



Life-work Synergy in 2021 and Beyond

In early 2020, the spread of COVID-19 forced an unprecedented evolution of workforce policies across every industry. At the top of the list, many had to scramble to develop a work-from-home strategy for every employee. While this disruption could be painful and inconvenient, many saw a silver lining — a chance to finally attain the elusive concept of “work-life balance.” Without a commute, and with more leeway to handle errands and family needs, employees saw an opportunity for a newfound handle on both halves of their daily lives.

Unfortunately, as months passed in lockdown, the opposite effect began to take hold for many. Instead of finding balance by unifying home and work into a single physical space, the crucial separation between the two had been obliterated. Kitchen tables, couches, and beds became desks; kids became rowdy officemates; video chats stood in for everything from boardroom meetings to water cooler gossip sessions.

While those who had already worked from home for years often flourished, their colleagues new to this arrangement suffered. Feeling the strain of both work- and home-related stresses simultaneously, these employees often found that a sensible equilibrium between “home” and “job” was unattainable or even impossible. After all, workforces are now always connected to their jobs with their smartphone, and children at home don’t require any less supervision during invisible “business hours.”

The advent of life-work synergy

Instead of balance, workers suddenly found themselves in the middle of a *negotiation*. Crucial decisions were made minute-to-minute as to which role needed to be played. Parents put off projects until the evening to help with homework. Managers had to develop new routines to check on their direct reports. Employees sought assistance to become more productive in a home office that was never supposed to exist. Others worked extra hours to meet deadlines, and then required unexpected PTO to help protect their health.

In all cases, successful employers during the crisis were those that supported employees in these negotiations, be it with equipment, job flexibility, technological support, or anything else that could help when help was needed most. Work-life negotiation requires a high level of trust: managers must trust their people to manage their time efficiently, and employees must trust their employers to reward productivity and organizational impact, even during atypical hours or through unconventional means.

When these personal negotiations succeed, the result is **life-work synergy**, which completely reimagines the relationship between employers and their employees. There are three levels of life-work synergy — a life-work synergy trifecta — employers can consider to evaluate their current efforts.

The life-work synergy trifecta

- **People experience:** This starting point is analogous to “employee experience” but extends to life outside of the traditional office walls and hours. It means simply aiming for positive experiences and interactions. For many businesses, crisis mode forced them into a state of survival where this kind of supportive, yet transactional, employee-employer relationship was the best they could hope for.
- **Humanizing work:** One step further than people experience, humanizing work means people are unafraid to share the real circumstances of their lives, and feel heard — more crucial than ever when colleagues are physically distant. This may sound touchy-feely, but the impact is direct: employees who believe managers care about their personal lives are nearly three times more engaged.
- **Human flourishing:** This final level in the trifecta sees employers take a vested interest in supporting their people in all areas of their lives, and actively helping in the negotiations described above. When their company goes out of the way to help beyond the confines of their roles, employees will never forget it. Flexibility is the name of the game here.

Making time for time off

Another unexpected consequence of the blurred lines between home and work is that employees may not realize the “right” time to take time off, even to the detriment of their own mental and/or physical well-being. Prior to the pandemic, remote workers already took less time off on average than their in-office counterparts. Now, more employees than ever are in that category.

Consider the early days of this new year an opportunity to reevaluate your company-wide PTO policies, both during the ongoing crisis and on a permanent basis beyond. No matter what, **communicate regularly and clearly with your workforce about it.** Remind your people that time off is expected and necessary during trying times, and that they are not expected to forgo time off when working from home. Some employers are even advising employees on how to fully disconnect from their jobs when on PTO, avoiding the omnipresent temptation to check email or project statuses while “relaxing.”

The future of work is happening now. Take steps to encourage and emphasize time off now to support life-work synergy long after the crisis is over.

About UKG

At UKG (Ultimate Kronos Group), our purpose is people™. Built from a merger that created one of the largest cloud companies in the world, UKG believes organizations succeed when they focus on their people. As a leading global provider of human capital management (HCM), payroll, HR service delivery, and workforce management solutions, UKG delivers award-winning Pro, Dimensions, and Ready solutions to help tens of thousands of organizations across geographies and in every industry drive better business outcomes, improve HR effectiveness, streamline the payroll process, and help make work a better, more connected experience for everyone. UKG has more than 12,000 employees around the globe and is known for an inclusive workplace culture. The company has earned numerous awards for culture, products, and services, including consecutive years on Fortune's *100 Best Companies to Work For* list. To learn more, visit ukg.com.

References:

1. <https://www.businesswire.com/news/home/20130211005999/en/Dale-Carnegie-Training-Uncovers-Major-Drivers-of-Employee-Engagement-in-US-Workforce>



Our purpose is people

© 2021 UKG Inc. All rights reserved.

For a full list of UKG trademarks, please visit ukg.com/trademarks.
All other trademarks, if any, are property of their respective owners.
All specifications are subject to change. CV1342-USv1