

Reinvent jobs to build organizational resilience in uncertain times



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The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated many trends associated with the future of work, including remote work and the use of gig talent and automation. In the process, the workplace has become more distributed and virtual. In this newly reconfigured workplace, organizations are rethinking how work and talent are organized and how jobs might be reinvented to build organizational resilience in the face of this crisis.

Job reinvention and value creation

The pandemic is a defining leadership moment. Job reinvention is one critical strategy enabling leaders to respond with agility to this rapidly unfolding, unprecedented situation. Leaders can use job reinvention to create different types of value for their organizations depending on their business objectives, which may include improving performance, containing costs to help fuel growth and reducing necessary risk.

How to reinvent jobs to meet different business objectives

A tale of two jobs: Data governance and strategy job

Reinvented to improve business performance	Reinvented to contain costs
<p>60% of value-added activities added to the job for business partnering</p> <p>50% of reporting, data capture activities automated and removed from the job</p> <p>40% of analytic activities remain with new skills tied to business services</p>	<p>65% of independent modeling and reporting analysis activities removed from the job and assigned to highly skilled freelance talent</p> <p>35% of remaining work moved to centralized analytics team</p>

This reinvention requires that leaders deconstruct jobs into tasks and determine how to complete these tasks using the optimal combination of human talent and automation. It's critical that leaders approach job reinvention in a responsible and ethical manner that considers the interests of all stakeholders from customers to suppliers to employees. For example, there's upside to be captured from using automation to augment human work or to create entirely new work that can potentially be more fulfilling for humans instead of merely using automation to replace human labor.

Leaders can better respond to the evolving needs of their organizations, customers and employees by following a three-step action plan to reinvent jobs: 1) identify alternative sources of work, such as automation or nontraditional talent; 2) determine which work can be dispersed inside and outside an organization and performed remotely; and 3) achieve greater visibility into pivotal tasks.

#1: Identify alternative sources of work

When most people think of work, they think of employees who perform jobs. But by deconstructing jobs and examining the tasks that compose them, leaders can identify how to best complete these tasks using different sources of work.

With pressure to optimize costs and reduce risk during times of economic uncertainty, leaders can start by analyzing which tasks may be best performed by automation and artificial intelligence (AI). For example, many utility companies have expanded their use of automation software in recent weeks to allow workers to operate, monitor and control systems remotely, thereby reducing the risk of human exposure to the virus and enabling utilities to run smoothly without service disruptions.

Figure 1. Talent exchange example: Airline baggage handlers to eCommerce logistics coordinator

Baggage job activities 	Transferrable skills 	Logistics job activities 
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Handle load and unload baggage and cargo ▪ Perform handling procedures like documentation ▪ Implement safety procedures and standards in handling customers' baggage ▪ Keep track of the baggage while transferring from cars and buses and aircraft ▪ Direct and interact with clients in the delivery processes of their baggage ▪ Protect customers' baggage from theft, loss and damage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Cope with physical demands ▪ Practical work application, procedural mindset ▪ Problem-solving skills ▪ Attention to detail ▪ Interpersonal communications ▪ Display alertness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Prepares loads for shipment ▪ Monitors orders, receives products and coordinates delivery ▪ Process customer returns and ensure orders fulfilled within service level agreement ▪ Takes steps to avoid quality control issues ▪ Receive incoming customer calls, respond to orders, returns, general inquires ▪ Completes activities throughout the order fulfillment cycle to make sure deadlines met and batches posted

Some companies have also increased their use of automation in call centers to handle increased call volume or to reduce costs. For instance, IBM estimates that chatbots alone can help reduce customer service costs by up to 30% by speeding up response times, freeing up agents for more challenging work and answering up to 80% of routine questions.¹ Instead of focusing primarily on transactional tasks, these call center jobs can be reimagined to focus on empathy, hyper-personalized service and specialist expertise. For example, AI can listen to customer calls and coach agents to respond with empathy and emotional intelligence or make suggestions for personalizing services – all while letting automation handle the basic transactional tasks in the background.

To cope with a volatile economic climate, organizations can also consider which tasks can be performed by nontraditional talent: gig workers, independent contractors, alliances, volunteers and even customers. As leaders, we must all ask ourselves, How can we tap the broader ecosystem of talent to build the resilience of both organizations and people during these challenging times?

In China, for example, companies have creatively started sharing employees, taking those without work due to the COVID-19 outbreak, from such organizations as restaurants, and lending them to other organizations that have had a spike in demand, such as Hema, Alibaba's retail grocery chain well known for its fast grocery food delivery.² More than 3,000 new employees from over 40 companies in different sectors have joined Hema's employee-sharing plan.

This concept can be used to launch a talent exchange with two key objectives:

- Redeploy select talent with comparable skills from industries facing reduced demand (contributing organizations) to those facing a significant increase in demand (receiving organizations) for a limited period of time.
- Achieve this exchange while significantly minimizing the frictional cost and time associated with traditional employment transitions (e.g., reductions in force/furloughs, application for unemployment benefits, applying for new positions).

Receiving companies (in health care, select retail and logistics, for example) would identify the type and quantity of skills required and the appropriate sources of such skills from potential contributing companies (such as airlines). The receiving and contributing companies define the terms of the exchange (e.g., duration, implications for pay, benefits and insurance, legal requirements and considerations).

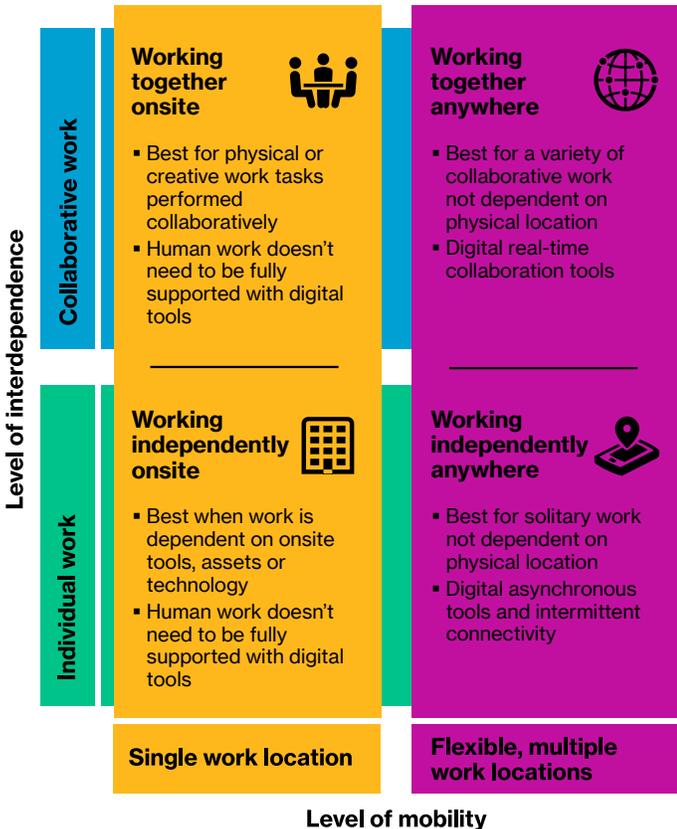
As an example, this type of exchange could result in airline baggage handlers using their skills to become e-commerce logistics coordinators (Figure 1).

For employees, such an arrangement delivers immediate work and income as well as a diversity of experience and the acquisition of related skills.

#2 Determine how to disperse work more easily

Given our current business environment, it is more important than ever to understand the types of work in jobs so that independent work and interactive work – performed onsite or remotely in a variety of locations – is suitably supported (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Tasks can be dispersed across time and space



Today, despite years of advocacy, remote working is available to only a handful of workers. Virtual teams are less costly to hire and maintain, and studies have shown that they are more productive too.³ Yet in the U.S., only 7% of private sector workers and only 4% of state and local government workers have access to telework, according to the 2019 National Compensation Survey (NCS) from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.⁴ And those who have it are largely managers, other white-collar professionals and the highly paid. Although telework is more common in Europe, anecdotal evidence suggests that there are fewer remote work opportunities in other countries, such as China. But by some estimates, 56% of the U.S. workforce hold jobs that are compatible – at least partially – with working remotely.⁵

By deconstructing jobs into component tasks, leaders can more easily see which tasks can be performed by local workers working from home independently – or even by workers in other geographic locations. To promote social distancing in response to outbreaks such as the coronavirus, leaders can bundle related tasks that can be completed remotely into new jobs and combine the tasks that require onsite work into a smaller number of other jobs, thereby limiting the amount of work that must be performed in the office or onsite.

For many, this will be an opportunity to operate differently, testing what new actions they can take. Even those who have already virtualized most work are using the crisis as an opportunity to work in new ways. For instance, some companies are successfully conducting entire workshops via video conferencing for the first time in response to the pandemic.

#3 Achieve greater visibility into pivotal work

Work is performed in jobs, but using jobs as the unit of analysis can obscure the actual work being performed and how it may be rapidly changing in an increasingly volatile world. By looking at the evolving tasks performed in each job and the skills required to perform them, leaders can far more easily spot the most pivotal work. Resources and attention can then be focused on where they will deliver the best return; non-value-added tasks can be dropped or assigned to others, and employees can be empowered to innovate in how they deliver nonessential work in ways that minimize unnecessary risk to others.

Amazon, for example, quickly changed its logistics, transportation, supply chain, purchasing and third-party seller work to prioritize stocking and delivering essential items for consumers in response to the massive surge in demand since the outbreak.⁶

Pfizer also reinvented jobs to focus on the work needed to achieve a critical business objective: boost workforce performance and engagement. After realizing that its highly skilled workers were spending 20% to 40% of their time on non-value-added tasks such as creating PowerPoint presentations, Pfizer reassigned these tasks to a support team now known as PfizerWorks.⁷ This approach enabled highly skilled workers to focus on higher-value work.

Research suggests that providing greater clarity to employees on how to get work done boosts engagement and is essential to providing a relevant and meaningful employee experience.⁸ And with so many working from home for the first time, being clear on what is important and how to get work done is essential.

Figure 3. Considerations to help jump start job reinvention

Now 	Intermediate team 	New normal 
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Enable remote work for all possible workers. ▪ Identify and plan workforce requirements by taking into account alternatives (talent exchange to scale up/down) with a view of balancing immediate and long-term impact. ▪ Identify and prioritize the pivotal work that needs to get done now in response to the crisis. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ensure leadership clarity on work you need to accelerate for business outcomes. ▪ Reinvent jobs to optimize the work and alternatives for sustainable performance. ▪ Continue to engage talent in new ways of working. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Continue to architect work with sustainability in mind. ▪ Adapt an agile and continuous learning mindset. ▪ Enable reskilling for evolving work.

Getting started reinventing jobs

As organizations manage through the different phases of the COVID-19 crisis, they can make progress on the path to work reinvention. Starting with a focus on facilitating greater access to remote work and identifying alternative work sources, organizations can then move on to reinventing jobs with visibility into the work that will help accelerate business outcomes in the intermediate term. They will then be ready to architect work in a sustainable manner post-crisis and adopt a continuous learning mindset needed to enable reskilling as work evolves (Figure 3).

To help organizations with their job reinvention efforts, Willis Towers Watson is launching a new AI-based platform, WorkVue, that allows organizations to evaluate, model work alternatives and reinvent jobs for targeted business outcomes.

Although a difficult time for all, this crisis can provide unprecedented opportunity. Designing around the constraints of today’s challenging business environment may accelerate the future of work and unlock new and innovative ways to reimagine how, where and by whom work gets done. Ultimately, this can help build greater resilience and efficiency in our organizations and a more sustainable business model to see us through this challenging period.

Sources

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