

**The New Future of the Workplace**

# **3 Must-Learn Lessons from the Pandemic**





# The Playing Field Has Changed

For many — if not most — industries, the pandemic has dramatically altered the way business is done. From day-to-day operations and the services and support they provide, to customer perception and employee expectations, “business as usual” is anything but.

Through this time of unprecedented anxiety, uncertainty, and unrest, HR has emerged as the MVP for businesses big and small. They took on the challenge and put their heads and hearts together — making their companies stronger, smarter, and better, and their workforces more efficient, flexible, and resilient.

As the pandemic dust settles, many HR professionals may find themselves asking, “Can we go back?” But perhaps the right question to ask is, “*Should we?*” In fact, 90% of respondents to a Gartner survey<sup>1</sup> said they’ll continue to allow employees to work remotely at least part of the time, and 44% anticipate offering additional benefits (mental health, childcare leave, etc.).

Despite its utility during this unexpected season, the “survive” mentality focused on the tasks and issues of today has often come at the expense of forward-thinking, employee-centric strategy. One-hit-wonder tools and procedures act as temporary band-aids for long-established (and likely to endure) problems with employee engagement and experience.

In this ebook, we’ll take a look at three of the biggest lessons we’ve learned from the pandemic.

**But before we get started, there’s an important topic we need to cover.**

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gartner.com/smarterwithgartner/9-tips-for-managing-remote-employees/>

# Get Your Data Ducks in a Row

Without the ability to rely on water-cooler talk and the usual physical cues that help HR keep a pulse on the organization, businesses must rely increasingly on data for insights on their people. The keys to success in our post-pandemic world depend on your ability to access, interpret, and act on data. HR is now on the frontline of business transformation, with digital tools that can provide mountains of data to help guide and inform decisions (and track their impact) that shape their strategy and success.

It's important to remember, though, that digital tools are not set-it-and-forget-it technology. As the needs and goals of your business change, the data insights and applications need to adapt accordingly to stay relevant and impactful. So just as the company is making adjustments, your digital tools need to be adjusted as well.

**Now, let's get to the lessons.**



## Lesson 1

# Amp Up Your Agility

Agility and adaptability — they made it possible for many businesses to survive the change and disruption caused by the pandemic. Others have even thrived. From curbside pick-up and expanded delivery to robust ecommerce and virtual solutions, successful business owners and managers have stepped out of their comfort zone, stepping up their game entirely.

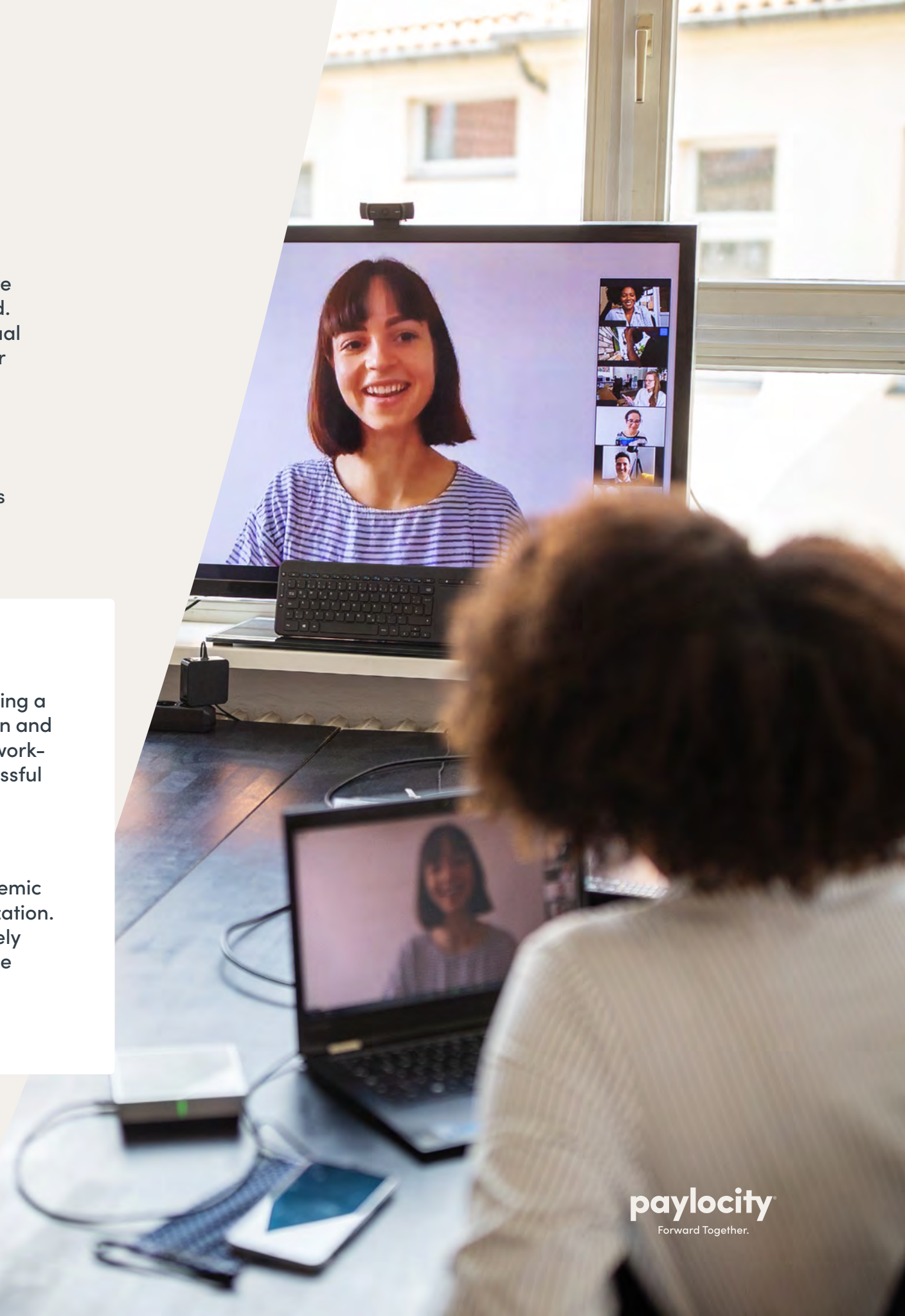
Though the pandemic has redefined the way we think about change and disruption, they've always been part of the job for HR professionals. The differences are the scale and speed of change. Organizations accustomed to planning three- and five-year goals look at significantly shorter goal windows — planning, instead, for a year, a quarter, or even a few weeks. For HR, agile planning means taking control of change instead of just reacting to it.

### ✓ **Manage Change**

Prepare your organization and workforce to stay productive without missing a beat. Start with solid digital infrastructure to help facilitate communication and remote working, manage schedules, maximize flexibility, and optimize work-life balance. Set your company and employees up for a seamless, successful transition and make it easier to implement future changes as needed.

### ✓ **Manage Communication**

Anyone trying to keep up with the news and guidelines during the pandemic knows how quickly things can change. The same is true for your organization. HR is challenged with making sure changes are communicated effectively and efficiently. With your entire workforce on the same page at the same time, you can help avoid breakdowns in communication and workflow, minimize frustration, and maintain corporate credibility.





## Lesson 2

# Give Your Employee Experience a Refresh

Whether your leaders and people managers are well-acquainted with remote work or were thrown into it for the first time this year, it's easy to lose touch with the needs of your workforce. To help employers and employees stay connected, HR professionals have had to redefine, reimagine, and recalibrate the employee experience.

### ☑ **Redefine Engagement**

Staying in tune with employee needs means staying in touch. It's critical that HR executives make a concerted effort to identify or innovate new tools and techniques to both encourage and measure employee engagement, whether it's employee surveys or tips for helping managers stay ahead of communication breakdown and the loss of emotional connection that comes with remote working.

### ☑ **Rethink Onboarding**

Research by GlassDoor shows that a good onboarding process can improve an organization's new-hire retention by 82% and productivity by more than 70%.<sup>2</sup> Whether your organization hires remote workers on a regular basis or made the shift during the pandemic, having a blended workforce of remote and on-site employees is the new normal. That means developing an onboarding process that provides a consistent experience for every new hire — whether on screen or in person — is critical to preparing them to hit the ground running.

<sup>2</sup> <https://b2b-assets.glassdoor.com/the-true-cost-of-a-bad-hire.pdf>





## Lesson 2 (continued)

# Give Your Employee Experience a Refresh

### ✓ Reimagine Management

When the pandemic first hit, HR focused on making sure employees were set up for remote working, but many overlooked (or never fully acknowledged) the need to equip managers and executives with the tools and training they need to manage a remote workforce. Experience has taught us managing by email and video conference takes a very different set of skills than managing a team sitting outside your office. Providing training for managers will help them effectively and confidently manage things like productivity and team morale.

### ✓ Recalibrate Your Data

Continue monitoring and tweaking your workforce analytics to identify trends, measure employee feelings, gauge their needs, and monitor which benefits they're utilizing most. Keeping track of this important data will help make sure your programs and initiatives align with the organization's goals — and your employees' needs.

**"If you don't have the data available to really explore and understand the patterns that exist under the surface, you're not going to be able to employ technology as effectively. First and foremost, you've got to get your data in order."**

Shawn Dubravac | NY Times Bestselling author, *Digital Destiny: How the New Age of Data Will Transform the Way We Work, Live, and Communicate*





## Lesson 3

# Make Employee Well-Being Priority #1

The pandemic wasn't the only source of anxiety employees have faced. Civil unrest and increased political tension have cast a glaring light on issues that are important to employees outside their 9-to-5s, inspiring a change in priorities for HR professionals.

HR has always been about the people. But companies shifted from prioritizing the the work people do for them to ensuring the company works for the people as well. According to Cheryl Johnson, Paylocity CHRO, that means leaning into the human experience and asking, "Is this the right experience for the employees?"

The issues impacting employees personally will eventually impact them professionally. So it's increasingly important that employees know the issues that are meaningful to them are also meaningful to the company they work for.

**"We have be the ones challenging the business to say: Is that human? Is that the right experience for the employees? And I think the business is going to lean on that more and ask us to be thinking about the human experience."**

Cheryl Johnson | CHRO | Paylocity



## Lesson 3 (continued)

# Make Employee Well-Being Priority #1

### ☑ Destigmatize Mental Health

Not a new issue, mental health awareness has been slowly gaining momentum. But the pandemic has brought the issue speeding to the top of many HR priority lists. In fact, by March of 2020, 68% of organizations added at least one new wellness benefit to help employees during the pandemic.<sup>3</sup>

The stress and pressure the pandemic put on the workforce are tremendous, and everyone is experiencing grief. But there remains a stigma associated with mental health, and HR is in a position to help change that. By including mental health in the everyday HR conversation, you can normalize talking about it — and that's the first step toward managing it.

### ☑ Focus on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Another topic simmering on the back burner of organizations for years, talks of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) have often been limited to unconscious bias. But the recent social unrest has inspired many organizations to develop robust DEI programs that not only improve diversity in hiring but also ensure that the corporate experience is balanced to give all employees a true sense of belonging.

Data, analytics, and AI-enhanced recruitment are some of the most powerful DEI tools an HR professional has at their disposal. When powered by accurate, relevant data, state-of-the-art recruitment tools can equip businesses to evaluate and improve processes that prevent and overcome the unconscious biases to level the playing field. And by establishing goals and setting up metrics around DEI, your organization can capture actionable data around hiring and compensation practices. Your data can also provide insight into benefit enrollment and usage patterns — making it easier to evaluate whether your offering meets the varying needs of a diverse workforce.



<sup>3</sup> <https://hbr.org/2021/01/9-trends-that-will-shape-work-in-2021-and-beyond>



## Lesson 3 (continued)

# Make Employee Well-Being Priority #1

### ☑ Practice Transparency

As we emerge from this season of intense uncertainty, one of the most impactful ways to promote well-being amongst your employees is through transparency. According to a Deloitte survey, it's "the most valuable organizational currency."<sup>3</sup> Transparency builds deeper employee trust and respect for the organization — which goes hand-in-hand with employee well-being.

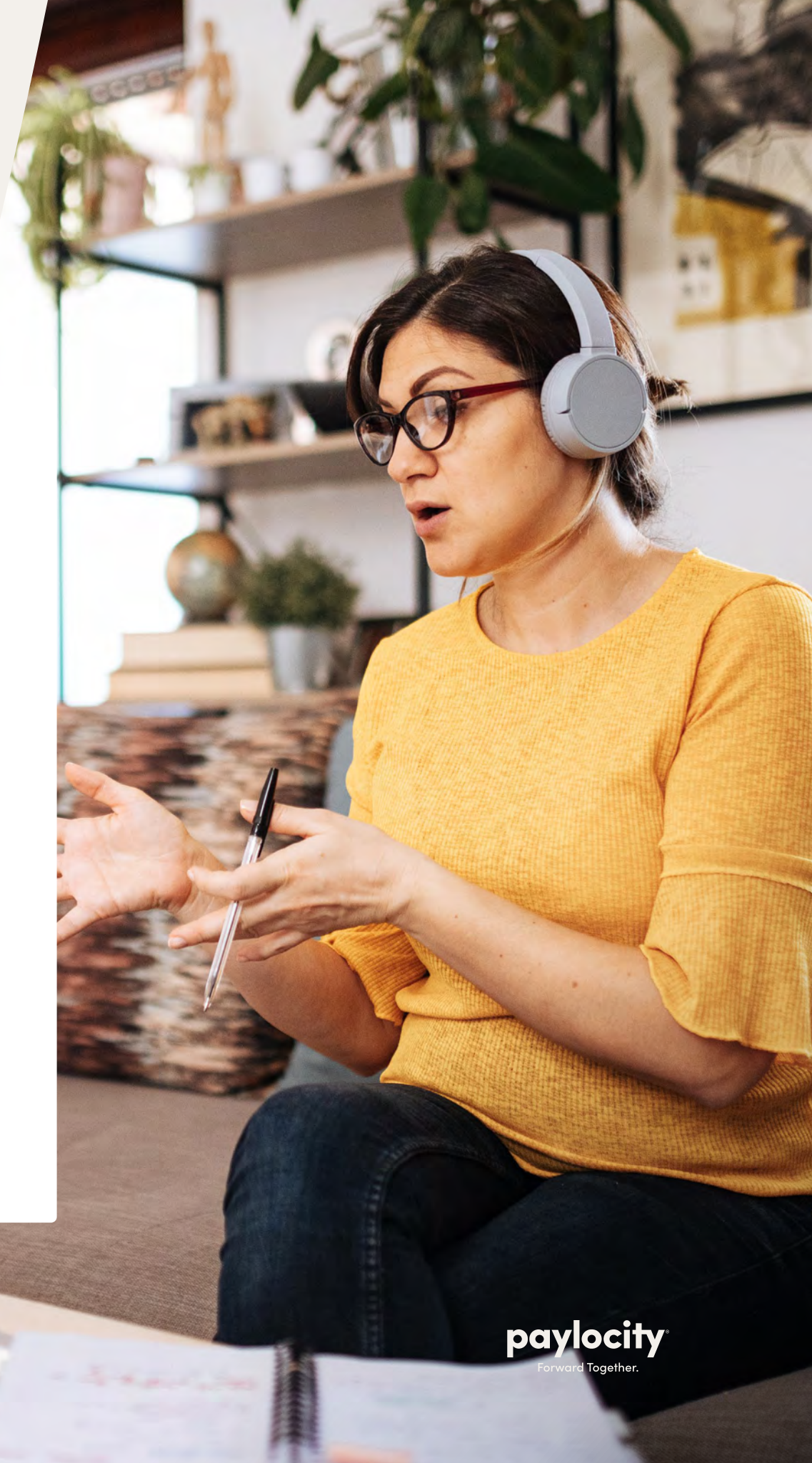
Yet, when surveyed, a surprising 60% of organizations were concerned about employee perception of transparency and another 27% believed their lack of transparency created a competitive disadvantage.<sup>4</sup> Building trust through transparency can start with something as simple as clearly outlining expectations and goals for your employees — openly sharing organizational goals, successes and, yes, even failures with employees goes even further. Vulnerability inspires empathy. Trust begets trust. Show them that you're in it together.

### ☑ Take a Stand

Navigating social issues is new for a number of businesses. When these hot topics came up in the past, we'd ask, "Is this issue relevant to our business? Will taking a stand be too polarizing?" And in answer to those questions, our default setting was always to remain neutral. Well, over the past year, we've learned that staying neutral is no longer an option.

Now we're asking, "Is this issue relevant to our people?" More often than not, the answer is yes, and it's especially true for Gen Z — the workforce of the future. For them, standing up for what's right and what they believe in isn't new. It's a core part of their identity. As complicated as social issues can be to navigate, it's crucial that HR leaders help organizations clarify their positions for both customers and employees.

<sup>4</sup> [https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/insights/us/articles/5136\\_HC-Trends-2019/DI\\_HC-Trends-2019.pdf](https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/insights/us/articles/5136_HC-Trends-2019/DI_HC-Trends-2019.pdf)



## Going Back Isn't an Option — and That's a Good Thing

The way you do business has changed irrevocably, and the lessons you've learned during the pandemic will have a lasting, positive impact on your organizations. In spite of the distance, this shared experience has helped create a culture that's more connected than ever. Your operations are more agile and your workforce has acquired a valuable new set of skills — giving you a competitive edge that will only get sharper.

As a leading provider of cloud-based HR and payroll software solutions, Paylocity can help your business make strategic decisions in the areas of benefits, core HR, payroll, talent, and workforce management, while cultivating a modern workplace and improving employee engagement. Our comprehensive product suite delivers a unified platform, and our client-first service approach means we are a partner and advocate for your success.

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