

Virtual
Working
Group:
Future of
Work:
What is
your Work
Forward
Strategy?

Future of Work: What is your Work Forward Strategy? April 26, 2022

Work-life balance/harmonization as we know it has changed dramatically over the past two years. More companies have moved to hybrid or remote work models than ever before. Companies have been challenged to find the right approach to keep their employees safe in the workplace while balancing individual choice and flexibility. Employees are thinking about work differently and have more desire to rethink their careers in this employee friendly labor market. All of this has provided a big opportunity for companies to think differently about work in the short term. The harder part has been implementing a longer-term work model given the constantly evolving nature of the COVID-19 variants. This working group focused not on how companies are managing things through COVID-19, but what their “work forward” strategy will be.

DISCUSSION TAKEAWAYS

The working group started with one company sharing their future of work strategy. Key takeaways included: establish guiding principles to shape the work vision, provide resources and tools such as playbooks to local teams to support the vision while enabling local relevance, execute the plan but continually seek feedback to iterate as needed, inform the internal plan with external/social trends (in this case global preference towards choice/flexibility and the importance of purpose), be authentic to your company’s approach and use it to differentiate your employee value proposition (EVP), and reinforce the culture through increased employee communication and engagement.

Working group participants expressed interest in a range of topics including how companies were building flexibility/choice into traditionally non-flexible environments (i.e. manufacturing), enabling managers in a hybrid world, and how to address cultural change needed going forward. In addressing these, the following themes emerged regarding longer term work models:

Balance the Needs

All companies in the session were moving forward with a hybrid work model, except for work that is required to be done in a specific locale (i.e. manufacturing). For those roles that could be done more flexibly, companies are balancing business imperatives with team, customer and personal needs. While many companies had flexible work policies pre-pandemic, the driver in the decision was based on business need. Going forward, the individual need is a bigger part of the equation and a balance between the two will be needed in this highly competitive talent market.

11
participants
from
9
CAHRS Companies:

CNH Industrial
Cigna
Corning
Estée Lauder Companies
General Electric
IBM
Manulife
Medtronic
Novartis

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Global Approach

Companies are establishing work forward strategies with a company-wide, global blueprint in mind. However, these global policies must have the flexibility to account for local legal, business, and cultural requirements and provide local leadership the ability to have ownership.

Brand & EVP

Flexibility in a vacuum is not the answer. Companies need to look at their entire EVP and be authentic to how flexibility can fit into it, but be sure to communicate the total value proposition to current and future employees. Be true to your company's history and heritage and use this opportunity to amplify existing strengths. You cannot be all things to all employees, so have to be choiceful.

Changing Role of the Manager

In the past, flexible work decisions were largely made in HR. Going forward, HR can establish a framework, but managers need to make the decisions. This will be uncomfortable for them, but is a necessity given the volume of decisions as well as driving the work model into the culture. A good approach is to not look for consistency – let the team do what's needed for them. Provide guidelines but give freedom within the framework. Build confidence in the managers through training and sharing of ideas between teams.

DEI Impact


The elevated discussion about diversity, equity and inclusion has had an impact on companies' work forward strategies. They have shifted from a one size fits all approach to more individualized inclusion and valuing what each person brings to work. Co-creation is a great way to ensure individual needs are taken into account and is also a way to involve employees in the change. Two-way dialogue is critical here to understand what is important and valued.

Purposeful Presence

Companies talked about ensuring employees both understand why and have good reasons to come into the office. Make the office spaces as inclusive as possible. Ensure collaboration happens when teams are in the office. Enhance the amenities and food offered for in-office work. Be sure that coming to the office is directly tied to the type of work that needs to be performed.

Flexibility for All

Traditionally, there have been some roles that have not had flexibility. Companies are devising ways to give even the most inflexible positions some control and choice moving forward. One way to do that is through technology allowing shift selection. If companies can allow more flexibility to these employees, there may be a way to leverage self-directed work teams in new ways, going beyond scheduling to performance management, etc.

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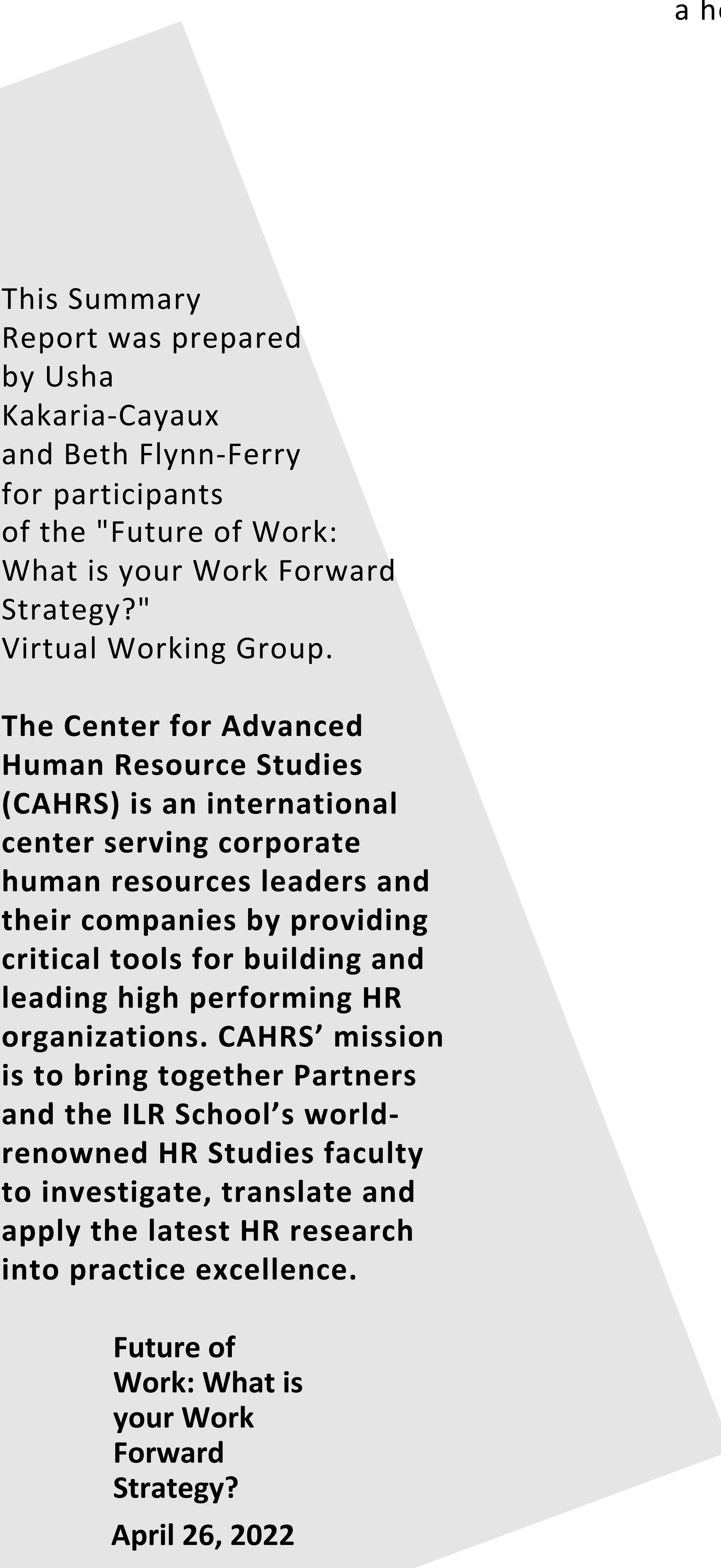
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Generational Impact

In the past, companies have tried to balance the needs of all generations in their work models. However, there may be an opportunity to leverage the younger generations as we make decisions today. Gen Z is coming into the workplace, never having been in it before, allowing for fresh eyes and thinking. Use this talent for reverse mentoring, co-creating, voice of the customer, etc.

Employee Wellbeing/Wellness

Research shows that it is expected that the most critical Key Performance Indicator (KPI) for companies going forward will be their employee wellness index. COVID-19 has amplified the importance for not only physical but mental and financial health. As we consider our work forward strategies it is important to account for the entire individual, as the lines between work and personal life have blurred considerably and employees are looking increasingly to their employer to provide a holistic approach.

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This Summary Report was prepared by Usha Kakaria-Cayaux and Beth Flynn-Ferry for participants of the "Future of Work: What is your Work Forward Strategy?" Virtual Working Group.

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