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HYBRID WORKFORCES: EVOLVING STRATEGIES FOR EVOLVING TEAMS

LEARN THE BENEFITS A BLENDED WORKFORCE OFFERS AND HOW TO EFFECTIVELY MANAGE HYBRID TEAMS FOR SUCCESS.

HYBRID WORKFORCES: EVOLVING STRATEGIES FOR EVOLVING TEAMS

By Karen Lopez, Property and Casualty Client Advisor

As the business world continues to evolve, insurers are tasked with accommodating shifting priorities to meet their clients' needs. The tumultuous economic climate, ongoing modernization projects and fluctuating workloads – not to mention a global pandemic – have made it necessary for most organizations to embrace multiple types of employment. Even after physical offices reopen, most insurers are planning to remain flexible in regards to location and hours. According to The Jacobson Group and Aon's January 2021 Insurance Labor Market Study, 56% of respondents plan to offer full-time remote work opportunities and 77% intend to offer occasional work-from-home. Blended workforces, which may include on-site and remote employees, full-time and part-time professionals, contract workers and more, are here to stay. It is vital insurance leaders are able to focus on the value of diverse employment types and effectively manage shifting team compositions.

By employing hybrid teams, insurers can keep internal full- and part-time staff engaged and productive, while looking to interim resources such as [subject matter experts](#) and project teams to help tackle unforeseen challenges and special needs, including CAT season or open enrollment. Through a comprehensive human capital plan that outlines talent solutions for various circumstances and focuses on effective management, insurers can maintain productivity while avoiding backlogs and employee burnout.





THE BENEFITS OF BLENDED TEAMS

It is imperative insurers are equipped to manage a variety of needs while providing seamless service to their customers. In the current environment, virtual work options and flexible schedules are expected by most candidates and employees, especially as they continue to juggle personal responsibilities brought on by the pandemic. However, this also creates newfound flexibility for employers as they build a scalable workforce.

Increase Agility.

One of the greatest attributes of building a hybrid team is the ability to quickly expand or contract the size of your workforce based

on business demands. Your talent strategy should provide the flexibility to support busy seasons, shifting workloads, employee leaves and special projects. Plan ahead by identifying an interim staffing partner that understands your unique needs. In the current environment, this may also mean selecting a firm with a record of setting up successful work-at-home teams and training them remotely. By building these relationships early, you'll be prepared to bring on qualified, skilled professionals to augment your current workforce when needs arise, rather than scrambling to find a last-minute solution.

Reach talent outside of your geographic location.

By expanding your team beyond your backyard, you're able to reach skilled talent who can fill even the most specific of needs. Without geographic constraints, you can build a highly-qualified remote workforce that spans across the entire country. Additionally, leveraging U.S.-based contractors (or homeshoring) enables you to bypass many of the constraints associated with offshoring. Employees will work in similar time zones and are able to more seamlessly integrate with your existing team members, without sacrificing morale and camaraderie.

Enhance employee satisfaction.

In addition to offering alternate work arrangements for interim staff, acknowledge full-time employees and direct-hire candidates also desire flexibility. Insurance remains stable relative to the overall economy and top talent is still in high demand. Even organizations that did not previously offer work-at-home options now have the technology in place, reducing the need for all employees to return to a brick and mortar office. In fact, 69 percent of individuals say they are as or more productive at home. Leverage this flexibility to increase employee satisfaction and remain competitive when recruiting and retaining high-potential employees.

Gain specific expertise when you need it.

In today's technologically-driven world, many departments are undergoing modernization efforts, adopting automated systems and streamlining processes. While you should prepare your full-time staff for these shifts, bringing in temporary employees who are

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familiar with new technologies or products can help maintain productivity while your in-house team ramps up. At the same time, these individuals are able to assist in training your internal staff and support the implementation process, as needed.

Seamlessly take on new business and projects.

Whether your organization is awarded new business or a natural disaster strikes, it's vital to be up and running immediately. Your internal recruiting team may need to hire 15 people, and not have the bandwidth to make a high quantity of full-time hires in a limited timeframe. Employing trained interim staff can ensure you're able to meet pressing demands during the time it takes to hire for more permanent roles. Often, the right temporary staffing partner will assist with onboarding interim talent and serve as a single point of contact for questions, enabling managers to remain focused on the critical tasks at hand.

Alleviate impact to other departments.

It's easy to focus on the needs of one isolated department. However, backlogs can have a

snowball effect, impacting numerous other areas. For instance, a delay in the claims department will likely create a backlog within the appeals and grievances department. This may result in an uptick in customer service call volumes, as claims payments are delayed. Once one operational area is behind or stalled, it's likely a ripple effect will be felt throughout the entire organization. By having a flexible and agile team, you'll be able to best distribute staff to avoid delays.

Maintain company reputation.

Not being able to support customer needs can be catastrophic and result in declining memberships and customers, lost quality and customer service ratings, and negative community standing. At the same time, without sufficient support, internal employees are likely to become overworked and burnt out. This can affect work quality and also result in increased turnover, further exasperating the issue. By leveraging interim talent, you can alleviate any pain points early on and ensure your service levels are relatively unaffected.

EFFECTIVELY MANAGING A BLENDED WORKFORCE

To truly reap the benefits of a blended workforce, department leaders must also commit to tailoring their management techniques to meet each individual's needs. Employees may be based in different locations, with some working remotely and others beginning to come back on site as restrictions lift. Some may be working non-traditional schedules and/or part-time hours. It's critical all employees – no matter their location or employment type – are able to work together in a cohesive and well-organized manner. By being intentional,

planning ahead and committing to transparent communication, you can ensure your team is operating most efficiently.

Involve employees in your decisions.

Be transparent with your team when adding staff and adjusting the team composition. For instance, proactively seek buy-in from your full-time employees before bringing on interim individuals. Ask where they could benefit most from additional support and inquire about their current pain points. This also enables your current staff to better understand how new team members fit in with their day-to-day responsibilities and contribute to their overall success. By including employees in the process, you can increase their engagement and ensure they have positive attitudes toward the arrangement, while also mitigating potential future tension.

Set them up for success.

The first few days are incredibly important when onboarding talent, especially in a remote environment. Encourage your current team to be welcoming and available to help answer questions as individuals settle in. You may consider identifying one or two people new hires and contractors can rely on for guidance as they become comfortable with your team's systems and processes. Make sure all professionals are set up from a technology standpoint to minimize hiccups and unnecessary issues. Be upfront with expectations around productivity and communication, and provide a training schedule, if applicable.

Adjust your communication style.

There is no one-size-fits-all communication method. Consider how past communication



styles and channels may need to evolve to accommodate multiple geographic locations, working hours and work sites. Is it easy for everyone to come together to discuss project objectives and share information? How can remote employees get questions answered most efficiently? Leverage a variety of tools including Skype chats, video conferencing, emails and phone calls. You may even consider asking employees about their preferred methods of communication to make sure everyone is receiving and understanding information in a way that makes them feel included, supported and involved in the success of their projects and team.

Manage productivity.

Lay out clear expectations around projects, deliverables, schedules and communication. Invite open and transparent communication among all team members. Make sure the entire staff is aware of current priorities for the coming weeks and months. This may be best accomplished through weekly all-team meetings or frequent check ins. Additionally, determine if your methods for measuring productivity translate across all work arrangements and locations. Provide ongoing feedback, both positive and constructive, to help team members remain aligned and on track.

Create a sense of ownership.

Include interim and part-time employees in all-team calls and immerse them in your company culture. Plan meetings around when everyone can join, accounting for time zones and work schedules. All employees should feel like they are a part of your team and have clear expectations around their own roles and responsibilities, as well as those of their teammates. Even if a project is short-term, you can help employees understand how their contributions impact the overall company. Everyone should be working to reach the same end result and best service clients during their times of need.

Focus on development.

Discuss expectations around professional development with your permanent staff and inspire individuals to continually better their skills. This could mean encouraging them to take online courses, hiring an outside

speaker to present to your team on topics such as customer service or empathy, or putting together team training. Aside from formal programs, all team members, including temporary staff, should value building relationships and sharing their insights with one another on an informal level. Additionally, ensure all staff is included when discussing any proposed changes to processes or any updates to regulations.

A blended workforce may be the key to ensuring your organization stays competitive and productive in uncertain times. Account for various circumstances and workloads, plan ahead, and be intentional with your management style. By embracing flexibility and agility, focusing on all-inclusive communication, and helping all team members feel valued, you'll be best positioned to take on the unpredictable.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:



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To further discuss this topic or if we can serve as a thought leader in your talent-related endeavors, don't hesitate to contact Karen at klopez@jacobsononline.com.

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