

The Future of Work Arrives Early: How HR leaders are leveraging the lessons of disruption

Germany

RESEARCH OVERVIEW

Oxford Economics and the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) partnered with SAP SuccessFactors to understand the realities of a post-pandemic workplace for both employers and employees in 10 countries.¹ Our research offers a glimpse of the various workforce strategies adopted by organizations in response to COVID-19, including insight into hiring and layoffs, expectations for future employment changes, readiness for remote work, and investment plans around digital technologies.

This brief report highlights research results for **Germany** and suggests next steps for HR leaders as they plan for the years ahead.

GERMANY'S RESPONSE TO COVID-19

Experiences with COVID-19 vary from country to country, based in some part on the scale of the virus spread, national responses to controlling the pandemic, and local economic realities.

Germany has, to date, contained the virus more effectively than many other countries in our sample, even considering a rising second wave. Early and closely coordinated shutdowns, along with a furlough program ("Kurzarbeit") that pays a majority of affected worker salaries, have limited community spread and kept the unemployment rate relatively low. These responses help inform our interpretation of survey responses from Germany, which reflect somewhat less concern with future workplace changes compared to responses from other countries in our sample.

Understanding regional and local differences will be critical for HR leaders in Germany and across the world as they make plans for their global workforces.

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¹ Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, Germany, India, Mexico, Spain, United Kingdom, United States. To learn more about the research, including a detailed overview of each country, visit: <http://www.sap.com/human-experience-shrm-oe>

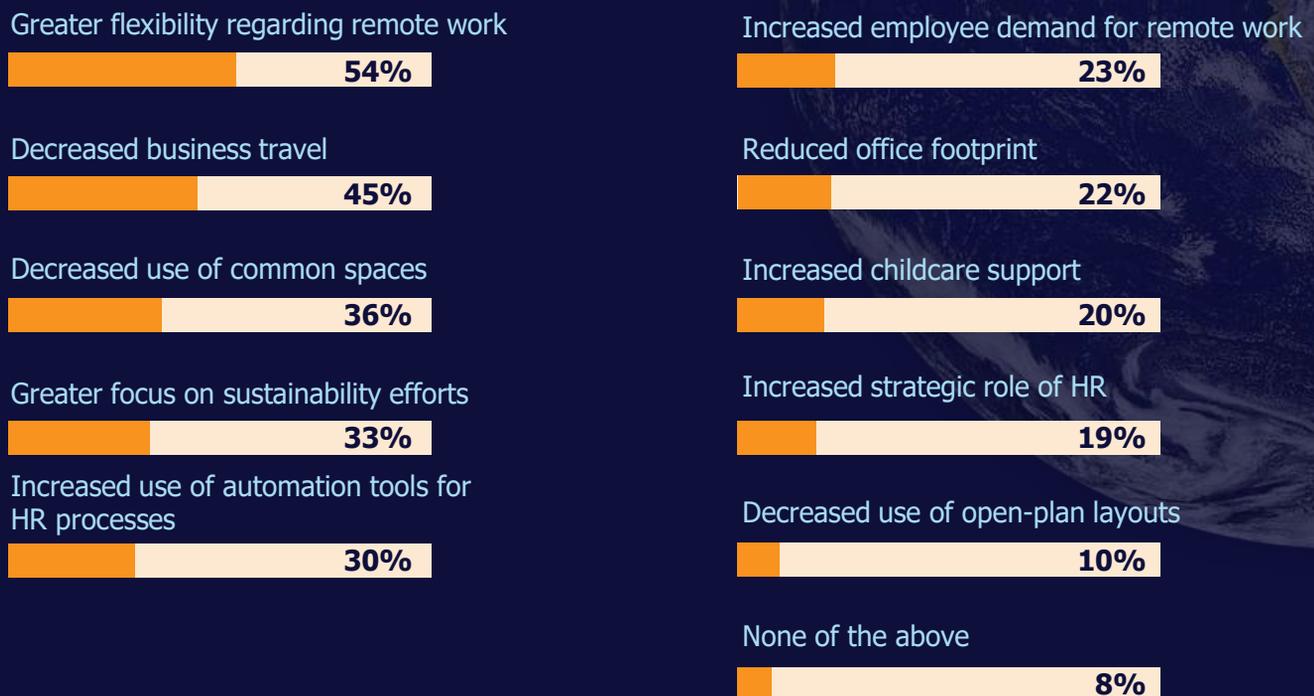
REDEFINING THE WAY WE WORK

The pandemic has redefined work and altered workspaces for employees around the world, forcing leaders to adapt to unexpected disruptions, anticipate future challenges, and plan for strategic changes.

- Two-thirds of German respondents say their organization has effectively handled new ways of working in response to COVID-19, and 70% say their organization is well prepared to address the changing work environment. In general, they are less confident in these areas than respondents from other countries in our sample.
- German respondents to our survey are more likely than others in our sample to say that most of their workers must be on site in a facility or at a customer site—yet they are less likely to be making a number of workplace changes. While 60% are increasing sanitation, far fewer are taking steps like staggering the number of employees in the workplace at once (26%), checking temperatures (21%), or implementing social distancing precautions such as plexiglass (29%). This could, in part, reflect comparative success controlling the virus to date.
- With change comes challenges. Maintaining productivity given new ways of working is the top expected barrier, cited by 46% of respondents. Reskilling the workforce to work with new technologies (37%) and establishing a culture that supports remote employees (36%) are also top of mind.

FIG. 1: A range of workplace changes expected in 2021

Q: Which of the following long-term changes (12+ months) do you expect COVID-19 to have on the workplace? *Top-three ranked*



THE POST-PANDEMIC TALENT CRISIS

Attracting and retaining top talent remains a concern for leaders around the world, though many—including respondents in Germany—may be underestimating the extent to which competition for talent will present a challenge in the days ahead.

- Just 19% of German respondents say that competing for top talent will be a top challenge to their organization after COVID-19, focusing instead on productivity concerns.
- German HR professionals in our survey also may be underestimating the extent to which employee wants and needs will change in 2021 and beyond: they are less likely than most others to say flexible work policies (45%), work/life balance (34%), and diversity and inclusion (21%) will become more important to employees in the wake of COVID-19.

FIG. 2: Flexible work will not be the only talent differentiator

Q: To what extent do you expect the following to become less or more important in an organization's ability to attract or retain talent, given the effect of COVID-19?

"Somewhat more important" and "Much more important" responses



MIXED MESSAGES ON TECHNOLOGY

German respondents in our survey are more likely than others to say workers must report in-person, but flexible work will likely still become important in the years ahead—requiring leaders to make sure remote employees have the tools they need.

- Nearly three-quarters (70%) of German respondents say their company has the technology it needs to navigate the changing work environment.
- Nearly one-fifth (17%) say that most of their workers could work remotely, but do not have the technology or environment they need to do so.

Q: Which technologies do you plan to invest in the most over the next 12 months? Top three technologies

32%

Learning programs for reskilling and upskilling, as well as new procedures

26%

Automation tools

23%

Mobile platforms