

# Talent Without Borders

NAVIGATING A GLOBAL TALENT ECONOMY

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the mitchellake group

talent for innovation

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# Introduction

It's now been more than a year since COVID-19 first swept across the world. In that time, the coronavirus has transformed how we live and how we work. But while we're all keen for life to get back to normal, many of us are less keen on seeing the way we work return to how it used to be.



# HOW COVID-19 CREATED A GLOBAL TALENT ECONOMY

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As an executive search firm, The MitchellLake Group's services are often deployed by businesses in Australia and Asia looking to access a broader talent pool by identifying and recruiting highly specialised individuals from Europe and the US. This can be a tricky and laborious task, particularly when there are families, schools and visas involved.

But with many professionals now having worked remotely for more than a year, it makes sense to ask what this is going to mean for the global workforce once the pandemic starts to abate?

Several forward-thinking companies have been successfully running remote teams for years. Matt Mullenweg, founder of Wordpress, summed up his experience of leading remote teams in an article titled, Distributed Work's Five Levels of Autonomy. According to Mullenweg, there are five levels of distributed work functionality, from Zero (where a job simply cannot be done remotely) to Five (fully remote, with higher productivity, performance and employee wellness than could be achieved by an in-person environment).

He argues that Level Five isn't attainable all of the time, but serves as an ideal scenario that businesses can strive towards



## LEVEL FIVE - NIRVANA

consistently perform better than any in-person organization could

## LEVEL FOUR

when things go truly asynchronous

## LEVEL THREE

being remote-first, or distributed

## LEVEL TWO

everything is still synchronous, your day is full of interruptions

## LEVEL ONE

no deliberate effort to make things remote-friendly

## LEVEL ZERO

a job which cannot be done unless you're physically there

Before COVID-19, most traditional businesses sat at Level One, with no deliberate effort to make things remote-friendly. However, during the pandemic (and post-pandemic in some cases) many businesses have found themselves at Level Three or even Level Four. One of the first consequences of this transformation is a shift in how employee work is evaluated.

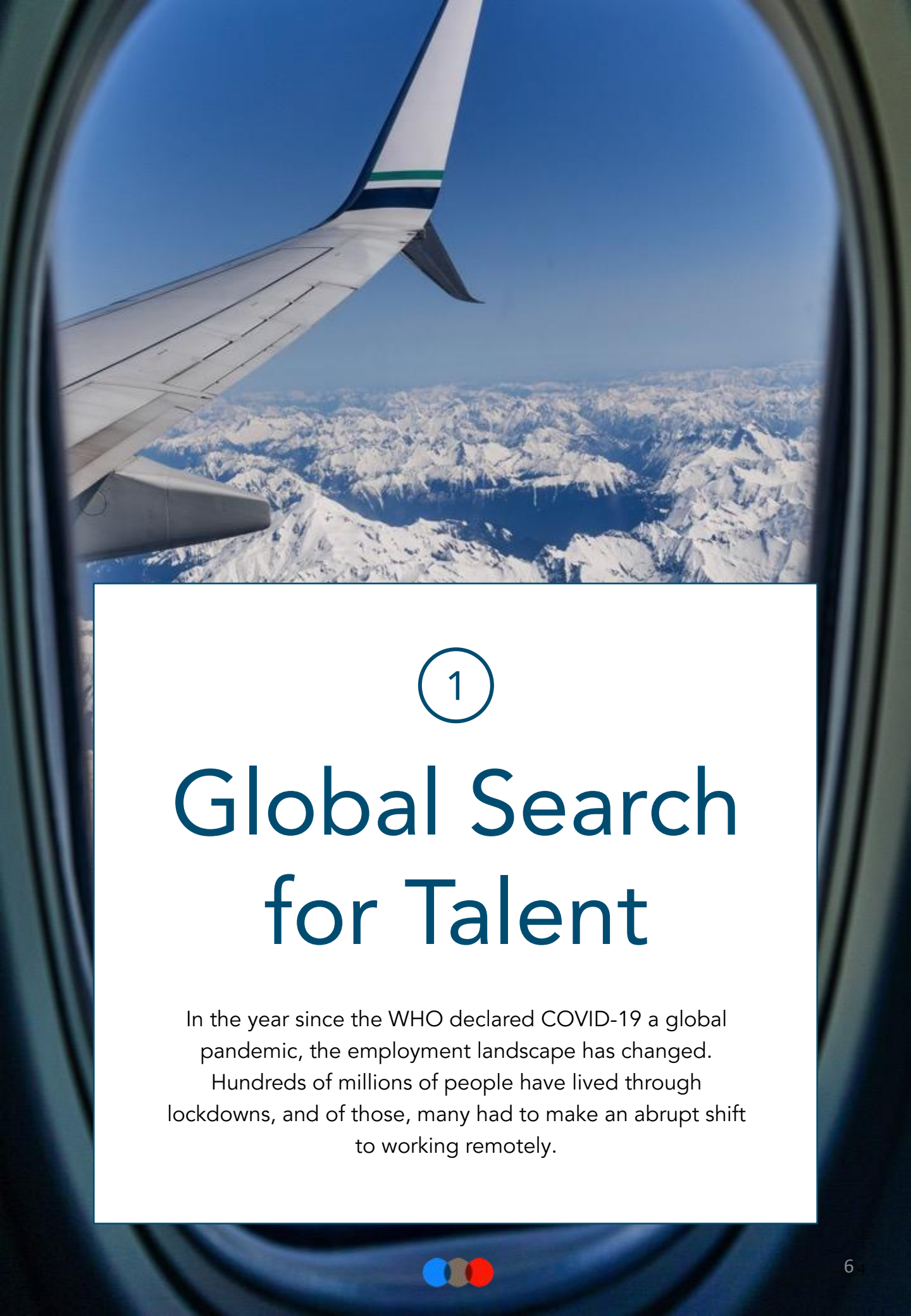
The focus is no longer on where work is produced, or even how it is produced. Instead, attention is being paid solely to what is produced. Companies have proof that productivity and quality of output have been maintained or improved during the switch to remote work, which increases their trust in the concept. And with greater confidence in the viability of remote work, it's likely that we'll see businesses starting to look further afield to tap into previously inaccessible talent.



In this paper, we'll explore how remote working is going to change the way we hire, giving specific focus to how adapting to global remote work will allow companies to engage in more cross-country or even cross-continent hiring. Just as importantly, we'll consider the cultural and structural changes businesses need to make to achieve a successful transition from local to global hiring.

To answer these questions, we've interviewed more than 30 senior executives from around the world, asking for their perspectives on how leadership hiring has evolved during the pandemic. Questions focused on areas such as the shifting scope of talent searches, the complexities of remote interviewing, and their individual experience of the positives and negatives of recruiting talent during one of the toughest years in living memory.





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# Global Search for Talent

In the year since the WHO declared COVID-19 a global pandemic, the employment landscape has changed. Hundreds of millions of people have lived through lockdowns, and of those, many had to make an abrupt shift to working remotely.



# NEW EXPECTATIONS, NEW OPPORTUNITIES

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For most companies, this has meant temporarily abandoning the traditional office-based model. Employees have had their commutes reduced, freeing up several hours per week, and have been able to demonstrate that their jobs can be done effectively without stepping inside an office.

As a result, new expectations about job flexibility, work locations, working conditions and work/life balance have been created.

“Remote working has amplified the geographical opportunities that we are able to tap into.”

Anna Di Silverio  
President (Europe)  
Avanade







74%

Almost three quarters of leaders say their companies are somewhat likely, likely or very likely to consider a wider geographic pool of candidates since COVID-19

Beyond resetting employee expectations, the shift away from traditional, localised ways of working also opens up a global talent pool. In realizing that much of their work can be done just as effectively in a remote setting, organizations have become more open to exploring potential new ways to access talent.

"I wasn't a big believer in remote working but I've been proven wrong. What I've seen since COVID is that productivity can be just as high working remotely, and you only need short time together."

Gillian Findlay, Former CEO, Vamp



# ADJUSTING TO NEW WAYS OF WORKING

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While many businesses had to hustle to provide their remote workforces with the right equipment and set-up for working from home, companies such as Biteable, who already had experience setting up distributed teams, were able to focus immediately on new recruitment opportunities.

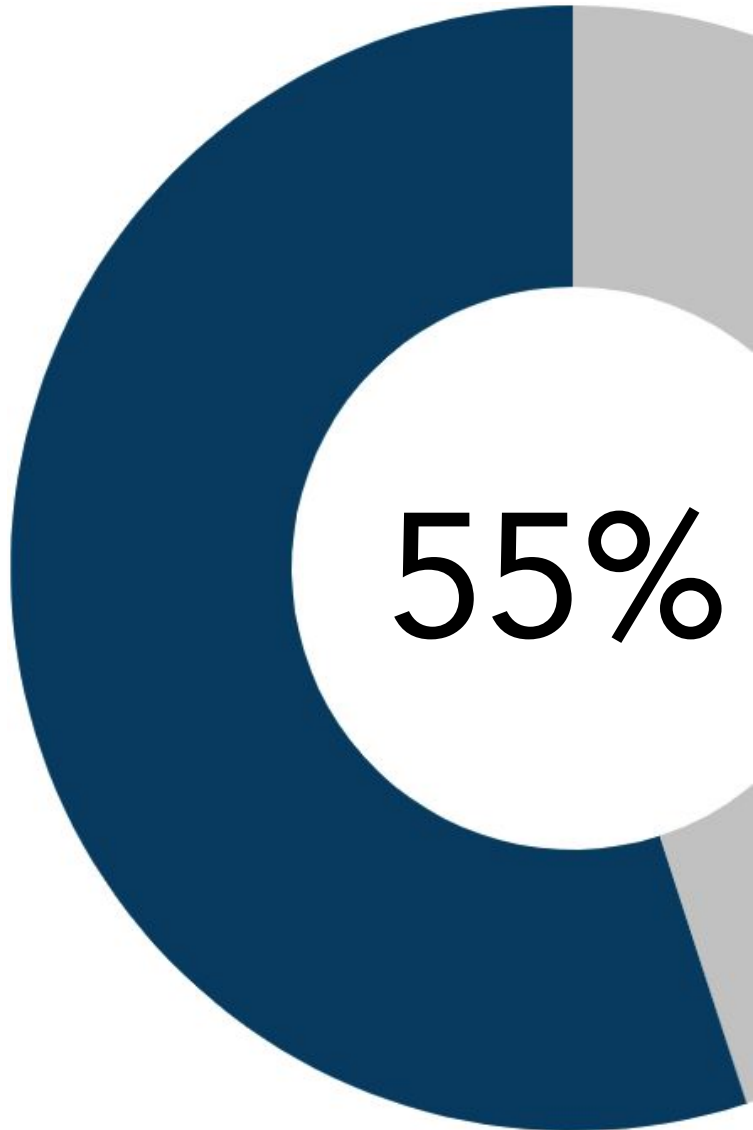
“Post-COVID, I'm blown away by the talent you get inbound given the lack of constraint on location. There are a lot of people that have decided to not live in certain places anymore and to live where they want to live. I actually think the biggest benefit for us is these people are looking for companies that are already remote.”

Brent Chudoba, CEO, Biteable



The majority of respondents are somewhat likely, likely or very likely to consider leadership talent based remotely since COVID-19

However, several respondents cited issues such as disparate time zones and the complexity of organizing regular alignment meetings as barriers to a smooth transition.



One approach to address this has been to create 'hubs' shared by teams within similar time zones, where members can collaborate and still feel connected.



“The pandemic has exacerbated the time zone challenges we had in the past. You find that if you want to spend more time with the team globally (virtually), there's not much overlap time. So it's important that people are in a similar time zone.”

Will Lopes, CEO, Catapult Sports

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While Catapult Sports CEO, Will Lopes, recognizes that people don't need to be in the office physically, he has found that innovation and productivity work better when teams within a specific function or product area are close enough to be able to talk through problems in real time.

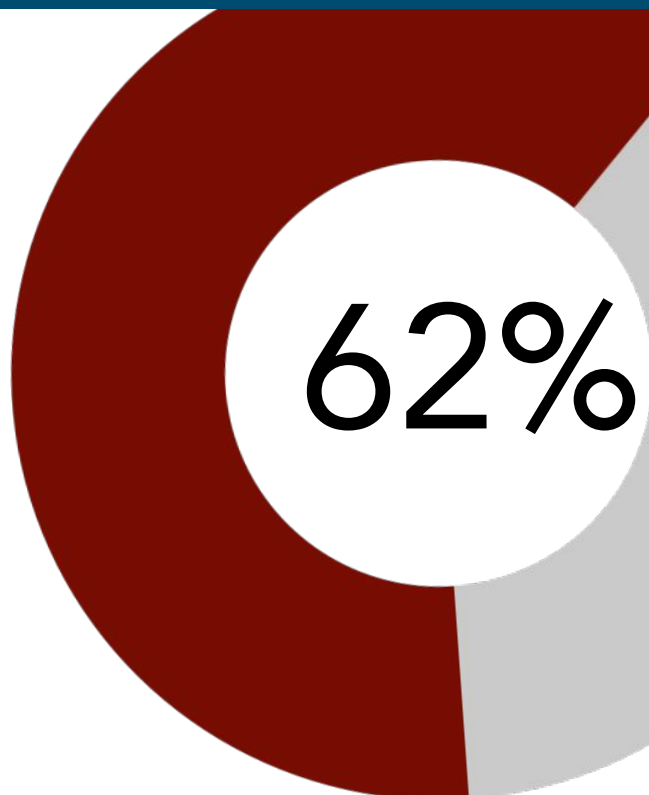
“We've never been averse to hiring specialist talent across different regions,” he says, “but they need to be able to have regular conversations with each other. We couldn't have a Head of Data scientist in Ireland and our best Data Scientist in Japan - it wouldn't work for collaboration. But if the best data scientist is in Berlin, then that could work.”



“There are a lot of perspectives out there on this, but we have had enormous net productivity gains. We may take a hit on whitespace opportunities and strategic planning, but we will spend a week together in one location to get aligned on our approach and then go back to distributed for 6-7 weeks. That principal allows us to recruit anyone anywhere, no limits.”

Jessica Lindl  
GM and VP, Social Impact  
Unity Technologies

Individual experiences of navigating the pandemic vary, but overwhelmingly, the business leaders we spoke to agreed that remote work has created opportunities even where it has added hindrances. The majority of respondents said that their businesses are now likely to consider hiring remote-based specialist talent





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# Hiring Without Borders

“We can recruit and retain talent in a way we haven't been able to before. There is a more equitable way to manage our team and work when we are all distributed. We all feel a lot more equal in how we are collaborating with each other.”

Jessica Lindl, GM and VP, Social Impact, Unity Technologies



One of the most exciting developments to arise from the shift to remote work is how it has changed the hiring process. Companies have had to embrace digital tools to communicate with potential candidates, relying on video conferencing programs like Zoom, Skype, Google Hangouts and Microsoft Teams as digital alternatives to the traditional face-to-face interview.



“COVID has opened my eyes up to the true value of executive search. We should always have had a global view, but COVID broke down the barriers we had before. Being able to engage with teams through video is better understood now.”

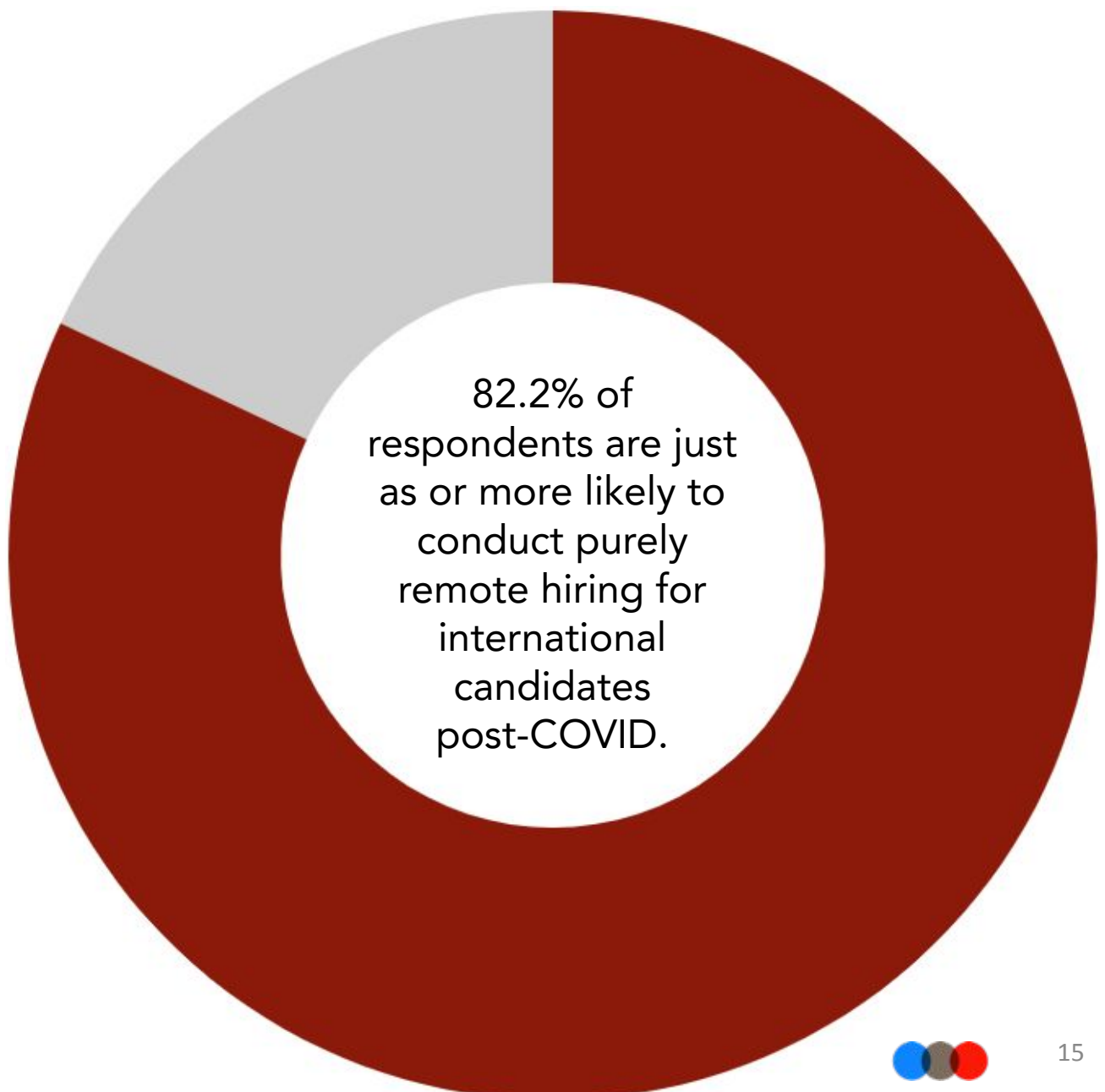
Gernot Abl, Chairman, Mogul

Beyond the technical aspects of hiring, a significant number of business leaders also said that other elements will need to change to accommodate a remote process.



“We have lengthened our search process and made it more rigorous, adding more stages and a case study element to understand thinking style and technical capability. We’ve also doubled down on references, with more deep interrogation with referees.”

Helen Lea  
Chief Employee Experience Officer  
MYOB





# HIRING PROCESSES BECOME MORE RIGOROUS

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When screening potential employees, certain criteria have retained their importance, with leaders still prioritizing a capacity for autonomous work, communication skills and a collaborative mindset. However, many of the leaders we interviewed also said that they have lengthened their hiring processes to ensure more touchpoints on both sides of the table, to increase the chance of finding the right fit.

“We’ve made sure there are more people involved in the recruitment process - if one person thinks someone isn't a good fit, that person is really heard. There’s been a real focus on ensuring quality in what we are doing.”

Jodette Cleary  
Chief People & Culture Officer  
hipages



In addition to becoming more technically complex, some respondents reported feeling less confident in their decision-making, citing the difficulty of getting a comprehensive sense of the candidate on-screen.

“We have been using more internal referrals and experiencing passive candidate approaches from LinkedIn.”

Janice Sim  
Regional Talent  
Acquisition GM  
Bridgestone

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“It's hard to get a sense of the whole person meeting them remotely; their mannerisms, how they hold themselves - you miss that aspect of it.”

Nicole Brolan  
Chief Product Officer  
Redbubble



# ONBOARDING IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN EVER

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For HR professionals and People leaders, onboarding has been a major challenge, with the virtual environment making it harder to give new starters a sense of company terrain, team culture and provide the specific support they need in their new roles. Companies that reported fewer issues here tended to have already made investments in onboarding tools, as was the case with BPAY.

“Relationship building has been difficult so we’ve been spending more time on onboarding. Workplace ‘buddies’ are being engaged more often and virtual coffees with senior leaders are actually happening more now than when we were all in the office.”

Kelum Kumarasinghe  
Partner - Tax Technology & Transformation  
EY



“BPAY has a very good onboarding tool which starts with sending out info to new employees before they start, so the process of communication starts early.”

John Banfield  
CEO & Chairman  
BPAY & Sypht



But even where companies didn't already have an onboarding infrastructure in place, the pace of adaptation has been swift, with many seeing real long-term benefit in these changes.

“We've taken the opportunity to conduct more personality profiling as part of the remote hiring process, ensuring onboarding is more thorough.”

Helene Gordon  
CPO  
Sensis (now Thryv Holdings)



# NEW LEADERSHIP SKILLS

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While hiring remotely has required new strategies, so too has leading and managing teams. For company leaders and Boards across the world, this means identifying a new type of leader: one who is truly comfortable in the digital sphere and able to adapt to a globalized workforce.

“We have redefined our leadership profiles - we are searching for more autonomous, independent, flexible and adaptable people.”

Andreea Parvu  
People Operations Business Partner  
Endava



“You have to think more global and decentralized. It’s one quality to be a leader in-person, but it’s another skill to lead virtually in multiple time zones effectively. Leadership qualities have changed. It’s no longer just about charisma and knowledge, it's more hands-on to show results are being made. Leaders need to be in the trenches working on things together.”

Sami Rusani  
Former CRO  
Shipchain

Living and working through a pandemic has emphasized the need for leaders who are compassionate and genuine.

At a time where many employees are feeling a great deal of uncertainty, the words and actions of an inspiring leader can help bring teams together, providing emotional support, building resilience, and putting the company’s work in a context that emphasizes its purpose.



“Remote leadership during COVID requires stronger communication capabilities and more empathy. Working from home is proving stressful and disruptive for most, so it is important to find a leader capable of understanding, connecting, supporting and working in much more flexible ways.”

Anna Di Silverio  
President (Europe)  
Avanade





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# The End of Air Miles

“Our team used to travel at least once a week, but we won’t be travelling until the end of the end.”

Peter Urmson, CEO, Spotzer





"If you are a digital product business, why do you need to be somewhere physically?"

Gernot Abl  
Chairman  
Mogul

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Travelling for business, whether it's to meet new clients and suppliers or to interview prospective hires, has always been an essential part of corporate life. However, with significant world-wide restrictions on air travel, the COVID-19 pandemic has forced companies to replace in-person meetings with virtual ones.

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"People are now much more willing to work using video conferencing systems but at the same time people love socialising, so it will be a matter of finding a balance."

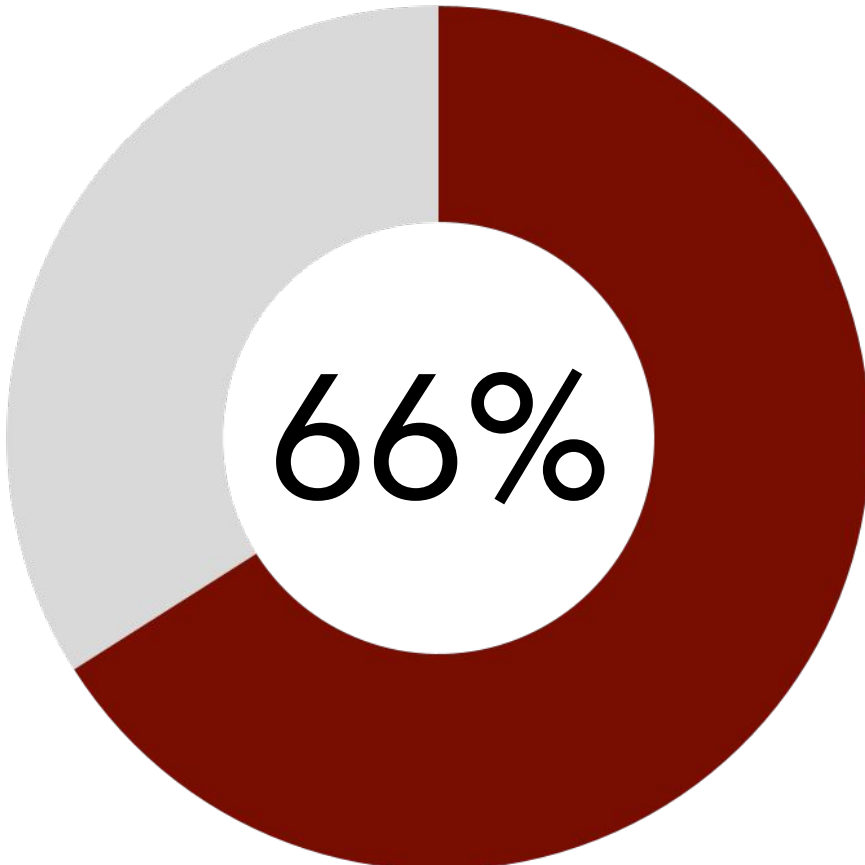
Nick Matthews  
VP & General Manager (Europe)  
Culture Amp



As international travel continues to be restricted and even interstate travel proves problematic, companies can expect business travel to be significantly curtailed for the time being, with the reduction possibly enduring beyond the end of the pandemic.

In fact, research from The Wall Street Journal suggests that “between 19% and 36% of all business trips could disappear, given efficiencies developed during the lockdown.”

As a result, new expectations about job flexibility, work locations, working conditions and work/life balance have been created.



66% of leaders indicate that future travel will be reduced by at least 50% post-COVID



For business-related travel that does still take place, we can expect to see a new set of policies being developed to measure its necessity and impact. Both Janice Sim (Bridgestone) and Kelum Kumarasinghe (EY) have suggested that, moving forward, trips will be evaluated for business benefit on a case-by-case basis.

“Work travel should no longer be an operational part of business practices but a strategic one.”

Boon Koh, Director  
Sun Venture

“It will partly depend on the market, because everyone is delivering remotely we can still do this and be competitive. If everyone goes back to fully face-to-face for demos rather than sending a trial system, we may do the same. It will depend on what the market expects.”

Lenore Gerschwitz  
Head of Operations  
Emesent



# THE FUTURE OF CONFERENCES

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Oxford Economics has estimated that, before the pandemic, business conferences generated more than a trillion dollars in direct spending, production, events-related travel, exhibitor operations, planning and other costs. They are crucial not only for networking, but as a place to exchange ideas and collaborate with others in the field.

"Before COVID, we would go to Facebook and Google conferences to meet the teams we partner. Moving forward, we won't be doing that - meeting online works. But it's hard to know how our clients' businesses are going to change. We need to mirror what our client base does, so if our client expects us in person for a pitch, we'll do it."

Gillian Findlay, Former CEO, Vamp



"I'm doing a big event next week with 150 panelists from all over the world. If it was in person in Copenhagen, we would have had travel complexities, visas issues and so on. Zoom events have so many upsides in terms of accessibility for people. Going forward, travel will be focussed on relationships we have to form vs. what we had to do before."

Jessica Lindl  
GM and VP, Social Impact  
Unity Technologies

Across the board, COVID-19 has forced businesses to fast-track their digital transformation. With many in-person conferences being cancelled, virtual events have taken their place, resulting in more people having access to these forums than would otherwise have been the case.





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# Conclusion

“At the beginning, I couldn't have imagined doing board meetings and fiscal year results virtually. And yet, this is what we have done and it's been surprisingly effective”

Will Lopes, CEO, Catapult Sports



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The emergence of effective COVID-19 vaccines in the first months of 2021 have given us all reason to look forward to a day when our lives start to feel normal again. But even as old routines are reestablished in the rest of the world, it's clear that for businesses, some of the adjustments made over the past year are going to be permanent. Already we're seeing large companies like Google announcing flexible work arrangements, with fully remote work on the table for a meaningful proportion of their employee base.

Adapting to this new world is going to require a change in how businesses operate, how they recruit talent, and how they manage evolving employee expectations.

The MitchellLake Group has helped our clients think through issues like these for twenty years - [get in touch](#) if you'd like to talk.



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Since 2001, MitchellLake's executive search and talent solutions have helped launch and transform some of the world's leading brands. From partnering high-growth startups through global expansion to identifying the leaders to help guide some of the world's largest organisations through digital transformation and innovation.

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support you on your journey

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