

Toss the Playbook: Create New Opportunities With These Post-Pandemic Research Insights

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Business leaders need clarity and the ability to see into the future to make the best decisions. Post-Pandemic surveys deliver research insights that can help.

by Samuel Greengard

When the pandemic reared its head in early 2020, the changes came fast and furious. People began thinking, acting, and spending differently. Businesses often had to react without the benefit that research insights can deliver, so they were essentially flying blind to the patterns that data has now begun to reveal about the opportunities ahead for leaders.

Although some of the outcomes now seem logical and even obvious, others couldn't have been predicted. Every individual leader has been faced with the daunting task of sifting through opinion, emotions and hard facts — using fast-twitch muscles to make hard decisions. But now that patterns are emerging, so too are **hidden gems of research insights** that are in turn driving new conversations in the boardroom. And a lot of that insight comes from Ipsos, a \$2 billion multinational research firm with more than 18,500 employees, that has its fingers on the pulse of 90 markets around the world.

The Insigniam Post-Pandemic Survey 2021 reveals changes in how employees perceive themselves, how they perceive their lives, and, as a result, how they perceive their work environments. The implications are tremendous. Download that report here.

Businesses and their leaders need clarity and the ability to see into the future to make the best decisions around what is possible, or to see things before they are occurring. Ipsos delivers research insights that can help executives understand the business imperatives in front of them. Oscar Yuan, President and CEO at Ipsos Strategy3, Ipsos' management consulting group, has the unique perspective of not only working with Ipsos leadership to turn its own data on itself as a large and complex organization, as well as imparting research insights to businesses around the world. Yuan and the team at Ipsos regularly read the data tea leaves and spot patterns that might otherwise fly under the radar. In some cases, these observations fly in the face of conventional wisdom.

Home-Work Rewired

The concept of the office is changing...but not necessarily in ways many business leaders would expect.

Interestingly, the number of remote workers has remained steady at about one-third throughout the pandemic, even with vaccine availability and a trend toward businesses reopening. But when we place a microscope to this stat, some less-than-obvious trends emerge.

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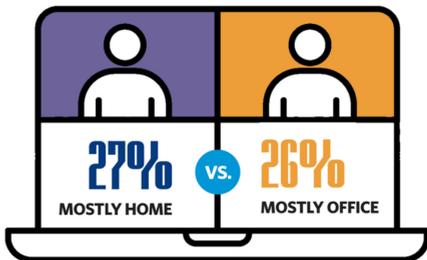
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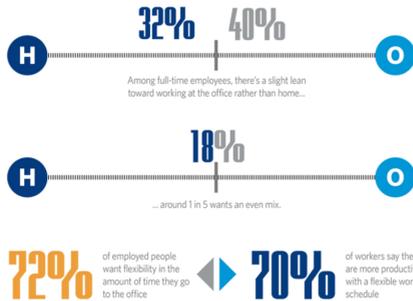
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WORKING MOSTLY AT HOME VS. MOSTLY IN THE OFFICE

The split among Americans on the right mix of working mostly at home vs. mostly in the office.



Source: Ipsos Poll on Consumer Behavior During COVID-19, March 16, 2021



First, don't get the idea that the work-at-home wave is permanent. There is pent up demand to go back to the office. Ipsos found that 62% of workers want to return to the office occasionally, and 34% find it challenging to be productive at home. This is where the tension lies for leaders: There are the employees who simply never want to work in an office again — and those who crave it yet expect the experience to be somehow different. This forces any leader to **unhook from immediate assumptions**, and can reshape the conversation between a CEO, CIO and CHRO pretty quickly.

In short, it isn't just how easy it will be to finally get people back in the workplace because they are ready and able. New expectations will push the boundaries of how work itself is designed and delivered. "There's an accelerated trend toward a hybrid work model," Yuan says. In fact, 72% want greater flexibility about how and when they spend their time at the office.

What do these research insights mean for business leaders? Is your workforce going to start calling the shots? How do leaders listen while also maintaining a sense of operational soundness? "There's a need to rethink the whole nature of workflow and workplace together — these are not separate issues. Consider the way workers compartmentalize tasks and the ways they collaborate. Even rethink the notion of officing. There may be a need to restructure days, hours and work methods to better fit different people's needs," Yuan says.

Can't Get No Satisfaction

It would seem logical that in a disruptive economy—and with high unemployment rates in many industries and sectors—people would feel less confident about their prospects—and more likely to cling to a job.

But insecurity be damned. Ipsos found that 25% of workers in the US say they will shop for a new job after the pandemic, and the figure rises to 36% for those ages 18-34. Contributing to this high level of angst is working from home. A lot of people find it difficult to be productive working at home, 46% are working unconventional hours, and 40% indicated that they feel overwhelmed trying to juggle work and life from the same location.

"A lot of people feel dissatisfied and burned out," Yuan observes. For leaders, the imperative is determining what mental health and wellness really mean in terms of work. While there's a "grass-is-greener-on-the-other-side-of-the-fence" aspect—and it remains unclear whether workers will actually follow through with job searches when the pandemic subsides—employers shouldn't shrug this one off. The answer to retention may lie in where workers feel their leadership team has a plan around mental health. The new company wellness point of view will be critical.

Just as the pandemic has accelerated and magnified other trends, it appears to have exposed underlying problems with work arrangements as well as always-on digital technology. For example, 46% said they are struggling with an inadequate home office set up or the lack of equipment. "The **imperative for employers** is to confront these issues and find ways to boost employee satisfaction — or lose talent," Yuan says.

In Search of the Perfect Tomato

Coping with rapid changes in consumer behavior was tough enough before the pandemic. COVID-19 poured gasoline on the fire. 47% of consumers have tried a new ecommerce or delivery brand, product, service or feature since the pandemic began—from grocery delivery and pre-ordered electronics to meal kits and alcohol.

AMERICANS ARE WILLING TO PAY MORE FOR CERTAIN THINGS...



Source: Ipsos Poll on Consumer Behavior During COVID-19, March 16, 2021

The disruption may seem frightening. After all, business models and supply chains are undergoing unprecedented change. But what's easily overlooked is that with disruption there's opportunity. Remarkably, 82% said they would be willing to pay more for groceries post-pandemic, 65% for a restaurant dining, 64% for takeout, and 50% for non-essential groceries.

Simply put, the pandemic has made people appreciate things they haven't had. The C-suite at many companies may find opportunity in **strategy innovation** as way to reposition existing products and services that previously may not have held promise. Another seemingly odd yet revealing finding? About one-third of those who bought groceries online and used curbside grocery pickup still went into the store to find the ripe tomatoes for their spaghetti sauce or the right mix of herbs for their omelet, Yuan says.

What might these research insights mean for decisions in the C-suite on product distribution? Don't get swept up in the hype about the need to shift everything online. When data points are connected, you may see new opportunities in buying journeys. There are still plenty of products people will go into stores to buy. Yuan says that the key to success is delivering emotional payback for consumers by better blending online and brick-and-mortar experiences. This includes making apps more like real stores through AI and other tools and making stores more like really cool apps. "The objective should be to find the right channel and approach for different products and services—and use technology to create more seamless experiences," he explains.

In Praise of Role Playing

Not surprisingly, research insights show the pandemic has resulted in a global drop in confidence in government and other institutions. In the US, UK, France and Japan the figure exceeds 20%. But what's easily overlooked is the vacuum this has created. Human systems don't function well without formal authority, and especially crave the moral authority that truly matters and ultimately gets the best results. The pandemic has revealed and accelerated a slow-burning dissatisfaction with the traditional arbiters of what's right and wrong. This seismic shift in the status quo presents opportunities for organizations that can co-evolve quickly within a complex, dynamic environment.

"With a drop in confidence comes an opportunity for companies to fill the resulting void," Yuan observes. And increasingly, this means tethering a company to causes. While this may seem incredibly risky or even taboo—and it would have been unheard of a few years ago—"Not taking a stand on social issues is akin to taking a stand that you're not in favor of it," Yuan warns. In fact, Ipsos found that 54% of consumers expect brands to take a stand on equality issues, and 60% said they are less inclined to buy products and services from a company they have philosophical differences with.

The upshot? "People are looking to companies to step up in areas like sustainability, racial justice, and employee equity," Yuan says. Yet, it's a slippery slope that requires a deep understanding of data...and customers. "People want companies to represent their values. You have to understand your customers like never before."

Toss the Playbook

Whether attitudes ultimately snap back to pre-pandemic values isn't clear. What is clear is that in an increasingly dynamic world, sentiment, behavior and values will continue to shift more rapidly and unexpectedly than in the past.

"Businesses must focus on shorter-term, scenario-based planning that allows for much more agility, flexibility and responsiveness," Yuan says. More bluntly: Evolve or die. It's increasingly essential to unhook from prevailing wisdom and ways of doing things under the assumption that what worked yesterday will work tomorrow.

It's equally important to truly understand what data is actually saying before taking action. For example: Ipsos found that 34% of the public made changes during the pandemic that led to complete comfort with online interactions, and 40% said that safety is now more important than prior to COVID-19. Yet there's a blindingly obvious corollary to this finding that might be overlooked by an organization reacting too quickly to this data: What about the 66% of people whose attitudes toward online shopping haven't changed? Or the 60% whose attitudes about safety weren't affected by the pandemic? A crosscurrent of conflicting ideas and beliefs is the perfect recipe for high levels of behavioral volatility and whiplash-like change.

One of the takeaways from the pandemic for companies large and small: **Evolve or die.** "Businesses must focus on shorter-term, scenario-based planning that allows for much more agility, flexibility and responsiveness."
—Oscar Yuan, President and CEO, multinational research firm Ipsos Strategy3

Ultimately, the power of data is more than numbers and percentages: It's about what they reveal when put under the microscope. The true advantage lies in teasing apart strands of statistics and exposing the hidden gems of research insights. This will inform those actions that bring new imperatives to life from and create competitive advantage from emerging opportunities.

Insigniam Post-Pandemic Survey 2021: The Reshaping of Attitudes to Work and Life

Peoples' opinions matter—and it makes no difference where on the corporate ladder they perform their job, whether administrative assistant or C-suite executive.

Respondents to the **Insigniam Post-Pandemic Survey 2021** said they had let their work displace their families and personal lives before the pandemic hit. They had missed major life events, such as their children's first steps: they hadn't made time to exercise or eat properly; and perhaps most painful of all, they weren't present for the daily routines of home. One executive captured the sentiment: "About two months into the lockdown, I realized I had never spent two consecutive months with my spouse or my children. Ever! What was I thinking?"

A truth has emerged and the survey captured it: People won't let it happen again. As a result of the pandemic, their priorities have been reshaped and their perspectives have shifted. For many, what was once acceptable is no longer seen as desirable or even tolerable. Now, life comes before work—health over deadlines, family over commuting, seeing friends over staying late in the office. [Read the full report.](#)