, and how will the new workplace model complement or contradict it?

