

Is hybrid working falling out of favour with employees? HR Barometer Report outlines some key findings from employer survey

As the Government advises organisations to move to remote working again, new research from Adare Human Resource Management reveals that employer enthusiasm for hybrid working has decreased since the phased reopening of workplaces began in September.

The latest HR Barometer Report reveals that only one third of employers (32%) believe hybrid working will benefit their organisation. This compares to over three quarters (76.8%) in their March HR Barometer Report. While the research did not specifically look at the not-for-profit sector, organisations in the 'human health & social work' sector were interviewed. A similar percentage (33%) believe that hybrid working benefits their Organisation.

The survey also highlights the slow progress being made on addressing diversity and inclusion as well as the ongoing gender pay gap that persists in many workplaces. Employers are warned that continued inaction on these matters could prove costly as recruitment and talent acquisition, along with retention, remain organisations' top priorities (67% and 65%) heading into 2022.

The latest HR Barometer Report highlights some significant HR challenges facing employers into 2022 which, if addressed, could be of substantial benefit to Organisations. Obviously, hybrid working won't necessarily be a blanket decision for all employers as it suits certain roles and sectors more than others. In previous articles, we have examined how remote or hybrid working may not always be suitable for those working in the non-profit sector who are working amongst the community, for obvious reasons.

With remote and hybrid working receiving the full support of Government through the publication of the National Remote Working Strategy and Code of Practice on Right to Disconnect, flexible working practices are here to stay for Ireland's employers. Many embraced it enthusiastically during lockdown as the ideal way to get back to the office. However, as hybrid models are put in to practice it's not surprising that there are a few issues. But there are ways to make it more effective for the organisation. Now is a great opportunity for employers in the not-for-profit sector to review what has happened in their workplaces over the past few months and with clear communication with their employees adapt their model so it works for all, including those delivering services to clients in the community and those service users receiving supports.

It also appears that there is significant room for improvement amongst employers around diversity and inclusion. According to the HR Barometer Report, the wider adoption of diversity and inclusion practices by Ireland's employers appears to have stalled. One third of employers surveyed have no diversity and inclusion policy in place, a level that is unchanged from the September 2020 report.

However, Organisations in the 'human health and social work' sector are well ahead with eight in ten (80%) having a D&I policy in place.

Employers' obligations under the Employment Equality Act, 1998 – 2015, are very clear. Organisations should ensure that they have the appropriate diversity and inclusion policies and training in place to protect themselves from any issues arising. Finding oneself in front of Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) without such a policy could further aggravate matters for employers, as well as negatively impacting the organisation's reputation given WRC hearings are now held in public.

Eliminating the gender pay gap is another important area where further progress is still needed according to the latest HR Barometer Report. It is concerning that just one in ten organisations (11%) is monitoring the matter given gender pay gap reporting is coming and this is seen across all sectors. An important aspect of the Gender Pay Gap Information Bill, 2019, is the requirement for employers to provide a narrative to support their reporting, including initiatives that they are planning to address any disparities.

Ignorance will not be a defence for employers who are found to have gender pay gaps that they haven't begun to address. Furthermore, at a time when staff retention is proving such a challenge to organisations, in particular in the not-for-profit sector, it could have serious and long-term repercussions in terms of staff turnover as well as recruitment considering the potential reputational damage.

Some 85% of the organisations surveyed are not monitoring the gender pay gap, which is very high. Of these one in four don't know how they compare to the national average of 14.4%, while half believe the gender pay gap in their organisation is higher or at least equal. It is the best interest of employers, as well as affected staff, that organisations start tackling this matter now, and demonstrate a genuine commitment to abolishing any differences once and for all.

The pandemic has presented serious challenges to employers in the not-for-profit sector which most have worked hard to address. It is clear from this HR Barometer Report that 2022 will be another challenging year. However, unlike with the pandemic, employers have more control over many of the issues they are facing – especially in the areas of flexible working, diversity and inclusion, and the gender pay gap. Addressing them in a meaningful way offers some 'easy wins', as well as avoiding significant HR and financial headaches, and potentially significant damage to their reputation.

The HR Barometer Report is available on Linea, Adare Human Resource Management's comprehensive online resource for HR Practitioners. If you would like to discuss Linea, and accessing the full report, please contact the team.

Adare Human Resource Management is a team of expert-led Employment Law, Industrial Relations and best practice Human Resource Management consultants. For more information go to www.adarehrm.ie or call (01) 561 3594.