



INTERIM IMPERATIVES E-BOOK

PIONEERING THE
FORESEEABLE FUTURE

Workforce: Reimagining the World of Work


NORTH HIGHLAND

COVID-19 HAS LEFT A PERMANENT STAMP ON THE WORLD. UNCERTAINTY IS EVERYWHERE, STRENGTHENING THE CALL FOR ADAPTATION.


We're approaching a monumental stepping stone on our path to the **post-pandemic world**. Following the immediacy of COVID-19 response, this next phase will force you to forge distinctions between the provisional realities of the next 12 to 18 months and your three or five-year strategy. The unique conditions of the foreseeable future introduce a host of unknowns that you must thoughtfully and intentionally explore while you advance towards a durable and adaptive recovery.

In approaching the path forward, we believe clarity of perspective comes when considering implications and critical considerations across customers, the workforce, and operations. It's impossible to know what the months and years ahead will look like, but we can start to place bets based on what we're seeing in the continuously changing environment around us. In this e-book, we explore the workforce-related trends shaping the foreseeable future.

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A NEW WORKFORCE IDENTITY

COVID-19 conditions have surfaced new gaps and challenged fundamental workforce paradigms—introducing unforeseen questions surrounding the physical workspace, workforce equality, employee engagement, and cross-functional collaboration. The near-term future will continue to raise the stakes on how organizations strategize through their workforce: Customers value businesses that align with their ethics and ideals, with over half (56 percent) saying that they won't purchase from companies they deem unethical.¹ The same study shows that "employee treatment" ranks as the top factor that customers consider when evaluating a company's ethics.² In other words, customers buy from companies based on how they treat their employees.

56%

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In this environment, business leaders—ready or not—must design for employee needs that did not exist in the pre-COVID-19 world. Suddenly, you must make game-changing decisions surrounding the return-to-work experience, managing hybrid teams, and addressing employee equality concerns. In traditional office workspaces, there's presumed fairness (e.g., equipment, work setting, work conditions) that no longer exists as we straddle the worlds of virtual and on-site work. For example, parents juggling the demands of young children have vastly different work experiences than those at home alone. Leaders must contemplate how to maintain engagement and evaluate performance in the context of those discrepancies. Similarly, younger generations may opt to return to physical work sooner than their older, potentially higher-risk counterparts, raising new questions around ageism and upholding generational equality. Looking towards the near-term future, you should begin to acknowledge these gaps and identify the activities that can help close them,

while at the same time minimizing the tensions across workforce, customer, and operations-related interests.

With customers putting increased stock in purpose-driven organizations, we're finding that employees, too, are rallying around safety as a higher-order need. This shared goal promotes greater agility, team building, and cross-functional collaboration. To help the organization progress towards a new employee experience vision, leaders should model and set the stage for employees at every level of the organization through frequent, vulnerable, and transparent communications. They should be forthcoming about their mistakes and engage employees for input and insight into solutions. To help prepare for the uncertainties ahead, you can also tap into the diversity of your workforce as an asset. Every segment of the workforce—from the Generation Z analyst who was hired six months before the crisis, to the Baby Boomer executive who led teams through the 2008 recession—brings a differentiated and valuable perspective to today's context.

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At the same time, the stark financial and operational realities of COVID-19 forced organizations to reevaluate their workforce make-up. In many cases, business viability challenges led some to permanent headcount reductions. In the future, you have an opportunity to consider more flexible, adaptive workforce options. An adaptive workforce strategy involves a portfolio of work structures, practices, and processes that balance productivity, engagement, and operational value through the core workforce. Over time, you may also explore adding a mix of insourced/outsourced capabilities, managed services, staff augmentation, on-demand staffing, and variable contractor options that better position you to achieve your longer-term strategic aspirations. **To best manage your workforce for the uncertainty ahead, you'll need to adopt a long-view, holistic orientation that compares the total cost, risk, and value of future workforce scenarios to operations, customers, organizational capability, and competitive differentiation.³**

TOP TRENDS

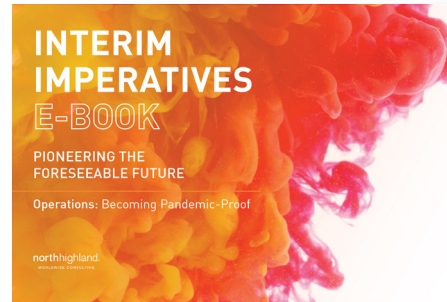
Explore the top trends that are reshaping the world of work:



**Click around the wheel
to learn more about each**

The next e-book in our series, *Becoming Pandemic Proof*, explores trends and considerations for operations.

And in the final e-book of our series, *Crafting a Design-Led Strategy*, we'll explore how Rapid Innovation arms you with a design-led methodology to evaluate the impact of near-term trends in the context of your strategic aspirations. By illuminating opportunity amid uncertainty, it positions you to adopt a positive, proactive posture in approaching the near-term future.





SERVICES SPOTLIGHT

ABOUT RAPID INNOVATION

In approaching an unknowable future, a design thinking mindset allows you to plan for critical uncertainties. It can help you place informed bets on where to focus as the near-term future comes into view—enabling you to adapt as you learn more each day. An intentional approach to Rapid Innovation helps you understand the drivers of change and identify and prioritize new opportunities. It enables you to shape a transformation strategy and lay the structural foundation for execution.

ABOUT WORKFORCE STRATEGY SERVICES

North Highland's pragmatic and people-first approach to Workforce Strategy ensures that you effectively achieve near-term viability and stability objectives while preparing for a future recovery requiring organizational durability and adaptability. We first work collaboratively to define a Workforce Strategy that can deliver your business strategy. We then enable effective Workforce Portfolio Management through a comprehensive view of the benefits, risks, and impacts of potential workforce models that help you realize your strategic plan.

¹ "56% of Americans Stop Buying From Brands They Believe are Unethical," Mintel, Nov. 18, 2015.

² Ibid

³ "Workforce Strategy and Portfolio Management: Propelling Crisis Response and Recovery Across Horizons," North Highland, Apr. 2020.

ABOUT NORTH HIGHLAND

North Highland makes change happen, helping businesses transform by placing people at the heart of every decision. It's how lasting progress is made. With our blend of workforce, customer and operational expertise, we're the world's leading transformation consultancy. We break new ground today, so tomorrow is easier to navigate.

Founded in 1992, North Highland is an employee-owned firm - regularly named one of the best places to work. We have more than 5,000 consultants worldwide and 65+ offices around the globe. Meanwhile, we're a proud member of Cordence Worldwide (www.cordence.com), an international consulting alliance.

For more information, visit www.northhighland.com or connect with us on [LinkedIn](#), [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#).

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



HEATHER BALKEMA

RAPID INNOVATION LEAD, U.S.

Heather.Balkema@northhighland.com

Heather is a Senior Director in North Highland's Experience Design capability. She is a dynamic leader with the ability to motivate and inspire teams to deliver customer-centric programs that drive brand equity and sales. Heather has over 20 years of experience in marketing strategy, advertising, and experience design across a variety of leading consumer and B2B brands.