Returning to the Office and Leading Hybrid and Remote Teams: A Manual on Benchmarking to Best Practices for Competitive Advantage

2nd Edition

By Dr. Gleb Tsipursky, CEO, Disaster Avoidance Experts

Empowering leaders and organizations to avoid business disasters

Testimonials on Dr. Gleb Tsipursky's Work With Leadership Teams on Hybrid and Remote Work

Gleb Tsipursky came to my attention sometime during the pandemic when I was planning to have our research institute follow the standard path that all the big corporations were following. Apple and Google were announcing plans to have people come back three days a week, I thought that seemed like a good plan. So we actually sent out a message saying that everyone would be going back to the office three days a week and working home two days a week. And then I saw a video that Gleb gave at IEEE [the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers] that really actually changed my mind about this. It was a video about hybrid work and how important it was to actually embrace it. One of the things I was impressed by was all these interesting ideas about how to make hybrid work more effective. So I signed up for a meeting with Gleb and I learned quite a bit more about how to do hybrid work well. Gleb has come on as a consultant for the Information Sciences Institute and has been really helpful in terms of putting us much more in a leadership position in terms of figuring out how to do hybrid work. We changed our policies, we are much more flexible about who can work at home and allowing people to work from home whenever it makes sense with respect to their supervisor. We are adapting people's home offices and our office spaces and figuring out how to onboard people in a way that is more effective when people haven't met in person. I think he's been incredibly helpful in terms of really transitioning us to lead in how we manage hybrid work at the institute. All of Gleb's advice has been incredibly useful, and I appreciate all the help he's given us with respect to moving forward with our hybrid work plans.

- Dr. Craig Knoblock, Keston Executive Director, the University of Southern California Information Sciences Institute

I didn't know what to do about returning to the office. On the one hand, the large majority of my employees wanted to work from home and only come to the office when needed. On the other hand, my peer executives from other companies were telling me that I needed to return everyone back to the office at least a few days a week for the sake of effective collaboration, innovation, and company culture. That put my goals of retention and recruitment against the goals of company culture and productivity. My consulting with Dr. Gleb provided clarity on the issue. His expertise in the future of work, especially in returning to the office and leading hybrid and remote teams, enabled me to make an effective strategic decision going forward. He provided invaluable insights on how to optimize collaboration, innovation, productivity, and company culture in a home-centric, remote-first company. With these strategies in mind, I was able to proceed with a win-win solution that should help to maximize retention and recruitment, while continuing to promote collaboration, innovation, productivity, and company culture, by transitioning to a home-centric model with the approval of the Board of Directors secured through the insights provided by Dr. Gleb. Thank you, Dr. Gleb, for providing the research-backed best practices that enabled me to make this crucial pivot in the future of work for my company!

- Adam Glassman, Executive Director, Jaeb Center for Health Research

My name is Alyssa Swenson and I work for Luckett & Farley as the Manager of People and Community. We have been in a hybrid setting for a couple of years now and we hired Dr. Gleb to assist us with improving our hybrid policy and the hybrid experience and our hybrid culture and workplace within Luckett & Farley. I think it was a really great experience, we talked a lot about different things that I would not have considered before talking with Dr. Gleb. He brought a lot of knowledge from testimonials

and different articles and research that he's done from talking with other companies and what they're currently doing. Overall I think it was really helpful because we talked about things that I would not have considered, it definitely forced us to talk more about what's really happening and what we can do to improve within our company. It was a really great experience, I really appreciate the opportunity to work with Dr. Gleb and I'm really glad that we did it."

- Alysa Swenson, Manager of People and Community, Luckett & Farley

I'm Susan Winchester, and it's my delight and pleasure to tell you a little bit about our experience with Dr. Gleb. He had a big positive impact at Applied Materials. Our leaders and engineers love data-based, research-based insights, which is exactly what he brings. He hit it out of the park, and he used a team led process, which was incredibly engaging. He introduced us to a concept he created called asynchronous brainstorming. It was a process we used with hundreds and hundreds of leaders globally at the same time. We did this during our CEO kickoff session for our strategy work. In a very short amount of time, we were able to get great benefits. I also love the work he's doing to educate leaders around the power and positive benefits of hybrid and virtual working. And one of his techniques that I'm planning to use is what he calls "virtual coworking", where you and as many coworkers as you'd like create a virtual meeting, no purpose or agenda, but rather just to be working with one another. I highly endorse Dr. Gleb's work with leadership teams.

- Susan J. Schmitt Winchester, Chief Human Resources Officer, Applied Materials

Dedication and Acknowledgment

This book is dedicated to all my clients whose insights and feedback greatly improved the content of this book. Thanks for making it possible!

Contents

Executive Summary

- Many leaders have a preference for in-person work.
- Yet research conclusively demonstrates that those employees who can do so have a strong preference to work remotely much of their time, and a large minority of them all of the time.
- Moreover, remote workers show substantial productivity gains, cost savings, and risk mitigation.
- Mental blindspots called cognitive biases often inhibit leaders in seeing this clear conclusion.
- The best approach to returning to the office involves a hybrid-first model with some limited full-time remote options. Offer full-time remote options for those workers who can show they can be effective and efficient remotely.
- Doing so will enable organizations to excel in retention and recruitment, boost productivity, re-energize company culture, gain substantial cost savings, and manage a wide variety of risks.
- In transitioning strategically to a hybrid-first model, leaders need to benchmark to best practices.
- That involves first surveying your employees to get both information on their specific needs and buy-in for whatever policies you implement.
- The survey should serve as the basis for top leaders providing broad guidelines involving one to three days in the office.
- Then, use a team-based approach to determining the details. Have each team leader of rank-and-file employees, in consultation with their team members and their peers, make decisions about what their team's schedule will look like.
- Based on that, downsize office space. Reshape it to focus on collaboration versus individual work.
- Revise employee performance evaluation to focus on tasks, not time spent.
- Ensure a regular weekly evaluation process that provides both hybrid and fully remote employees with a constant awareness of where they stand and what they need to do to improve.
- Adapt company culture to the new hybrid-first model strategically, addressing challenges of connection of employees to each other and to the company as a whole.
- Adapt your company culture to innovate successfully in hybrid and remote settings, through virtual brainstorming and serendipitous innovation practices.
- Address diversity-related issues, such as technology-based discrimination.
- Train your staff to succeed in this hybrid model by helping them understand how to divide their work between collaboration in the office and individual tasks at home; likewise, boost their virtual and hybrid communication and collaboration skills.
- Finally, offer appropriate funding for their home office needs.
- Taking these steps will maximize your competitive advantage in the most important resource: your people.

Introduction

"I really like working with other people. I'm uncomfortable working by myself, it's just not the same. So I'd love to have everyone go back to the office five days a week." That's what Marvin, the long-time CEO of a company with 4,000 employees, told me when we discussed his plans for the post-pandemic transition back to the office.

Then, he added: "However, we're doing a lot of hiring for managerial roles right now to prepare for the post-pandemic recovery. One of the first questions applicants ask is if they have to move and how much time they can work from home, especially younger ones. Also, our internal surveys show that 29% of our employees want to stay fully remote and 58% prefer a hybrid model. I guess I have to accept the fact that the new generation of leaders and employees doesn't have the same preferences that I do. Our most important resource is our people. I need to make sure that I'm tapping that resource most effectively."

I admired his willingness to update his beliefs and do what's uncomfortable for him. People are indeed the most important resource of any organization.

Yet so many leaders are failing to live by that maxim. They instead prefer to do what's comfortable for them, even if it devastates employee morale and engagement. They fail to recognize how doing so deeply undercuts the bottom line through decreasing productivity, growing turnover, and subpar recruitment, while harming collaboration and innovation.

The call by many leaders for employees to return to the office full-time represents an egregious and self-defeating example of top executives choosing to do what's comfortable for them over what's best for their people and their bottom line. We can see that in some reversals by large employers who realized they screwed up. That's why Google, after many months of insisting all employees return to their campus, backtracked from its plans and permitted full-time remote work to many in the face of mass employee resistance and resignations. Amazon did the same for similar reasons.

These trillion-dollar companies lost many billions through their self-defeating actions due to top employees leaving, serious hits to employee morale and engagement, and having to change the basics of their return to campus plans. If these top companies, with supposedly the best leadership and policies, can screw up their return-to-office plans so badly and hurt their innovation advantage, no wonder leaders of less-resourced smaller companies do so as well.

Fortunately, many more forward-looking leaders walk the talk of truly valuing their people. After evaluating the internal and external environment, they recognized that they can't simply try to turn back the clock to January 2020 if they want their organizations to survive and thrive in the post-COVID environment. Instead, they made the strategic decision to support their employees working remotely part or full-time. They saw this approach, though initially uncomfortable for themselves, as a way of gaining and maintaining a competitive advantage in the most important resource for any company.

Still, too many leaders rely on traditional office-centric collaboration and management styles in managing hybrid teams. Yet research conclusively demonstrates that, instead of incrementally improving on the old-school office-centric approach, the best outcomes in managing hybrid teams comes from adopting a flexible hybrid-first work model. Doing so results in much higher

retention, productivity, engagement, innovation, collaboration, cost savings, and risk mitigation.

A hybrid-first model involves best practices adapted specifically to hybrid work contexts. Such best practices include asynchronous brainstorming, remote coworking, virtual water coolers, weekly performance evaluations, addressing proximity bias, and a culture of "Excellence from Anywhere."

This book offers case studies and best practices that you need to make the most effective transition to hybrid work. It relies on the author's interviews with 47 mid-level and 14 senior leaders in 12 companies which he advised on developing and implementing a strategic approach to returning to the office and leading hybrid and remote teams after the pandemic. It also draws upon extensive peer-reviewed and survey research on hybrid and remote work.

Through adopting the methods from this book, your team will excel in retention, productivity, innovation, collaboration, cost savings, and risk management, thus enabling you to seize a competitive advantage in the increasingly-disrupted future of work.

Chapter 1: What Does the Research on Hybrid and Remote Work Say?

What Do Employees Want?

Several in-depth, independent, and large-scale research surveys on hybrid and remote work published after vaccines became widely available all reveal strong preferences for working from home at least half the time for the majority of respondents. Anywhere from a quarter to a third want full-time remote work.

A Harvard Business School study on remote workers found that:
- 27% hope to work remotely full-time
- 61% would like to work 2-3 days a week from home
- Only 18% want to go back to the office full-time

A study by the Society for Human Resource Management discovered the following:
- 52% would like to work from home permanently full-time if herd immunity to COVID is never achieved
- 34% would still like to work from home full-time and permanently even if herd immunity was achieved
- 35% would accept a reduction in salary to work from home permanently

Another survey of those working from home had these top-line findings:
- 42% say if their current company does not continue to offer remote work options long term, they will look for another job
- 68% perceive a hybrid model of significant remote and in-person work as the ideal model
- 87% would prefer to work remotely at least some of the time
- 80% report they adapted well to full-time remote work
- 76% of employees consider benefits when evaluating whether to stay in a job, and they list remote work, flexible schedules, and mobility opportunities as the top three benefits
- 34% want resources to help set up a home office, and 33% want resources to subsidize other remote work expenses
- 35% report working more hours and 54% report taking less time off
- 50% are not concerned about their career growth
- 43% of remote workers say that they would be nervous about their job security if they worked remotely full-time, while others returned to the work site
- 26% plan to look for a job with a different employer after the pandemic, and of these, 34% want to find a job where they can work remotely and 80% are concerned about their career growth
- 48% feel more pressure to be online all the time while working remotely
- 39% find it difficult to socialize with co-workers
- Remote worker connection to company culture improved from 36% in May 2020 to 47% in March 2021, showing that working remotely may actually boost company culture
- 42% of workers who plan to leave their current employer would grade their employer's

efforts to maintain culture during the pandemic as a "C" or lower compared to 30% of all workers

A fourth survey of remote workers finds:
- 46% would look for a different job if their current employer doesn't offer some remote work after the pandemic
- 54% would be willing to stay in their job if not offered some remote work after the pandemic, but be less willing to go the extra mile
- 80% expect to work from home at least three times per week after the pandemic
- 81% think their employer will support working from home after the pandemic
- 74% would be less likely to leave their employer if offered remote work, and 71% would be more likely to recommend their company to a friend
- 75% of people are the same or more productive during COVID-19 while working from home
- On average, remote employees worked an extra 26 hours each month during COVID (nearly an extra day every week)
- 80% believe there should be one day a week with no meetings at all
- 23% of full-time employees would take a pay cut of over 10% in order to work from home at least some of the time
- 57% weren't concerned that working remotely would impact their career progression
- 77% feel that after COVID, being able to work from home would make them happier
- 72% agreed that the ability to work remotely would make them less stressed
- 77% report that working remotely would make them better able to manage work-life balance
- No more than 25% of companies pay or share the cost of home office equipment
- 32% report that training in remote work would make them more effective
- 62% of respondents saw interruptions/being talked over as their top telework challenge
- 57% of respondents said that the audio quality of video conferencing is a challenge, and 56% said the video quality is a challenge

A fifth survey's key findings on staff working remotely in the pandemic:
- 58% said they would "absolutely" look for a new job if they cannot continue remote work
  - 31% said they aren't sure what they would do
  - and only 11% said that working remotely is not a big deal
- 46% feel concerned that returning to the office means less flexibility
- 43% believe it will bring less work-life balance
- 84% rank not having a commute as the most important benefit of telework
- 55% believe their productivity has increased while working remotely, 33% said their productivity has remained the same, 6% think their productivity has decreased, and 6% aren't sure
- 35% see overworking as their biggest challenge with remote work, 28% list dealing with technology problems, 26% report challenges with reliable WiFi, and 24% indicate Zoom fatigue
- 56% experienced burnout

Here's a sixth survey (including both remote and non-remote workers):
- 47% of employees say they would likely leave their job if it didn't offer a hybrid work model once the pandemic ends
- 41% say they would be willing to take a job with a lower salary if their company offered a hybrid work model
- Asked about the top benefit of hybrid work, 38% cite the top benefit of hybrid work as

less time and money spent commuting, 34% say work/life balance, and 21% list improved work performance

Finally, a [Microsoft study](#) of remote and non-remote employees, combining survey responded with data from LinkedIn and Microsoft 365 products, found that:
- 73% of employees want flexible remote work options to be permanent
- 66% of leaders are planning to remodel their company spaces for hybrid work
- 67% of employees want at least some in-person collaboration after the pandemic
- 54% of employees felt overworked, 39% felt exhausted, and about 20% believe their company doesn't care about work/life balance
- 46% of those currently working remotely are planning to move to a new location in 2021 because they can now work remotely
- Remote job postings on LinkedIn increased more than five times during the pandemic, and women were 15% more likely to apply to such positions than in-person ones
- Comparing collaboration trends in Microsoft 365 between February 2020 and February 2021:
    - Time spent in Microsoft Teams meetings has more than doubled (2.5X) globally
    - Average meeting is 10 minutes longer
    - Average Microsoft Teams user is sending 45% more chats per week and 42% more chats per person after hours
    - Despite meeting and chat overload, 50 percent of people respond to Teams chats within five minutes or less, a response time that has not changed year-over-year
    - Number of emails delivered to commercial and education customers in February, when compared to the same month last year, is up by 40.6 billion
    - 66% increase in the number of people working on documents.
    - This barrage of communications is unstructured and mostly unplanned, with 62% percent of calls and meetings unscheduled or conducted ad hoc
- LinkedIn data indicates nearly a doubling of job-switching intent in 2021

Here are the **key conclusions of a [meta-analysis](#) comparing all of these studies:**
1. Over two-thirds of all employees who worked remotely in the pandemic want and expect to work from home half the time or more permanently, while over a fifth want to work remotely full-time
2. Over two-fifths would leave their current job if they didn't have the option of remote work of two to three days per week
3. Over a quarter plan to leave their job after the pandemic, especially those who rate their company cultures as "C" or lower
4. Over two-fifths of all employees, especially younger ones, would feel concern over career progress if they worked from home while other employees like them did not
5. Most employees see telework and the flexibility it provides as a key benefit, and are willing to sacrifice substantial earnings for it
6. Employees are significantly more productive on average when working from home
7. Over three-quarters of all employees will feel happier and more engaged, be willing to go the extra mile, feel less stressed, and have more work-life balance with permanent opportunity for two to three days of telework
8. Over half of all employees feel overworked and burned out, and over three-quarters experience "Zoom fatigue" and want less meetings
9. Employees need funding for home offices and equipment, but no more than 25% of companies provided such funding so far

Over three-fifths of all employees report poor virtual communication and collaboration as their

biggest challenge with remote work, and many want more training in these areas

Are Employees Really More Productive Working Remotely?

Elon Musk demanded that all Tesla staff return to the office full-time in June 2022, according to an email sent to executive staff and leaked on social media. Musk said in a tweet that those who don't want to come to office should "pretend to work somewhere else." Musk wrote in another leaked email that those who work remotely are "phoning it in." He highlights the importance of being visible and cites his own notoriously long working hours as an example. However, Musk – despite his technical brilliance – is simply wrong in his claims of poor productivity by remote workers.

For example, consider a thorough survey comparing productivity of in-person vs. remote workers during the first six months of stay-at-home orders, March through August 2020, to the same March through August period in 2019. Employees showed a more than 5% increase in productivity over this period. Another study surveying 800 employers reported that 94% found that remote workers showed higher or equal productivity than before the pandemic. Non-survey research similarly shows significant productivity gains for remote workers during the pandemic. Moreover, governments plan to invest in improving teleworking infrastructure in the future, making higher productivity gains even more likely.

Such remote work productivity gains aren't surprising. Prior research showed that telework boosted productivity pre-COVID. After all, remote work removes many hassles taking up time for in-office work such as lengthy daily commutes. Moreover, working from home allows employees much more flexibility to do work tasks at times that work best for their work/life balance, rather than the traditional 9 to 5 schedule. Such flexibility matches research showing we all have different times of day when we are best suited for certain tasks, enabling us to be more productive when we have more flexible schedules.

Some might feel worried that these productivity gains are limited to the context of the pandemic. Fortunately, research shows that after a forced period of work from home, if workers are given the option to keep working from home, those who choose to do so experience even greater productivity gains than in the initial forced period.

Moreover, academic research at Stanford demonstrated a further increase in productivity in remote work throughout course of the pandemic. Remote workers in their study were 5 percent more productive than in-person workers in the summer of 2020. That number increased to 9 percent more productive in May 2022. That's because companies and employees grew better at working from home.

An important academic paper from the University of Chicago provides further evidence of why working at home will stick. First, the researchers found that working at home proved a much more positive experience, for employers and employees alike, than either anticipated. That led employers to report a willingness to continue work-from-home after the pandemic.

Second, an average worker spent over 14 hours and $600 to support their work-from home. In turn, companies made large-scale investments in back-end IT facilitating remote work. Some

paid for home office/equipment for employees. Furthermore, remote work technology has improved over this time. Therefore, both workers and companies will be more invested into telework after the pandemic.

Third, stigma around telework has greatly decreased. Such normalization of work from home makes it a much more viable choice for employees.

The paper shows that employees perceive telework as an important perk. On average, they value it as 8% of their salary. The authors also find that most employers plan to move to a hybrid model after the pandemic, having employees come in about half the time. Given the higher productivity that the paper's authors find results from remote work, they conclude that the post-pandemic economy will see about a six percent productivity boost.

Chapter 2: Back to the Past?

The majority of employers - ranging from [two-thirds](#) to [three-quarters](#) in various studies - plan for a hybrid schedule of having previously-remote employees return to the office for one to three days per week after the pandemic ends. That applies, naturally, only to those employees who can do at least some work remotely.

Surveys taken during the pandemic show that two-thirds of all US workers worked remotely some of the time, and over a half full-time. Thus, those who can do their work in a hybrid model applies to the large majority of all US workers.

More large companies than smaller ones intend to support hybrid models, according to [survey responses](#). That means the overwhelming majority of employees who can do some work remotely will have the opportunity to do so.

That would satisfy the 60-65% of all employees who want such a hybrid schedule. It would also satisfy the 15-20% seeking full-time in-person work.

It would be a serious problem for the 20-25% who want to remain full-time remote. Many of the latter already [moved out](#) of their [previous geographical areas](#). They [structured their lives](#) around fully-remote work forever.

Yet before addressing this tension, let's consider the small proportion of employers who intend to force their employees who can easily work remotely back to the office full-time. For instance, Goldman Sachs CEO David Solomon [called](#) working from home "an aberration that we're going to correct as quickly as possible."

It's not only traditional businesses like investment banking that are making such decisions, at odds with employee desires and improved productivity. Tech companies do so as well. Google has declared that employees will [not be regularly permitted](#) to work remotely more than 14 days per year. The CEO of Netflix, Reed Hastings, [described remote work](#) as a "pure negative" and intends his employees to get back to the office after vaccination.

Many of the 61 whom I interviewed also felt resistant to permitting remote work for their employees. Specifically, just over a quarter did not want to permit any remote work for their employees. An additional 15% accepted a hybrid model, with some reluctance, but did not want any employees working remotely full-time after COVID. They listed a number of reasons for disliking telework.

A large number described a desire to return to what they saw as "normal" work life. By that they meant turning back the clock to January 2020, before the pandemic. After all, they said, once the pandemic is over, why can't we go back to what worked well?

After I dug a bit deeper on why they wouldn't want to permit employees to work where they want and where they are most productive, these leaders shared additional reasons. A key concern for many involved personal discomfort. They wanted to see and engage with their direct reports and other staff in person, not remotely. They liked the feel of a full, buzzing office. They preferred to be surrounded by others when they work.

Other reasons involve challenges specifically related to remote work. Many list concerns about deteriorating company culture as an issue. Others see growing work-from-home burnout and Zoom fatigue as major issues. They list a rise in team conflicts and deterioration of trust as serious concerns about telework. Many feel frustrated by challenges in virtual collaboration and communication, ranging from problems with technology to insufficient skills among staff. A final category of concerns relates to a lack of accountability and effective evaluation of employees.

Chapter 3: Mental Blindspots Leading to Disastrous Decisions on Returning to the Office

What's going on with these senior leaders who show resistance to seemingly-simple decisions on working from home? Unfortunately, we're all vulnerable to dangerous judgment errors that behavioral economists and cognitive neuroscientists call cognitive biases. These mental blindspots, which stem from our evolutionary background and the structure of our neural pathways, lead to poor strategic decision-making and planning. Fortunately, by understanding these cognitive biases and taking research-based steps to address them, we can make the best decisions, whether on telework or other business areas.

Many feel a desire to go back to the world before the pandemic. They fall for the status quo bias, a desire to maintain or get back what they see as the appropriate situation and way of doing things. Their minds flinch away from accepting the major disruption stemming from the pandemic.

Unfortunately for them, with so many people having successfully worked from home for so long, the genie is out of the bottle. They're used to it: to them, working from home is the status quo. Surveys show the vast majority adapted to it well and want to continue doing so for half the work week or more after the pandemic. The disruption happened.

Yet many leaders have spent this time gnashing their teeth and seeing work from home as a "purely negative" situation, in the words of Netflix CEO Reed Hastings. To them, telework represents a deviation away from the pre-pandemic status quo, to which they want to return. They're closing their eyes to reality and ignoring what's in front of them.

A major factor in leaders wanting everyone to return to the office stems from their personal discomfort with work from home. Like Marvin, the CEO I quoted at the beginning of this book, they spent their career surrounded by other people. Sure, the leaders have their corner office. But they regularly walk the floors, surrounded by the buzz and energy of staff working. Moreover, much of their time involves meetings with other leaders. They're extroverted and gregarious, and they like other people. Is it any wonder, given their experience, that they want to bring back the atmosphere that surrounded them their whole career?

They're falling for the anchoring bias. This mental blindspot causes us to feel anchored to our initial experiences and information. Given that their whole career focused on in-person interactions, they feel anchored to that mode of collaboration. They struggle to break the chain of that anchor and accept the viability of work from home as a permanent solution, rather than a forced necessity.

Many leaders such as Elon Musk emphasize the importance of workers being visible. Such a focus on visibility in the office speaks to a highly traditionalist leadership mindset underpinned by the illusion of control. This cognitive bias describes our mind's tendency to overestimate the extent to which we control external events.

It's especially prevalent in authoritarian executives who want to control their employees. They believe that having employees present in the office guarantees productivity.

In reality, research shows that in-office employees work much less than the full eight-hour day. They actually spend anywhere from 36 to 39 percent of their time working. The rest, according to these studies, is spent on other activities: checking social media, reading news websites, chit-chatting with colleagues about non-work topics, making non-work calls, and even looking for other jobs.

Musk's desire for control is not simply emphatically unrealistic. It also goes directly against what we know is critical for productivity, engagement, and innovation for information workers: the desire for autonomy.

Studies show that we do our best work through intrinsic motivation, which involves autonomy and control over our work as a fundamental driver of effectiveness. Employees are most engaged, happy, and productive when they have autonomy. A key component of autonomy in the post-pandemic environment involves giving workers flexibility and self-control of where and when they work, rather than trying to shoehorn them into the pre-pandemic "normal." And though Musk claims that forcing employees to come to the office under the threat of firing will help Tesla develop and make "the most exciting and meaningful products of any company on Earth," a study of 307 companies finds that greater worker autonomy results in more innovation.

The evidence that work from home functions well for the vast majority doesn't cause many of the more traditionalist executives to shift their perspective in any significant manner. The confirmation bias offers an important explanation for this seeming incongruity. Our minds are skilled at ignoring information that contradicts our beliefs, and looking only for information that confirms them.

A very common way I've seen confirmation bias play out is a refusal by leaders to do anonymous employee surveys on their preferences for telework vs. in-office work after the pandemic. Then, I express curiosity about their reasoning. After all, the costs of surveys are negligible, and the information is critically important.

Reluctant leaders usually tell me they feel confident that the large majority of their employees would rather work at the office rather than at home - regardless of what the large-scale public surveys say. At most, the leaders say perhaps the majority would like to take off a half-day on Friday and finish work at home.

They fall into the cognitive bias called the false consensus effect. This mental blindspot leads us to envision other people in our in-group - such as those employed at our company - as being much more like ourselves in their beliefs and values than is the actual case. Literally every time I convinced them to do the survey, they found that after the pandemic, the large majority of the workforce wanted to work from home at least half the time, and a substantial minority full-time. In fact, surveys at a couple of companies indicated that more than half wanted to work from home full-time, leaving some leaders shocked.

Another major cognitive bias, the normalcy bias, causes our minds to undercount the probability and consequences of disruptive events. Because of this perilous judgment error, leaders significantly underestimated major challenges such as the Delta surge, the Omicron surge, and subsequent variants.

For example, it was already clear that US Delta cases were starting to rise in early June 2021. There was also clear evidence that countries with high vaccination rates, like the United

Kingdom and Israel, were experiencing a surge in cases in May.

Still, a lot of large companies, mid-size firms, and even the federal government compelled unwilling employees to return to the office in September 2021. That's despite data showing that waning vaccine immunity after 6 months results in vaccine efficacy falling to 39% against Delta. As a result, many employees forced to return to the office quit, due to fears about breakthrough infections.

While leaders would like to think that they are making data-driven decisions, they have obviously ignored the data. Delta, Omicron, and other variants are illustrative of the long tail risk of new waves of COVID. Research on why Boards of Directors fire CEOs shows denying such negative reality as one of the top reasons. This denial is due to another cognitive bias, called the ostrich effect. It is based on the mythical notion of ostriches burying their heads in the sand when facing danger.

The planning fallacy is another blindspot that causes havoc. It prods leaders into setting optimistic yet unrealistic plans - on returning to the office along with other areas - and resist changing these decisions despite new evidence proving them wrong. After all, reversing a decision suggests that you were wrong to begin with. Weak leaders habitually refuse to own their mistakes and ignore the need to alter plans. By contrast, strong leaders show courage when new evidence shows a necessity to redirect.

What about the specific challenges these resistant leaders brought up related to working from home, ranging from burnout to deteriorating culture and so on? These represent serious issues. However, further inquiry on each problem revealed that the leaders never addressed these work-from-home problems strategically.

They transitioned to telework abruptly as part of the March 2020 lockdowns. Perceiving this shift as a very brief emergency, they focused, naturally and appropriately, on accomplishing the necessary tasks of the organization. They ignored the social and emotional glue that truly holds companies together, motivates employees, and protects against burnout.

That's fine for an emergency, a week or two. Yet COVID lasted for over a year. So they adapted their existing ways of interacting in "office culture" to remote work. They did not make the effort to figure out strategically what kind of culture and collaboration and communication methods would work best for telework.

That speaks to a cognitive bias called functional fixedness. When we have a certain perception of how systems should function, how an object should be used, or how people should behave, we ignore other possible functions, uses, and behaviors. We do this even if these new functions, uses and behaviors offer a much better fit for a changed situation, and would address our problems much better.

A final cognitive bias, which is related to functional fixedness, is called the not-invented-here syndrome. It's self-explanatory: many leaders have an antipathy toward practices not invented within their organization. They reject external best practices as not fitting their particular culture, style, or needs, even when adopting such practices would be much better for their own stated goals. Ironically, leaders who decry how virtual work impedes innovation tend to stick to old-school, traditional practices of advancing innovation. They fail to adopt external and innovative best practices on innovation, even with extensive evidence showing their benefits.

Chapter 4: Competitive Advantage in the New Normal

More forward-looking leaders realize the world changed. Like Marvin, they may prefer on a personal level to be surrounded by people when they work. They may feel uncomfortable with the idea of not having a full-time, in-office culture. However, they recognize that for the sake of their most important resource, it simply makes sense to let those employees who can productively do so work from home much or all of the time.

For example, a [host] of [large companies] - ranging from insurance giant Nationwide to tech firm Facebook to major drugmaker Novartis - decided to let many or all of their currently-remote employees work from home permanently. [Many more] announced a [switch] to a permanent hybrid model of 2-4 days of remote work after the pandemic. They include Citigroup, Ford, Microsoft, Siemens, Salesforce, Target, and many others.

Of these hybrid-first companies, many permit a substantial minority - 10-30% - to work remotely full-time if their roles allow such work easily. Such roles include call center staff and others who do not need to collaborate with fellow employees extensively.

To capitalize on their main competitive advantage, the leaders at the companies whom I helped to transition strategically back to the office overwhelmingly adopted a hybrid-first model. That means having most staff come in from one to three days per week. They also permitted full-time remote options for those employees whose roles facilitate full-time work. In addition, they allowed those who wanted to come in full-time to do so.

The top leaders I spoke with cited several factors as motivating their hybrid-first models. The first and primary concern stemmed from retention. Their internal surveys on remote work preferences matched the large public external surveys indicating a strong desire among most employees for hybrid work and a substantial minority - occasionally a majority - for fully-remote work.

Now, the internal surveys generally did not ask about job switching intent, given the low likelihood of accurate answers to such questions. Still, the top leaders knew from external surveys that very many employees are seriously considering job transitions after the pandemic. Naturally, some of these employees worked for them. Moreover, many of the internal surveys asked employees whether they moved away from the corporate office location during the pandemic; anywhere from a quarter to a third or more in most surveys answered affirmatively. Given this situation, and the desirability of flexible schedules and remote work, these top leaders realized that a hybrid-first model with fully-remote options would greatly improve retention.

That retention improvement stemmed especially from the [Spring 2021 recruitment surge] as companies stepped up their hiring for the post-pandemic recovery. That surge gave employees, especially the most capable ones that had the most options, many more opportunities. Failing to offer hybrid and fully-remote options meant the prospect of losing the best staff.

On the flip side, many top leaders cited recruitment as a major driver of their hybrid-first models. Over 90% of the companies I helped planned for a major recruitment ramp-up for the post-

COVID world. They cited a desire to appeal to the best candidates as a key reason for their shift.

The executives recognized the widespread perception among employees of flexible schedules and substantial or full-time remote work as a [major benefit](). Thus, they saw this model as enabling them to get better labor at lower prices. Those savings would be much higher than their planned investment into supporting their staff financially with funding for work-from-home equipment and furniture.

Moreover, allowing some staff members full-time remote work means a vast expansion of the talent pool. After all, remote workers can be hired anywhere, rather than in a specific geographic area. A further benefit: those in lower cost-of-living areas are willing to take lower salaries.

Even the best people won't work well if they're unhappy, disengaged, and stressed. Internal surveys conducted by these top leaders aligned with the external surveys on this question. They showed that if the workers who worked remotely during the pandemic didn't have substantial work-from-home options after the pandemic, they would be less happy and engaged, unwilling to go the extra mile or recommend the company to their peers.

The same internal surveys showed that those working from home gained more work/life balance and flexibility; they would feel stressed and constrained without at least a hybrid model. Who wants frustrated and stressed-out workers bad-mouthing the company to their peers, right?

Top leaders cited a desire to protect the productivity boost experienced by remote workers as another motive for their hybrid-first models. Surveys of managers and employees, along with internal company data, showed a boost in productivity of anywhere from 2 to 14% in these companies for those employees who worked remotely in the pandemic.

This average hid an important countertrend. While on average productivity per employee increased, more employee time was eaten up with meetings and other communication. That means that productivity gains came from tasks employees did by themselves, rather than collaborative tasks, which took on average more effort.

The leaders felt that having employees work in the office a couple of days would address some of the productivity challenges of collaborative tasks. After all, face-to-face communication is generally more efficient for more complex and nuanced issues. Thus, workers would focus on collaborative tasks while in the office. While at home, they would focus more on their individual tasks. That way, the leaders figured they could get the best of both worlds.

A major financial benefit of this approach stemmed from cutting down on costs from real estate and associated office-based services and products. The leaders I spoke to cited plans to substantially downsize office space as a significant, but not primary, factor in their decision-making process. They did plan for some major one-time investment into reconfiguring their office spaces for hybrid work. Yet these costs paled in comparison to ongoing real estate savings.

Finally, the leaders cited a desire to mitigate risk and prepare for future disruptors as a factor in their new policies. If staff worked from home a large chunk of their time, the company would be much more prepared to make shifts to working from home in case of any future disruptions. A diversified workforce located away from company offices is less vulnerable to the risk of localized or even regional events.

Of course, it requires an adaptation of [risk management protocols](#) to ensure employees harden their home office against disruptions. It also requires additional risk management strategies to ensure that employees living in areas prone to disruptions such as hurricanes have others cross-trained and ready to take on their work in case of any disruptions for that employee.

Chapter 5: A Hybrid-First, Team-Led Model for the Future of Work

Based on my research as well as practical work helping 12 companies devise and implement a strategic plan to transition to the future of work, here are best practices you can benchmark against.

Survey Your Staff

First, conduct an anonymous survey of your currently-remote staff on their preferences for remote work. All companies are different, and you want to know about your staff in particular. Furthermore, employees like to feel that they have input on major company decisions, especially those concerning their working conditions. You'll get a lot more buy-in, even from staff who may be unhappy with your final policies, if they feel consulted and heard.

While you may choose to ask a variety of questions, at least be sure to find out about their desire for frequency of work in the office. Ask in the first question of the survey, since people are most likely to answer the first question. Here's a good way to phrase it:

After the pandemic has passed, which of these would be your preferred working style?
- A) Fully remote, coming in once a quarter for team-building retreat
- B) 1 day a week in the office, the rest at home
- C) 2 days a week in the office
- D) 3 days a week in the office
- E) 4 days a week in the office
- F) Full-time in the office

Very likely, your results will be close to the major external surveys. In all the companies where I consulted, there were never more than a quarter who wanted to go back to the office full-time. In fact, one company with over 3,000 employees had 61% of its staff express a desire for fully remote work. And it wasn't even a tech company!

In the highly probable case that your results aren't too different from the typical company, you'll want to follow the lead of the companies I helped. Namely, you'll institute a hybrid-first model, with some flexibility for employees who want to work remotely full-time and whose roles permit them to do so.

A Hybrid-First, Team-Led Model

Avoid simply declaring a consistent policy from the top, or allowing individual employees to determine autonomously what they will do. Instead, the best practice is for the leadership to

provide broad but flexible guidelines for the whole company and then let teams determine what works best for them. Empower each team leader to determine, in consultation with other team leaders and their team members, how each team should function. The choice should be driven by the goals and collaborative capacities of each team rather than the personal preferences of the team leader. The outcome for each team should range from fully remote, with in-person team-building retreats once a quarter, to two days remote and three in the office.

The top leadership should encourage team leaders to permit, wherever possible, team members to work remotely, if the latter desire to do so and can demonstrate high productivity. In fact, some of the conversations I cited earlier with reluctant leaders came from discussions with team leaders who wanted their direct reports to come to the office when, objectively, they lacked a sufficiently justifiable reason to do so.

Likewise, there should be a very good reason for more than three days in the office. Such reasons exist. For example, in one company for which I consulted, the sales teams who placed outbound sales calls decided to do full-time office work. The team leaders argued persuasively that sales staff benefited greatly from being surrounded by other sales staff during outbound calls. Such calls are draining and sap motivation; being surrounded by others on the sales floor making similar calls boosts motivation and energy. Moreover, hearing others make calls offers an opportunity to learn from their successful techniques, which is difficult to arrange in telework settings. However, such exceptions are rare. Generally speaking, no more than 5% of your staff should be in the office full-time if that's not their preference.

All team members should come to the office on the same days. That way, all can collaborate easily, with no awkward conversations where half the team is in little squares on the screen. The office of the future will be much more a place for collaboration and much less one for individual work.

Chapter 6: The Four Horsemen of the Mandated Return to Office

As increasing numbers of companies are requiring employees to return to the office for 3-5 days per week, they're running into the buzzsaw of what one of [my clients](#) called the "Four Horsemen of the Required Return to Office" - challenges with resistance, attrition, quiet quitting, and diversity.

The Four Horsemen stem from the fact that workers who are capable of working remotely prefer to do so for most or all of the time. For example, an August 2022 Gallup [survey](#) of remote-capable workers shows that 34% of respondents want to work full-time remotely, 60% want to work a flexible hybrid schedule, and only 6% want to work in a traditional office-centric setting. A June 2022 McKinsey [survey](#) of all workers, remote-capable and not, provides further context on preferences for hybrid work. It found that 32% of respondents want to work full-time remotely, 10% want to work remotely four days a week, 16% three days a week, 18% two days a week, 13% one day a week, and 13% prefer full-time in-office work. Thus over half of all respondents want to work less than half the time in the office. And a September 2022 [survey](#) from the School of Politics and Economics at King's College reported that 25% of respondents would quit if forced to return to the office full time.

Resistance: The First Horseman

No wonder that workers facing return to office mandates show resistance, the first of the Four Horsemen. For example, the leadership of Apple required its employees to come to the office three days a week. While Apple employees are not known for stirring trouble, in this case 1,000 employees [signed](#) a petition requesting more flexibility. GM [announced](#) in a message on Friday September 23 that all salaried employees would have to return to the office three days a week. The message sparked intense employee backlash, leading to GM [walking back](#) its requirements and delaying any required return to office to next year.

In a September 2022 [survey](#), Gartner found that only 3% of companies would fire noncompliant employees, and only 30% would have HR talk to those who don't show up. No wonder that large US banks trying to force employees back to the office are meeting with [high rates](#) of noncompliance of up to 50%. And many other employees are [showing up](#) for a part of the workday, from 10 to 2 PM. The Labor Day return-to-office mandates resulted in a rise in office occupancy in early September, reaching 47.5% during the week ending September 14 in 10 major cities tracked by Kastle Systems, a security access card provider. Yet the office occupancy [declined](#) to 47.3% by the end of the week ending September 21, and to 47.2% the [following week](#).

Attrition: The Second Horseman

Given this resistance, some workers simply quit, joining the Great Resignation, making attrition the second of the Four Horsemen. That includes top-level executives: Ian Goodfellow, who led machine learning at Apple, quit in protest over Apple's mandated return to office of three days a week. It also includes many rank-and-file staff, with publications featuring the stories of employees who quit rather than returning to the office for 3-5 days per week. Or consider a National Bureau of Economic Research paper about a study at Trip.com, one of the largest travel agencies in the world. It randomly assigned some engineers, marketing workers, and finance workers to work some of their time remotely and others in the same roles to full-time in-office work. Those who worked on a hybrid schedule had 35% better retention.

Even finance, the industry leading the charge for returning to the office, suffered significant churn. European banks, which offer more flexible hybrid work policies, are using these to hire talented staff from the less flexible US banks. Smaller and more flexible financial planning firms are headhunting financial planners in larger and less flexible companies. Even bankers at the top banks, like JP Morgan and Goldman Sachs, are leaving due to the return to office requirements.

Quiet Quitting: The Third Horseman

Perhaps even more dangerous than resistance and attrition is the third of the Four Horsemen, quiet quitting. That term refers to employees psychologically disengaging from their work, and doing just enough to get by without getting in trouble. Quiet quitting can be worse than the much more obvious resistance or attrition, since quiet quitting rots a company's culture from within.

A September 2022 survey by Gallup found that such quiet quitters make up about half of the US workforce. Forcing employees to come to the office under the threat of discipline leads to disengagement, fear, and distrust, according to Ben Wigert, director of research and strategy for workplace management at Gallup. Indeed, Gallup found that if people are required to come to the office for more time than they prefer, "employees experience significantly lower engagement, significantly lower well-being, significantly higher intent to leave [and] significantly higher levels of burnout." By contrast, employees feel gratitude to companies that give them more flexibility and show trust: as one such employee said, "if my company is going to come in and give me this flexibility, then I'm going to be the first to give them 100%."

Indeed, research by Stanford University even before the pandemic found that workers who spent 4 days a week working remotely were 9% more engaged than in-office staff. Gallup finds that "the optimal engagement boost occurs when employees spend 60% to 80% of their time—or three to four days in a five-day workweek—working off-site." A June 2022 Citrix survey finds that 56% of fully-remote workers feel engaged, but only 51% of in-office employees do so. The evidence is backed up by a CNBC survey from June 2022, which found that 52% of fully remote workers say they are very satisfied with their jobs, compared with 47% of workers working full-time in the office. No wonder, then, that mandates forcing employees to come to the office result in quiet quitting.

Loss of DEI: The Fourth Horseman

The final of the Four Horsemen relates to the serious loss of diversity associated with the mandated office return. A Future Forum survey found that 21% of all White knowledge workers wanted a return to full-time in-office work, but only 3% of all Black knowledge workers wanted the same. That's a huge difference! Another Future Forum survey found that 38% of Black men wanted a fully flexible schedule, but only 26% of white men. The Society for Human Resource Management found that half of all Black office workers wanted to work from home permanently, while only 39% of white workers did so.

Why do we see this difference? It's because Black professionals still suffer from discrimination and microaggressions in the office, and are less vulnerable to harassment in remote work. Similar findings apply to other underrepresented groups.

Evidence shows that underrepresented groups are leaving employers who mandate a return to the office and are fleeing to more flexible companies. For example, Meta Platforms offers permanent fully-remote work options. By doing so, Meta found, according to Sandra Altiné, Meta's VP of Workforce Diversity and Inclusion, that "embracing remote work and being distributed-first has allowed Meta to become a more diverse company." For example, in 2019, Meta committed to a five-year goal of doubling the number of Black and Hispanic workers in the US and the number of women in its global workforce. Thanks to remote work, Meta's 2022 Diversity Report shows that it attained and even outperformed its 2019 five-year goals for diversity two years ahead of its original plans.

While Meta's diversity goals are benefitting from remote work, other companies that offer less flexibility have DEI staff ringing alarm bells about how the desire for remote work among underrepresented groups threatens diversity goals. After all, the workers who are going to Meta are coming from somewhere, right? Underrepresented groups are joining the Great Resignation in greater numbers in the context of the mandated office returns.

Defeating the Four Horsemen

In working with my clients who wish to bring their employees back to the office to slay the Four Horsemen, I find a combination of strategies to be crucial. Before launching an office return, we consider compensation policies. A June 2022 survey by the Society for Human Resources reports that 48% of survey respondents will "definitely" look for a full-time WFH job in their next search. To get them to stay at a full-time job with a 30-minute commute, they would need a 20% pay raise. For a hybrid job with the same commute, they would need a pay raise of 10%. A September 2022 survey by Goodhire found that 73% of workers believe companies should pay in-office workers more than remote workers. Indeed, research by Owl Labs suggests that it costs an average of $863/month for the average office worker to commute to work versus staying at home, which is about $432/month for utilities, office supplies, and so on.

That data helped my clients develop a fair compensation plan that paid staff a higher salary if they spent more time in the office. Doing so helped address the first two Horsemen, resistance and attrition. Some of my clients even used that policy as a simple yet effective incentive to

nudge most of their staff to return to the office in a way that minimized resistance and attrition, while saving significantly on payroll for the small minority who chose to work remotely.

Addressing quiet quitting required a range of techniques. One involved working on improving culture and belonging, such as retreats with fun [team-building exercises](#). Another centered on helping staff address burnout, such as by providing [mental health benefits](#). Finally, it helps if employees feel you care about their professional development: [upskilling](#) pays off.

To help prevent diversity losses, as well as facilitate underrepresented groups getting promoted, it's valuable to create a formal [mentoring program](#) with a special focus on underprivileged staff. That means providing minority staff with two mentors, one from the same minority group and one representing the majority population. Doing so offers the minority mentee a diverse network of connections and experiences to draw on among both minority and majority staff. It provides mentees with the implicit knowledge and relationships they will need to advance, while the fact that each mentee has two mentors lightens the load on each mentor and makes the workload manageable.

So if you are committed to returning to a mostly or fully in-person workforce, remember that you need to watch out for - and defeat - the Four Horsemen. Make a plan in advance, and determine how you will [overcome these problems](#) before they threaten the success of your return-to-office plan.

Chapter 7: Offices in the Future of Work

Reshape Your Office Space

A hybrid-first model will enable you to cut costs on real estate. The less frequently you have staff come in, the less real estate you'll need, so consider that in your guidance to team leaders.

Start adjusting your office space by planning for anticipated usage. Have each team leader indicate how often they plan to have employees come in and on which days of the week. Encourage some shifting of days of the week if too many plan to come in on one day, and not enough on other days. A good way to do so is having team leaders rank their preferred days of the week from one to five. Then, use an algorithm to assign teams to various days to maximize preference satisfaction.

Also, survey staff to find out how many plan to come in on days when they're not required to do so. Some of your employees who prefer to work surrounded by others or have problematic home office arrangements might choose to come in when their team stays home.

Separately, determine your space needs for larger staff events. These might range from quarterly retreats to large-scale in-person trainings (keep in mind you can always rent such spaces).

Next, make plans to decrease your real estate footprint accordingly. Consider arranging to have some of your office space in coworking venues. Doing so will mitigate the risk either of excess or insufficient space. Keep in mind that some teams will likely change plans as they adjust to hybrid work.

Next, you'll want to transform your office space layout. In the hybrid model, in-office work will focus much more on direct collaboration with team members. It will also involve working side-by-side with other team members who you can ask quick clarifying questions, or to whom you can provide guidance.

Currently, typical offices have 80% of their space dedicated to personal use and 20% shared space. You'll want to use the results of your survey to change your office space accordingly. For instance, many companies have been increasing collaborative space to two-thirds, and decreasing personal space to one-third.

As part of doing so, you'll want to get rid of most individual cubicles and offices. Retain them only for team leaders at all levels who need private spaces for sensitive conversations, as well as anyone else requiring such spaces.

In most cases, you'll want to change the office space and technology to facilitate hot-desking, unless your industry requires employees to have privacy or if there are other good reasons to avoid doing so. Have employees use laptops and retire desktops. Upgrade your video technology in shared spaces to facilitate meetings where some people will be videoconferencing from home. After all, some team members will choose to work-from-home permanently. In other cases, such videoconference technology will be important for cross-functional teams that don't

come in on the same days.

Four-fifths of the companies I helped guide in returning to the office chose to save costs on remodeling for pandemic safety. How? They either mandated vaccination for all employees, or only permitted vaccinated employees to return to the office. If you do the same, you'll save substantially on remodeling costs.

To minimize liability, you'll want to keep to current OSHA guidelines about masking and social distancing while they're still in effect. Still, the remodeling investments are mainly relevant for addressing employee safety and risk of COVID spread. Given CDC guidelines permitting indoor gatherings of fully-vaccinated people, you'll minimize COVID risks and employee anxiety by making your office for vaccinated people only.

The one-fifth of the companies that chose to permit unvaccinated people in the office decided to invest into substantial remodeling and frequent cleaning, following OSHA guidelines. That remodeling included installing commercial HEPA filters, physical barriers, hygiene stations, providing PPE, and so on.

Funding for Home Offices

With the hybrid-first model, and some workers fully remote, the home office of your employees is now a permanent arrangement for your company. You'll want to make sure to help them avoid the situation too many still face: using their kitchen table for office space, relying on 5-year-old laptops, and having the basic broadband package with no backup options.

It's important to provide a separate budget for your employees to address this problem. That can include funding a comfortable and well-equipped home office. It can mean paying for their membership in a coworking space if they have no suitable room in their home, or if they feel unable to work effectively without others around them.

To mitigate risks of internet outages or slowdowns, consider providing them with hotspot plans. You might also address potential issues by encouraging employees to and providing funding for taking a variety of steps toward risk mitigation for their home. Remember, their home is now part of your company, and you bear some responsibility for managing such risks. Include such risk mitigation and backup planning in your business continuity planning and Enterprise Risk Management strategies.

Altogether, an initial fund of $3,000 for the home office transition, plus an annual budget of $2,000 for maintenance, should be sufficient for most employees. Add at least an additional $500 per year for working parents of young children to address parenting needs connected to working remotely.

Chapter 8: Adapt Your Culture: Collaboration in Hybrid and Remote Work

Culture refers to that social and emotional glue that bonds your employees together into a community of belonging, motivates employees, and protects against burnout. Culture includes the norms, habits, and practices that determine how you collaborate, and the values that guide your community into the increasingly-disrupted future.

Why Did Corporate Culture and Social Capital Suffer During the Pandemic?

Google announced in April 2022 that its new post-pandemic work policy will require employees work in the office for at least three days a week. That policy went against the desires of many rank-and-file Google employees. A survey of over 1,000 Google employees showed that two-thirds felt unhappy about being forced to work in the office three days a week; in internal meetings and public letters, many have threatened to leave, and some followed through to go to other companies with more flexible options.

Yet Google's leadership defended its requirement of mostly in-office work for all staff as necessary to protect the company's social capital, meaning people's connections to and trust in one another. In fact, according to the former head of HR at Google, Laszlo Bock, three days a week is likely to be just a transition period. Google's leadership intends to require full-time in-office work in the next couple of years. Ex–Google CEO Eric Schmidt supports this notion, saying, "I'm a traditionalist" and it's "important that these people be at the office" to get the benefit of on-the-job training for junior team members.

Google's position on returning to the office for the sake of protecting social capital echoes that of Apple, which required a three-days-in-office workweek in April 2022. That company similarly met with employee discontent, with many intending to leave if forced to return. By contrast, plenty of other large tech companies, such as Amazon and Twitter, offered employees much more flexibility with extensive remote work options. The same applies to many other companies, such as Nationwide, Deloitte, and Applied Materials. Are they giving up on social capital?

Not at all. What forward-looking companies are discovering is that hybrid and even fully remote work arrangements don't automatically lead to losing social capital.

However, you *do* lose social capital if you try to shoehorn traditional, office-centric methods of collaboration into hybrid and remote work. That's why research findings highlight how companies that transposed their existing pre-pandemic work arrangements onto remote work during COVID lost social capital.

In the emergency of the lockdowns, the vast majority of companies transposed their office

culture-style of collaboration to remote work. That's like forcing a square peg into a round hole. You can do it if you push hard enough, but you'll break off the corners. In this case, the pegs mean much of the sense of connection that integrates your employees into your company culture. That peg will do in an emergency, but in the longer run it will wobble and eventually break.

No wonder so many suffered from work-from-home burnout and Zoom fatigue, and felt increasingly disconnected from their employers. Unfortunately, the large majority of companies tried to address culture-related problems through day-to-day tactics borrowed from in-office practices, such as Zoom happy hours. Only a select few took the strategic approach of revising their company culture to fit the needs of remote work. Such companies had much better retention.

As you're returning to the office, you need to make a strategic adaptation of your culture to a new hybrid model. To do so, you need to recognize the problems inherent in the emergency switch to remote work that harm company culture, and cause burnout and disengagement. Namely, remote work, when approached un-strategically, leads to a deprivation of our basic human need for connection.

At heart, we human beings are tribal creatures. We long to feel connected and belong to a community. Our work community offers a key source of fulfillment for many of us. We work together, we support each other, we celebrate each other's triumphs and support each other through losses, we connect to something much bigger than ourselves. Work-from-home cuts us off from much of our ability to connect effectively to our colleagues as human beings, rather than little squares on a screen.

Many companies try to replace the office culture glue of social and emotional connection with numerous virtual team meetings. On top of that are the semi-forced socializations of Zoom happy hours and similar activities that transpose in-person bonding events onto virtual formats. Unfortunately, such activities don't work well.

Have you ever started your remote work day at 9 AM sitting in your home office chair, had a series of meetings, and finished it at 5 PM feeling much more exhausted than if you'd had a similar series of meetings at work? This experience has grown to be called "Zoom fatigue." It's a real experience, but it's not about Zoom itself, or any other videoconference software.

The big challenge stems from our intuitive expectations about such meetings bringing us energy through connecting to people, but failing to get our basic need for connection met. In-person meetings, even if they're strictly professional, still connect us on a human-to-human level. And of course, most meetings have some social components, even if they consist of brief person-to-person greetings.

By contrast, our emotions just don't process videoconference meetings as truly connecting us on a human-to-human gut level. Yet our gut, usually without our conscious awareness, still intuitively anticipates videoconference meetings to bring us energy and connection. It's inevitably disappointing, resulting in a feeling of drain, exhaustion, and stress. Zoom happy hours are even worse than regular work meetings in this regard. They're supposed to make us feel connected, and our gut has even more elevated expectations. That results in more of a feeling of let-down than regular work meetings. No wonder employees are demanding fewer virtual meetings.

The hybrid model of coming in once or more per week will help address this issue for most employees. Still, if possible you should offer effective virtual connecting activities on non-office days. These activities are far more important for those employees who work remotely full-time, only coming in for quarterly team-building and strategic planning activities.

You need to replace bonding activities from office culture with bonding activities designed for a virtual format. These activities should be specifically distinct from office culture-based ones, so that our gut reactions don't have elevated expectations. They should also take advantage of digital technology. [Studies show](#) that by adopting such best practices for hybrid and remote work, organizations can boost their social capital and improve their culture.

Virtual Water Cooler

A valuable activity designed for a hybrid or fully-remote format that almost all of my clients implemented is a "Virtual Water Cooler" for each 4-8 people team inside their company. The team establishes a separate space in their collaboration software dedicated to personal, non-work discussions by team members. Every morning - whether they come to the office or work at home - all team members send a message answering the following questions:
- 1) How are you doing overall?
- 2) How are you feeling right now?
- 3) What's been interesting in your life recently outside of work?
- 4) What's going on in your work: what's going well, and what are some challenges?
- 5) What is one thing about you that most other team members do not know about?

Employees are encouraged to post photos or videos as part of their answers. They are also asked to respond to at least three other employees who made an update that day.

Note that most of these questions are about life outside of work, and aim to help people get to know each other. They humanize team members to each other, helping them get to know each other as human beings. There's also one work question, focusing on helping team members learn what others are working on right now. That question helps them collaborate together more effectively.

Then, during the day, team members use that same channel for personal sharing. Anyone who feels inspired can share about what's going in their life and respond to others who do so. The combination of mandated morning updates combined with the autonomy of the personal sharing provides a good balance for building relationships and cultivating trust that fits the different preferences and personalities of the company's employees.

Of course, you'll want to experiment and figure out what works well for your organization's teams. There are many variations you can try.

Virtual Co-Working

To facilitate remote training for on-the-job learning through virtual settings, as well as to promote effective team collaboration, employ virtual coworking. That involves all members of a team spending an hour or two per day coworking virtually with their teammates when they are not in the office.

That doesn't mean working together on a collaborative task: each person works on their own tasks, but can ask questions if they have them. After all, much of on-the-job training comes from coworkers answering questions and showing less experienced staff what to do on individual tasks.

First, all should get on a videoconference call. Then, all share what they plan to work on during this period. Next, all turn microphones off but leaving speakers on with video optional, and then work on their own tasks. That way, no sounds will be coming through unless a team member deliberately turns on their microphone to ask a question or make a comment.

This experience replicates the benefit of a shared cubicle space, where you work alongside your team members, but on your own work. As less experienced team members have questions, they can ask them and get them quickly answered. Most of the time, the answer will be sufficient. Sometimes, a more experienced team member will do screensharing to demonstrate how to do a task. Another option is to use a virtual whiteboard to demonstrate the task graphically.

Junior team members don't get all the benefits. More experienced team members might need an answer to a question from another team member's area of expertise. Occasionally, issues might come up that would benefit from a brief discussion and clarification. Often, team members save up their more complex or confusing tasks to do during a coworking session, for just such assistance.

Furthermore, sometimes team members will just share about themselves and chat about how things are going in work and life. That's the benefit of a shared cubicle space, and digital coworking replicates that experience.

However, note that this call is not meant to be a work meeting, and you should not intend to have any lengthy conversations during it. Do a separate call with a teammate if you need to have a longer chat. If you have specific teammates with whom you're collaborating more intensely, you should do a coworking session with them daily in addition to broader coworking with the team as a whole.

Such digital coworking does not cause the drain of a typical Zoom meeting. Team members typically find it energizing and bonding. It helps junior team members get on-the-job learning and integrates them into the team, while helping all team members address questions while feeling more connected to fellow team members.

Hybrid Meetings

Our intuitive, typical approach to hybrid meetings results in those attending remotely being second-class citizens compared to in-person attendees. One solution is to have everyone attend by videoconference. However, in many cases you want at least some to attend the meeting in person for more important meetings. That's because attending in person has been shown to improve attendee motivation, connection to fellow attendees, and ability to communicate effectively through conveying and reading nonverbal signals. So what if some can't attend in person? In that case, you need to do a couple of things.

First, you need to make sure you have high-quality technology. That includes high-quality audio technology to ensure everyone can hear each other very well. That also includes high-quality video technology. Many conference rooms are long and narrow, and cameras are typically located at one end of the table, so that those at the far end are not easily visible on video. That creates a problem for remote attendees, since they can't see clearly the body language and gestures of the in-person attendees.

Second, you need to train both the meeting facilitator and also the attendees - including in-person and remote ones - to help ensure that those attending remotely aren't second-class citizens. The facilitator has to give the remote attendees specific and clear opportunities to talk at regular intervals, asking them to weigh in on each topic of discussion. The facilitator needs to call on remote attendees as soon as reasonable whenever they use the "raise your hand" function electronically, skipping in-person attendees in queue to speak, as well as read out loud chats typed by videoconference attendees. The in-person attendees have to pay extra attention to those attending remotely and give their input more weight than feels intuitively appropriate, to deanchor the natural and intuitive greater weight that in-person attendees would give to fellow in-person attendees. The remote attendees need to go against their intuitions and speak up more frequently than seems natural to them, using the "raise your hand" function and chat function to make their points. This approach will seem artificial and uncomfortable at first, because everyone will have to address their miscalibrated intuitions, but it will help maximize everyone's participation and address the problems with typical hybrid meetings.

Third, you need to measure and provide feedback on the quality of the hybrid meeting experience, for in-person and especially remote attendees. As you're making the transition to hybrid meetings, survey participants on various aspects of the meeting, such as: their overall evaluation of their meeting experience, how well they were able to hear and see others, how well they think others heard and saw them, how much they were able to participate in and impact the meeting, how well the in-person participants accommodated remote participants, how well the facilitator accommodated remote participants, how effectively were features like chat and "raise hand" used, what could have been done better to improve their experience and impact, and related questions.

Fourth, you need to provide such feedback to the meeting facilitator privately, so that they can take steps based on that feedback. Also, as needed, provide additional training and coaching to the meeting facilitator. That might involve sitting in on meetings or watching recordings and providing specific feedback on specific behaviors to improve, and so on.

Fifth, you need to publicize the results and compare teams within business units and compare business units to each other. Doing so helps provide reputational rewards for the more progressive, forward-looking leaders who adopt best practices quickly, and motivation for old-

school leaders who are reluctant to change.

Establish Mentoring (In-Person and Virtual)

With the rise of remote and hybrid work environments, one crucial aspect of employee development has taken a hit: mentoring. [Recent findings](#) by WFH Research, a group that includes Stanford University economist Nicholas Bloom and others scholars, show that on-site employees devote more time to mentoring and professional development than their remote counterparts. Namely, those who came to the office devoted about 40 more minutes a week to mentoring others, nearly 25 more in formal training and about 15 additional minutes each week doing professional development and learning activities.

As a seasoned expert in [helping](#) leaders figure out a flexible [return to office and hybrid work policy](#), I can attest that Bloom's research is spot on: when you just let things take their natural course, junior staff suffer. No wonder leaders who previously showed strong support for flexibility like [Marc Benioff](#) and [Mark Zuckerberg](#) changed their minds, at least about junior staff, pushing them to come to the office for three days a week - but also asking senior staff to come to the office to mentor recent hires.

Unfortunately, their proposed solution is wrong-headed. Mandating in-office attendance for most of the workweek is [bound](#) to lead to attrition, resistance, disengagement, and lowered productivity. And it will not be very effective for mentoring, either: in the context of the return to office wars, senior staff especially resent coming to the office with the sole goal of mentoring junior staff by osmosis. They tend to go to their office or cubicle, shut their door and put on their headphones, and try to avoid interacting with anyone else. Junior staff are usually too intimidated by this obviously hostile and standoffish attitude, and fail to get mentoring.

Instead, the solution is a structured mentoring program that embraces flexible schedules. Senior staff feel much less resentment about coming to the office once a week for several hours to do in-depth mentoring, along with some virtual mentoring sessions, compared to an obligation to come in three days a week for the weak soup of mentoring by osmosis.

Picture a garden with an abundance of diverse and colorful plants. Each plant represents an employee, and the garden as a whole represents your organization. The sun, water, and nutrients these plants receive are akin to the mentoring and professional development opportunities that nourish your employees.

Without these essential resources, the garden withers and fails to reach its full potential. Similarly, without a structured mentoring program, your employees' growth may be stunted, leading to a less vibrant and successful organization.

And it's not only the gardening metaphor that illustrates effective mentoring: a [study](#) by Charter and Qualtrics of 3,005 desk-based workers in the United States does so as well. They found that "hybrid work does not limit the potential of mentoring" and "Successful mentoring relationships were similarly likely to occur if mentor and mentee met remotely [or in-person."

Similarly, the *Harvard Business Review* [reports](#) that "many individuals incorrectly presume that

physical proximity is essential in developmental relationships. But like work itself, mentoring is defined less by the medium in which it is accomplished than by the outcomes delivered." If you have "commitment, trust, relationship quality, and mentor competence," these "are the real ingredients of developmental growth," and you can have these in both in-person and "virtual mentorship."

But what is involved in a structured mentoring program of this sort? One-on-one in-person interactions with senior professionals serve as the sun in our garden analogy. These meetings foster personal bonding, vulnerability, psychological safety, and trust – the lifeblood of effective mentoring relationships.

While these sessions are powerful, senior professionals' time is limited, and most want to minimize their time in the office. That's why it's essential to incorporate other mentoring activities, such as virtual coffee meetings.

Imagine these virtual meetings as the water that sustains our garden. After trust has been established through in-person interactions, virtual coffee meetings with senior professionals offer a convenient and accessible way to maintain relationships.

The lower time burden and flexibility of these meetings make them an attractive option for busy senior professionals, no matter where they are in the world. I'm not simply referring to traveling: many senior professionals at my clients moved to more attractive locales during the pandemic, and only came to the office for quarterly retreats. They were too high-value for my clients to pressure them to return to the office.

But, we ended up making arrangements where these senior professionals met their mentees during quarterly retreats and began their relationships in these intense bonding experiences. Then, they continued mentoring in these virtual meetings, having established the trust necessary to do so.

Regardless of whether you do in-person or virtual meetings, make sure to do them often. Both my own experience with clients and the [research](#) by Charter and Qualtrics found it's key to have frequent check-ins between mentors and mentees. In fact, according to the study, "Some 51% of very successful mentors meet with their mentees once a week or more often, compared to 37% for somewhat successful mentors."

An additional valuable tool: group lunch sessions. These act like the fertile soil that supports the growth of your organization's garden. By engaging small groups of young employees with senior professionals, these sessions facilitate knowledge sharing and relationship building while making efficient use of senior professionals' time. Such gatherings allow the collective wisdom of your organization to flourish.

Moreover, much like the pollinators in our garden, group mentoring sessions encourage cross-pollination of ideas among a cohort of younger employees mentored by a senior employee. This approach fosters a collaborative learning environment of peer-based learning and reduces the burden on senior employees of teaching junior staff, promoting a thriving ecosystem within your organization.

Just like with one-on-one mentoring, group sessions are best started in-person. Then, you can transition to remote once trust has built up.

Finally, virtual coworking with a mentor serves as the intertwined roots of plants in a vibrant garden. Just as these roots share nutrients and stabilize each other, coworking sessions present a unique opportunity for senior and junior employees to share knowledge and support each other. This shared workspace provides a fertile ground for collaboration, where ideas can germinate, blossom, and bear the fruit of innovation.

In-person coworking sessions, in particular, are akin to the roots that delve deep into the soil, drawing essential nutrients and establishing a robust foundation. These sessions offer the invaluable advantage of immediate feedback, allowing for real-time adjustments and refinements. The energy and spontaneity in these physical spaces spark creativity, much like the invigorating feel of the earth between a gardener's fingers.

Virtual coworking sessions, on the other hand, are comparable to the surface roots that adapt to their environment, spreading out to absorb rainwater and sunlight. They offer the flexibility of connecting from anywhere, making them an excellent solution for remote work scenarios. These sessions remove geographical boundaries, enabling the exchange of diverse perspectives, much like the rain and sun that nurture a garden's growth. Unlike the one-on-one or group sessions, I haven't observed the need for trust-building through initial in-person coworking, making this activity an especially flexible tool for teams with some members who are fully remote.

What makes coworking sessions a win-win solution is the reduction of burden on senior employees. By encouraging shared workspaces, both physical and virtual, senior staff members can impart their wisdom and experience without overextending themselves. It's much like the way mature plants support the growth of younger ones in a garden without depleting their own resources. Ultimately, coworking sessions cultivate a culture of mutual learning and teamwork, laying the foundation for a thriving, resilient organization.

To maximize the yield of our metaphorical garden, we must set clear goals and incentives for the mentoring program. This approach ensures that all parties are fully engaged and that the program is effective in fostering employee growth.

Just as a gardener regularly prunes and assesses their plants' health, organizations must implement evaluations to monitor the progress and success of their mentoring initiatives. This process enables continuous improvement and helps your garden – or your organization – to flourish.

Again, the findings by Charter and Qualtrics supported these lessons from my work with clients. According to the study, "Mentors in successful relationships are more likely to have this mentorship supported through compensation (27%, vs. 17% for less successful mentors), recognition in performance reviews (42% vs. 33%), and being provided time by their employer to mentor (39% vs. 33%)."

Personal User Manuals

An excellent way to have remote and hybrid workers learn more about and thus better collaborate with each other involves having each one create a Personal User Manual. This document helps you communicate to others how to collaborate with you most effectively. That

includes your strengths and weaknesses, your collaboration, communication, and leadership style, your preferences and quirks. Below is an example of my own Personal User Manual, and my clients have found that establishing such manuals for their staff offers an invaluable tool for smoothing collaboration, reducing miscommunication, and facilitating teamwork.

Contact info
- Email: gleb@disasteravoidanceexperts.com
- Phone: xxx-xxx-xxxx

Working Hours
- 10 to 6 Eastern time, M-F
  - Can accommodate to +/- 3 hours if needed
- Freshest in the morning, do my best and most creative work at that time

Communication Preferences/Style
- Email is preferred as baseline communication
  - Check email at beginning, middle, and end of day
  - Will respond to urgent email within a few hours, at least with an acknowledgment
  - Will respond to regular email within 24 hours, at least with an acknowledgment
  - Prefer more thorough emails with substantive points explaining context, will read such emails carefully and avoid skimming
  - Will set away email message if away for more than a day
- For quickest response
  - Both email and text/call
- Can communicate on Slack or other venues based on pre-arranged agreements
- Expect collaborators to respond
  - To email within 72 hours if they don't have an away message
  - To phone calls/texts within 24 hours
- For more nuanced or in-depth topics, prefer videoconference meeting

Organization
- Highly organized
- Thorough planner
- Deadline-driven
- Self-motivated, strong initiative
- Results of achieving goals matter above all

Collaboration Style
- Focused on establishing shared expectations and committed to meeting/exceeding them
  - Strongly expect collaborators to at least meet expectations
- Believe strongly in need to write down and confirm with collaborator important points of collaboration
  - Treat memory as fallible and not trustworthy, based on research studies
- Forgiving of mistakes due to inexperience with activity, less so repeated same mistakes
  - "Make new mistakes"
- Strength of idea generation
  - Rather than idea improvement
- Very optimistic, willing to take risks and try new things
  - Can be too risk-blind, apt to take excessive risks

- Focus on processes and systems, improving them over time
  - "What gets measured, gets managed"
- Prefer to work in close feedback loops with others rather than long solo stretches
- Driven by shared goals
- Conscientious and accountable to others
- Very loyal to allies/collaborators
  - Care about their goals and well-being

Additional Information
- **Bio**: Dr. Gleb Tsipursky is a world-renowned thought leader in future-proofing, decision making, and cognitive bias risk management. He serves as the CEO of the boutique future-proofing consultancy Disaster Avoidance Experts, which specializes in helping forward-looking leaders avoid dangerous threats and missed opportunities. He is the best-selling author of *Never Go With Your Gut: How Pioneering Leaders Make the Best Decisions and Avoid Business Disasters*, *The Blindspots Between Us: How to Overcome Unconscious Cognitive Bias and Build Better Relationships*, and *Returning to the Office and Leading Hybrid and Remote Teams: A Manual on Benchmarking to Best Practices for Competitive Advantage*. He was featured in over 550 articles and 450 interviews in *Fortune*, *USA Today*, *Inc. Magazine*, *CBS News*, *Time*, *Business Insider*, *Fast Company*, and elsewhere. His expertise comes from over 20 years of consulting, coaching, and speaking and training, and over 15 years in academia as a behavioral scientist.
- Link to CV
- Link to business website
- Link to LinkedIn
- Link to list of strengths and weaknesses

Chapter 9: Mastering the Art of Hybrid Meetings

As companies continue to navigate the challenges of remote work, hybrid meetings have emerged as a critical solution for successful collaboration between in-person and remote teams. A hybrid meeting combines in-person and remote attendees and allows for face-to-face interaction between all participants, regardless of their location. And with the right technology and facilitation, hybrid meetings can provide the best of both worlds: the benefits of in-person meetings, such as nonverbal communication and spontaneous collaboration, combined with the convenience and cost-effectiveness of remote meetings.

But in order to truly take advantage of the benefits of hybrid meetings, organizations must pay attention to several key factors. Otherwise, hybrid meetings can be a miserable experience for both in-person but especially remote attendees. In fact, after consulting for 21 organizations on how to implement hybrid work arrangements, my experience shows most companies have a policy that if one person is attending virtually, then everyone will attend virtually.

However, as I tell my clients, by doing so they miss out on the real benefits of in-person interaction for those who are in the room. Attending in person has been shown to improve attendee motivation, connection to fellow attendees, ability to communicate effectively through conveying and reading nonverbal signals; no wonder more than eight in ten executives prefer in-person meetings to virtual contact.

Instead of throwing out the baby with the bathwater, the best approach is to learn best practices for hybrid meetings, which can create a positive experience for both in-person and remote attendees. Doing so requires overcoming our intuitions and gut reactions about how to manage meetings and investing into quality AV technology, developing new meeting norms, and training participants on using this technology and following these norms.

Importance of Excellent Meeting AV Technology

One of the most critical elements of a successful hybrid meeting is having excellent audio and video (AV) technology that allows all participants to see and hear each other clearly. This is especially important for remote attendees.

Many conference rooms are long and narrow, and cameras are typically located at one end of the table, so that those at the far end are not easily visible on video. That creates a problem for remote attendees, since they can't see clearly the body language and gestures of the in-person attendees. Similarly, remote attendees need to be able to hear the points made by everyone in the room, but the typical narrow meeting rooms are not set up to pick up audio well for all participants, just for those at the head of the table. That's fine for presentations, but fails to work for collaborative meetings with discussion by various participants.

Remote participants need to see the person who is speaking at any given time. To do so requires a camera that tracks whoever is speaking at the moment, and focuses on them as a speaker. They also need a second camera that shows the whole room, in order to catch the nonverbal cues of their in-person colleagues and thus participate fully in the discussion. After all, the point of a meeting is not simply one-way communication by the speaker; it's also

observing the reaction of the meeting participants to the speaker. Finally, they need a third camera showing the PowerPoint and/or whiteboard.

In-person participants, in turn, have to be able to see remote attendees clearly. That means, ideally, having them sit on one side of the table and on the other side having a big conference room screen with the remote attendees. Then, the natural focus of the in-person attendees goes to the remote participants, not to each other.

For example, a mid-size insurance company was experiencing a lack of engagement from remote employees during meetings. Based on my advice, they implemented better AV technology, such as directional microphones and a 360 degree high-definition [conference camera](#) that tracked the speaker on one screen while also offering a wide shot of the attendees on another. With this technology remote employees reported feeling more included in the discussions and were able to better understand the reactions of their in-person colleagues. In turn, such understanding led to improved collaboration and more efficient decision-making.

Separate Facilitation for Remote Attendees

Another important factor in successful hybrid meetings is having a separate facilitator for remote attendees. Team leaders serve as the traditional meeting facilitator, and they already have their hands full managing the in-person portion of the meeting and the agenda while also being a full participant; they really struggle with the additional burden of managing remote participants, which requires substantial work, and the remote participants are typically left behind.

Instead, it's important for the team leader to appoint an in-person attendee as the remote facilitator. This person's role is to ensure that remote attendees are able to fully participate in the meeting and that their contributions are heard and acknowledged. They can also help to manage any technical issues that may arise. The remote facilitator should solicit the feedback and input of remote attendees, and interject on their behalf as needed. The facilitator needs to call on remote attendees as soon as reasonable whenever they use the "raise your hand" function electronically, skipping in-person attendees in queue to speak. They also need to read out loud chats typed by videoconference attendees who ask the remote facilitator to make a point on their behalf.

For example, a large financial services company struggled with ensuring that remote employees were able to contribute to meetings in a meaningful way. By assigning a separate facilitator for remote attendees, the company was able to improve participation and engagement from remote employees, leading to more effective decision-making and improved productivity.

Expressing Yourself through Emojis or Chat

Remote attendees need to collaborate with the remote facilitator and advocate for their perspective and full-fledged participation in hybrid meetings. They need to express themselves in reaction to what people are saying through reaction emojis or chat.

After all, with high-quality AV technology that provides a wide shot of the room in high-definition video, they can see how the in-person participants are responding to the points made by the

speaker. And they're invited to the meeting because their contributions are valuable; otherwise, why waste their time coming, right? They could just watch a meeting recording.

The challenge is that you can't see the responses of remote participants to what the speaker is saying, so remote participants have to be more deliberate about their responses. Fortunately, by using chat or reaction emojis, they don't have to interrupt the speaker or impede the conversation flow. It's much easier to use such features, especially for introverted participants, making them more likely to shine as remote participants in hybrid meetings.

And since there's someone in the room whose job it is to make sure remote participants are heard - the remote facilitator - that person will interrupt the speaker on their behalf. For example, a remote participant may indicate that they have a question or comment in the chat. If that happened in the room, the speaker could see that someone had a frown or confused look. But they can't see that easily for remote participants. However, the remote facilitator can interject on behalf of the remote attendees, addressing their confusion and making sure the remote participants can make their contribution.

For example, a small health care company was having trouble getting remote employees to participate in meetings. By implementing a norm that remote attendees would express themselves through emojis or chat, the company was able to improve participation and engagement from remote employees.

Norms of Behavior for In-Person Participants

In-person participants have to pay attention to remote attendees and to make an effort to include them in the discussion. This can be done by signing into the meeting on their laptops or phones and tracking the responses of remote attendees through chat or emojis. In fact, they can contribute to the conversation if they sign into the meeting, and make sure they don't miss the valuable subtext in the chat.

Likewise, in-person attendees have to overcome their intuitive and natural temptation to prioritize other in-person attendees. They need to pay attention preferentially to remote attendees to deanchor their gut reactions and encourage other in-person attendees to do so as well. That's why it helps to sit facing the remote attendees, not fellow in-person attendees.

For example, a mid-size retail company noticed that remote employees were not being fully included in meetings. By implementing a norm that in-person participants would pay attention to remote attendees and track their responses, the company was able to improve participation and engagement from remote employees.

Impact of Cognitive Biases on Hybrid Meetings

It is important to note that cognitive biases can also play a role in the effectiveness of hybrid meetings. Confirmation bias, for example, can lead to in-person participants only paying attention to and confirming the ideas of those in the room, while ignoring the input of remote attendees, harming their ability to build positive relationships. Attentional bias can also lead to

in-person participants focusing more on the in-person attendees and neglecting the remote attendees.

Additionally, the empathy gap can cause in-person participants to underestimate the difficulties faced by remote attendees, leading to a lack of consideration for their needs. To combat these biases, it is important to make a conscious effort to actively engage and include all attendees, both in-person and remote.

Training Meeting Participants

To achieve this change of norms and address cognitive biases requires training both the in-person and remote meeting facilitators and also the attendees, including in-person and remote ones. The new norms will seem artificial and uncomfortable at first, because everyone will have to address their miscalibrated intuitions, but it will help maximize everyone's participation and address the problems with typical hybrid meetings. Training - which should involve practice and role-playing - will help overcome the initial discomfort and ease alignment with the new norms.

Part of training involves setting up feedback systems for continuous improvement. Thus, especially as teams are starting to figure out their new meeting norms, they need to measure and get feedback on the quality of the hybrid meeting experience, for in-person and especially remote attendees. As you're making these transitions, survey participants on various aspects of the meeting, such as: their overall evaluation of their meeting experience, how well they were able to hear and see others, how well they think others heard and saw them, how much they were able to participate in and impact the meeting, how well the in-person participants accommodated remote participants, how well the facilitator accommodated remote participants, how effectively were features like chat and emojis like "raise hand" used, what could have been done better to improve their experience and impact, and related questions. Particular feedback needs to be provided to the meeting facilitators, including watching recordings with a coach who can point out specific moments the facilitator performed well, and other areas where they may need improvement.

Hybrid meetings can be a great solution for companies looking to bring together both in-person and remote teams. However, to ensure their success, companies must have excellent AV technology, a separate facilitator for remote attendees, and norms of behavior for in-person participants to pay attention to and engage with remote attendees. It is also important to be aware of and actively combat cognitive biases that can undermine hybrid meetings. To develop these norms and address cognitive biases requires training with an associated measure and feedback mechanism for continuous improvement until such norms become ingrained.

Chapter 10: Maximizing Hybrid Work Productivity: The Best Work to Do at Home and in the Office

A Summer 2022 study from the University of Birmingham has found that managers developed a more positive outlook on the benefits of hybrid work productivity since the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic. The research surveyed 597 managers and found that 51.8% of them agreed that working from home improves employee concentration, 59.5% agreed that it increases productivity, and 62.8% agreed that it increases motivation. Furthermore, an even larger proportion of managers, 76.5% believe that flexible working generally increases productivity. Importantly, the study also found that line managers were more likely to see flexible working as a performance-enhancing tool (71.2%) than senior management (65.6%). This highlights the importance of educating senior management on the benefits of flexible working and the positive impact it can have on employee performance.

Now, managers need to learn how to maximize hybrid work productivity by determining what employees can most productively work on at home, and what to focus on when they come to the office. Given that about three quarters of all US companies are in the process of adopting a hybrid work model, optimizing this mix of employee activities is critical both for the success of individual companies, and the US economy as a whole. So what are the best practices in determining what tasks hybrid workers should work on from home?

Some might say it's simple: just let the rank-and-file employees and their immediate supervisors figure it out for themselves. However, my experience shows that employees often fail to maximize their productivity.

It's not because they're lazy or deliberately inefficient: it's just that they never learned how to do hybrid work effectively, and don't know what they don't know. Without guidance and professional development in this area, lower-level supervisors and middle managers in particular end up shoehorning traditional office-centric methods of working into hybrid settings. The result is lower productivity, engagement, and morale, harming both company bottom lines and employee wellbeing and career success.

The Worst Part of Coming to the Office

One key filter to determine what to do where: to maximize productivity, hybrid work models have to minimize the commuting time for employees. Coming to the office needs to be for a specific purpose that outweighs the significant costs - in time, money, and stress - involved in the commute.

A survey by Hubble asking what respondents liked about working from home showed that 79% of respondents named the lack of commute, making it the most popular response by far. According to a recent survey by Zebra, 35% of Americans would be willing to take a pay cut in exchange for a shorter commute. Of those who would take a pay cut, 89% would sacrifice up to 20% of their salary.

Americans waste a lot of time commuting. The US Census data from 2019 shows that about 10% of Americans commuted over an hour each way, mainly those living in dense urban areas. On average, Americans commute a half hour each way.

Moreover, commuting to work costs a lot of money. According to a [FlexJobs analysis](#), employees can save up to $12,000 per year by working full-time remotely. This includes savings on transportation expenses like gas, car maintenance, and parking, as well as the cost of buying professional clothing and eating out at expensive restaurants. While there may be some additional costs associated with working from home, such as increased utility bills and the cost of cooking at home, these expenses are typically much smaller than the costs of commuting to an office.

Peer-reviewed research [found](#) that longer commute times correlate with lower job satisfaction, increased strain, and poorer mental health. And happy workers are productive workers, as found by [economists](#) at the University of Warwick. They did experiments to discover that a sense of happiness made people around 12% more productive. Similarly, a [study](#) run by Oxford University's Saïd Business School at BT, a British telecommunications firm, found very similar results: happy workers were 13% more productive.

In addition to the boost in productivity coming from happier workers who avoid a commute, those working from home actually work more hours. Chicago University research [discovered](#) that employees working from home devote about a third of the time saved from not commuting to their primary jobs.

What Kind of Work Should Hybrid Employees Do at Home to Boost Hybrid Work Productivity?

In fact, the large majority of the work that most employees do is more effectively done from home anyway, even if the commute wasn't an issue. For instance, much of the work done by individual employees involves focused tasks that they do by themselves. [Research](#) shows that workers are more [focused](#) working at home, without the distractions of the office.

Another category of work that takes up a great deal of time for employees is asynchronous collaboration and communication. That might involve sending emails, editing a Google Doc or Mural board, or doing [virtual asynchronous brainstorming](#). A McKinsey [analysis](#) shows that only email takes up an average of 28% of work time for knowledge workers. There's no reason to commute to the office just to read and send emails.

A third major activity best done from home is virtual meetings. In a [survey](#) by the collaboration software company Slack, employees report spending two hours each day in meetings. Stuart Templeton, the head of Slack in the UK, said that employers risked turning their offices into "productivity killers" by having their staff come in just to do video calls: according to him, "making a two-hour commute to sit on video calls is a terrible use of the office."

Of course, for those workers who don't have a comfortable and quiet home office, it's important for employers to provide an alternative workplace for these three tasks, either in an employer-owned office or a coworking space. Still, the large majority of employees prefer to work on such tasks at home.

What Kind of Work Should Hybrid Employees Do at the Office?

The [large majority](#) of hybrid employee time is spent on individual tasks, such as focused work, asynchronous communication and collaboration, and videoconference meetings, which are most productively done at home. There's absolutely no need for employees to come to the office for such activities. Still, the office remains a key driver of value for high-impact, lower-duration activities that benefit from face-to-face interactions.

Intense Collaboration

Intense collaboration involves teams coming together in person to solve problems, make decisions, align on strategy, develop plans, and build consensus around implementing ideas they [brainstormed remotely and asynchronously](#). Face-to-face interactions allow team members to observe each other's body language, picking up on subtle cues like facial expressions, gestures, and posture that they may miss when communicating remotely. These nuances carry much more weight during intense collaborations.

In addition, in-person interactions facilitate empathy, which helps teammates build and maintain a sense of mutual trust and connection. Such bonds can be strained during intense collaboration, making it valuable to have intense collaboration take place in the office.

Finally, the office creates a context that facilitates collaboration through meeting rooms with whiteboards, easel pads, and other relevant tools. This collaboration-conducive setting takes employees out of their regular [state of mind](#) and helps them inhabit a different mental context, enabling them to switch gears and be more cooperative and inventive.

Challenging Conversations

Any conversation that bears the potential for emotionality or conflict is best handled in the office. It's much easier to read and address other people's emotions and manage any conflicts face-to-face, rather than by videoconference.

That means any conversations that have performance evaluation overtones should rightly occur in the office. The content might range from [weekly 1-on-1 conversations](#) between team members and team leads that assesses how the former performed for the last week and what they will do next week, to a quarterly or annual performance review. Similarly, it's best to handle in-person any human resource concerns.

Another category of challenging conversations that belong in the office: conflicts that started remotely and couldn't be settled there easily. My clients find that getting the antagonists to sit down and hash things out in person works wonders for the vast majority of disagreements.

Cultivating Team Belonging and Organizational Culture

Our brains are not wired to [connect and build relationships](#) with people located in small squares on a videoconference call, they're wired to be tribal and connect with our fellow tribe members in face-to-face settings. In-person presence thus offers an opportunity to build a sense of mutual trust and group belonging that's much deeper than videoconference calls.

And let's face it: Zoom happy hours are no fun, at least for the large majority of participants. While it's possible to organize [fun virtual events](#), it's much easier to do such activities in person.

As a result - whether at the level of small teams, mid-size business units, or the organization as a whole - in-person activities offer the opportunity to create a sense of group cohesion and belonging. They can involve simply socializing, but also some combine with intense collaboration in the form of strategic planning. For example, one of my clients, the University of Southern California's Information Sciences Institute, organized retreats at both group and division levels to facilitate both a sense of belonging and a stronger strategic alignment.

In-Depth Training

A survey by The Conference Board reveals the key role of professional development for employee retention. While online asynchronous or synchronous education may suffice for most content, face-to-face interactions are best for in-depth training, by allowing trainees to engage with the trainer and their peers more effectively.

Physically present trainers can "read the room," noticing and adjusting to body language and emotions expressed by trainees. In turn, peer-to-peer learning helps create a learning community that builds trust and facilitates mutual understanding and retention of information by adult learners. And the physical props and spaces available for in-person learning facilitate a deeper and more focused level of engagement with materials.

Mentoring, Leadership Development, and On-the-Job Training

Whether integrating junior staff and providing them with on-the-job training, mentoring and coaching current staff, or developing new leaders, the office provides a valuable venue for such informal professional development.

If team members are in the office, mentors and supervisors can observe the performance of their mentees and supervisees, and provide immediate feedback and guidance. Doing so is much harder in remote settings.

Similarly, mentees and supervisees can ask questions and get answers in real time, which is at the heart of on-the-job training. It's certainly possible to do so remotely, but it takes more organization and effort.

Mentoring and leadership development often takes subtlety and nuance, navigating emotions and egos. Such navigation is much easier in person than remotely. Moreover, mentees need to develop a sense of real trust in the mentor to be vulnerable and reveal weakness. Being in person is best for cultivating such trust.

Spontaneity and Weak Connections

One of the key challenges of maintaining company culture for remote or hybrid workers is the decrease in cross-functional weak connections across staff. For example, research has shown that the number of connections made by new hires decreased by 17% during the pandemic, compared to pre-pandemic levels. Other research demonstrated that staff who worked remotely during the pandemic lockdowns built closer intra-team ties to members of their own team, but their inter-team ties to those on other teams deteriorated. This loss of connections can negatively impact long-term company success, since achieving organizational goals often requires cross-functional collaboration.

Such connections develop from spontaneous interactions in the cafeteria or during the chit-chat after a cross-functional in-person meeting. These kinds of spontaneous meetings can also help

spur conversations that lead to innovations. And although [organizations can replicate them](#) to some extent in remote settings, the office provides a natural setting for such spontaneous interactions and their benefits.

In short, the [best practice for hybrid work](#) involves helping employees reduce commuting by asking them to come in only for high-value face-to-face activities. These tasks include intense collaboration, challenging conversations, cultivating belonging, professional development, mentoring, and building weak connections.

For most staff, these activities should take no more than a day a week; junior staff getting on-the-job training and recently-promoted leaders receiving leadership development may require two or three days on a short-term basis of several months. Indeed, a [survey](#) of 1,500 employees and 500 supervisors finds that a schedule of one day a week provides the optimal balance of connection to colleagues with job satisfaction.

Leaders also need to develop and implement a transparent communication policy to explain this approach to their employees, get their feedback, and make any tweaks to improve this policy. Doing so will help facilitate employee buy-in and engagement with this new approach, which will reduce burnout while improving retention, engagement, and morale.

Chapter 11: Adapt Your Culture: Setting Boundaries and Expectations

One of the biggest complaints I hear about hybrid and remote work centers around uncertainty over expectations and boundaries.

Some people expect their Slack or Microsoft Teams messages to be answered within an hour, while others check Slack once a day. Some believe email requires a response within three hours, and others feel three days is fine.

In turn, some companies struggle with an overabundance of collaboration tools. They give their employees access to whatever their employees ask for: enterprise versions of Slack, Microsoft Teams, Trello, Asana, Dropbox, Google Drive, and so on. As a result, different teams end up using different tools, creating internal inconsistencies and friction.

Let's not forget work/life boundaries. Too many people feel uncomfortable disconnecting and not replying to messages or doing work tasks after hours. That might stem from a fear of not meeting their boss's expectations or not wanting to let their colleagues down or other reasons.

To solve this problem, establish and incentivize clear expectations and boundaries. Develop policies and norms around response times for different channels of communication, standardize the collaboration tools you use, and clarify the work/life boundaries for your employees.

Let me clarify: by work/life boundaries, I'm not necessarily saying employees should never work outside of the regular work hours established for that employee. But you might create an expectation that it happens no more often than once a week, barring an emergency. Thus, if such work after hours systematically happens more often outside of emergency situations, there's a problem that you will need to address.

Shorter Meetings

As you're implementing these strategies, aim for quick wins that benefit all team members, or at least most if all are not possible. A good activity to start with that helps build consensus and results in quick wins is shortening hour-long meetings to 50 minutes and half-hour meetings to 25 minutes, to give everyone a mental and physical break and transition time.

You can get the vast majority of what you usually do in an hour-long meeting done in 50 minutes, just remember to start wrapping up at the 40-minute mark, and at the 20-minute mark for meetings that last 25 minutes. Very few people will be reluctant to have shorter meetings.

After that works out, move to other aspects of setting boundaries and expectations that facilitate work/life balance. Doing so will require help group members get on the same page and reduce conflicts and tensions. After that, once your group feels the benefits of such changes, you can implement activities that have more of a ramp-up.

Physical and Mental Breaks

For working at home and collaborating with others, there's an unhealthy expectation that once you start your workday in your home office chair, and that you'll work continuously while sitting there (except for your lunch break). That's not how things work in the office, which has physical and mental breaks built in throughout the day. You took 5-10 minutes to walk from one meeting to another, or you went to get your copies from the printer and chatted with a coworker on the way.

Those and similar physical and mental breaks, research shows, decrease burnout, improve productivity, and reduce mistakes. That's why you should strongly encourage your employees to take at least a 10-minute break every hour during remote work. At least half of those breaks should involve physical activity, such as stretching or walking around, to counteract the dangerous effects of prolonged sitting.

Chapter 12: Adapt Your Culture: Innovation in Hybrid and Remote Work

Traditional Innovation Practices

"Our software engineers and product designers need to go back to the office full-time. Otherwise, we're going to lose our competitive advantage in innovation." That's what Saul, the Chief Product Officer of a 1,500-employee enterprise software company, said at the start of the company's planning meeting on the post-vaccine return to office and the future of work.

He continued: "Doing brainstorming by videoconference doesn't work nearly as well as in-person meetings. So letting them work virtually now that vaccines are available is a non-starter. Hybrid won't work either. We get some of our best ideas from serendipitous hallway conversations. That serendipity has been completely missing during the past year. I can guarantee that our competitors will overtake us quickly if we don't return product people to full-time in-office work." And then he sat back in his chair and crossed his arms, daring anyone to defy him.

Hired as the [consultant](#) to help the company figure out its return to office and permanent future of work arrangements, I was facilitating the meeting. It was my ninth such engagement. Over two-thirds featured leaders responsible for the company's products expressing some version of this concern, although Saul was the most aggressive about it.

My response to Saul, as well as to those other leaders, started by determining a shared goal: to maximize innovation in the most efficient and effective manner. All the leaders overseeing products agreed with this overarching goal.

Then, I probed how these leaders tried to pursue innovation during the lockdowns. They all told me they tried to adapt their office-based approach of synchronous brainstorming to the new videoconference modality.

Therein lies the problem. None of them tried to research best practices on virtual innovation to adapt strategically to their new circumstances. Instead, they tried to impose their pre-existing office-based methods of innovation on virtual work.

Traditional Brainstorming

Brainstorming represents the traditional approach to intentional, non-serendipitous innovation. That involves groups of 4-8 people getting together in a room to come up with innovative ideas about a pre-selected topic.

At first, everyone shares their ideas, with no criticism permitted. Then, after group members run out of ideas, the ideas are edited to remove duplicates and obvious non-starters. Finally, the group discusses the remaining ideas, and decides on which to pursue.

Research in behavioral science reveals that participants in brainstorming enjoy these sessions and find it to be effective in generating ideas. That benefit in idea generation comes from two areas identified by scientists.

One involves idea synergy, meaning that ideas shared by one participant help trigger ideas in other participants. Experiments show that synergy benefits are especially high if participants are instructed to pay attention to the ideas of others and focus on being inspired by these ideas.

Another benefit comes from what scholars term social facilitation. That's about the benefit of social support from working on a shared task. Participants feel motivated when they know they're collaborating with their peers on the same goal.

Sadly, these benefits come with costs attached. One of the biggest problems is called production blocking.

Did you ever participate in a brainstorming session where you had what you felt to be a brilliant idea, but someone else was talking? And then the next person responded to that person, and they took the conversation in a different direction? By the time you had a chance to speak, the idea seemed not relevant, or too redundant, or maybe you even forgot the idea.

If you never had that happen, you're likely extroverted and optimistic. Introverts have a lot of difficulty with production blocking. It's harder for them to formulate ideas in an environment of team brainstorming. They generally think better in a quiet environment, by themselves or with one other person at most. And they have difficulty interrupting a stream of conversation, making it more likely for their idea to remain unstated.

Those with a more pessimistic than optimistic personality also struggle with brainstorming. Optimists tend to process verbally, spitballing half-baked ideas on the fly. That's perfect for traditional brainstorming. By contrast, pessimists generally process internally. They feel the need to think through their ideas, to make sure they don't have flaws. Although brainstorming explicitly permits flawed ideas, it's just very hard for pessimists to overcome their personality, just like it's hard for introverts to generate ideas in a noisy team setting.

Pessimists are also powerfully impacted by a second major problem for traditional brainstorming: evaluation apprehension. Many more pessimistic and/or lower status, junior group members feel worried about sharing their ideas openly, due to social anxiety about what their peers would think about these ideas. Moreover, despite instructions to share off-the-wall ideas, many people don't want to be perceived as weird or out of line.

Finally, conflict-avoidant and/or politically savvy team members feel reluctant to share more controversial ideas that challenge existing practices and/or the territory associated with high-status team members, especially the team leader. These ideas are often the most innovative ideas, but they remain unsaid.

A related problem to evaluation apprehension is brainstorming groupthink. That refers to team members coalescing around the ideas of the most powerful people in the room. In the idea generation stage, groupthink involves lower-power team members focusing more on reinforcing and building on the ideas of the more powerful participants. In the idea evaluation stage, groupthink results in the ideas of the more powerful getting more preferential selected.

A final problem relates to group size. The more people you get in a traditional brainstorming session, the less ideas you get per person. Scholars attribute this loss of efficiency to a phenomenon called social loafing. The more people participate, the more tempting it is for each individual to not work quite as hard at generating ideas. They feel – rightfully so – that they can skate by with less effort and engagement. That's why research finds that the most efficient size of traditional brainstorming groups for the maximum number of novel ideas per person is 2.

As a result of these problems, numerous studies show that traditional brainstorming is substantially worse for producing innovative ideas than alternative best practices. It's a great fit for helping build teal alignment and collaboration and helping group members feel good about their participation. But you shouldn't fool yourself that using this technique will result in maximizing innovation. Thus, if you want to leverage innovation to gain or keep your competitive edge, traditional brainstorming is not the way to go.

Saul challenged me when I brought up these problems, saying he never experienced them. I pointed out that top leaders – like Saul – are rarely subject to these challenges.

Leaders tend to be extroverted and optimistic, as these personality traits facilitate leadership. Leaders by definition are the centers of power in product brainstorming sessions: they can interrupt at any time without any problems and all groupthink coalesces around his ideas. Because they own the outcomes of the brainstorming meeting and are thus strongly motivated, they don't feel social loafing. It's a classic case of bias blind spot, our tendency to not see our own mental blindspots.

I challenged Saul in return, suggesting to him that we run an anonymous survey of his staff to see if any of these problems exist. He took me up on my challenge. The survey revealed that his staff perceived production blocking and evaluation apprehension as serious problems that impede traditional brainstorming, and Saul was ready to listen to alternatives to traditional brainstorming at the next planning meeting. Fortunately, most other product leaders trust the credibility of peer-reviewed best practices and don't require such extra efforts to get proof.

Virtual Asynchronous Brainstorming

Trying to do traditional brainstorming via videoconference is a poor substitute for the energizing presence of colleagues in a small conference room, thus weakening the benefits of social facilitation. It's also subject to the same exact problems as traditional brainstorming. No wonder leaders responsible for innovation dislike it.

Instead of the losing proposition of videoconference brainstorming, leaders need to abandon their functional fixedness on synchronous team meetings for brainstorming. They need to adopt the best practice of asynchronous virtual brainstorming.

Step 1: Initial Idea Generation

All team members generate ideas by themselves and input them into a shared spreadsheet. You can do so via many software platforms: when I facilitate brainstorming meetings, I typically use a Google Form, which automatically produces a Google Spreadsheet with responses.

To tap social facilitation, the group can input ideas during a digital co-working meeting. You all get on a videoconference call for an hour, turn off your microphones but keep speakers on, with video optional (although preferable). If someone has a clarifying question, they can turn on their microphone and ask, but avoid brainstorming out loud. However, doing so is not necessary, especially if the team is geographically distributed such that time zone differences make coordination difficult.

Research has shown that to get the greatest number of novel ideas, all team members should be told to focus on generating as many novel ideas as possible, rather than the highest-quality ideas, and informed that this is the outcome on which they would be measured. Likewise, participants should be encouraged to consider contradictions between different and often-opposing goals in their innovative ideas, such as maximizing impact while minimizing costs. Science has found that this focus on opposing goals facilitates innovation.

The submissions should be anonymized to avoid evaluation apprehension. However, the team leader should be able to later track each person's submissions for accountability, as such accountability helps maximize novel ideas.

Step 2: Idea Cleanup

The brainstorming meeting facilitator accesses the spreadsheet, removes duplicates and combines similar ideas, breaks ideas up into categories, and sends them out to all team members. As an alternative, a subgroup of or even all participants can access the Google Spreadsheet and work together asynchronously on this process. If you adopt the latter process, for the sake of anonymity, create throwaway Gmail accounts for collaborating on the spreadsheet.

Step 3: Idea Evaluation

After the ideas are cleaned up, all team members anonymously comment on and rate each of the ideas. Thus, in a 6-people groups, each idea should have 5 comments and ratings. The ratings should assess at least 3 categories, each on a scale of 1-10: the idea's novelty, practicality, and usefulness. Additional ratings can depend on the specific context of the brainstorming topic.

Step 4: Revised Idea Generation

After commenting on and rating ideas, team members do another round of idea generation, either revising previous ideas based on feedback or sharing new ones inspired by seeing what others generated. In both cases, the process tapes the benefits of synergy through gaining the perspectives of other team members.

Step 4: Cleanup of Revised Ideas

The next step is to clean up and categorize the revised ideas. Use the same process as step 2.

Step 5: Evaluation of Revised Ideas

Following that, do another round of commenting and rating, this time on revised ideas, in parallel to step 3.

Step 6: Meet to Discuss Ideas

At this point, it's helpful to have a synchronous meeting if possible to discuss the ideas. Anonymity at this point is unnecessary, since there are clear ratings and comments on the ideas. Group participants decide on which ideas it makes the most sense to move forward immediately, which should be put in the medium-term plans, and which should be put on the back burner or even discarded. As part of doing so, they decide on next steps for implementation, assigning responsibility to different participants for various tasks.

This kind of practical planning meeting is easy to have virtually for full-tine virtual workers. Of course, it also works well to have steps 1-5 done virtually by hybrid teams, and do step 6 when they come to the office. However, it's critical to avoid doing steps 1-5 in the office to avoid production blocking, evaluation apprehension, groupthink, and social loafing.

You can also attain the same outcome through an asynchronous exchange of messages rather than a meeting. Yet in my experience facilitating virtual brainstorming, having a meeting reduces miscommunication and confusion for more complex and controversial innovative ideas.

Does Asynchronous Brainstorming Work?

Virtual asynchronous brainstorming appears to solve the biggest obstacles to traditional in-person brainstorming. Here's the big question: does it work?

Behavioral economics and psychology research definitely demonstrates the superiority of digital brainstorming over in-person brainstorming. For example, a [study](#) comparing virtual and in-person groups found in-person groups felt better about their collaboration. However, the feeling proved deceptive: virtual brainstorming resulted in more ideas generated. While in-person brainstorming may feel more fun, it actually results in worse outcomes.

Another [group of scholars](#) researched group size. It found that the larger the group of participants, the more benefits to electronic brainstorming in terms of ideas generated. That's because electronic brainstorming is not subject to social loafing. Each participant works by themselves and knows they're accountable for the quantity of novel ideas, with novelty determined by ratings from group participants.

In fact, [research finds](#) that while the larger the in-person group, the fewer novel ideas per person, the opposite is the case for electronic brainstorming. That means with more people, you get a [larger number](#) of novel ideas per person. That's likely because of synergy, with a greater total number of ideas inspiring participants to have more additional ideas.

A hidden benefit of virtual brainstorming comes after the initial brainstorming process is complete. While traditional brainstorming leaves a far-from-complete record of ideas, due to sparse notes and fuzzy memories, [scholars found](#) that the complete record of electronic brainstorming has a substantial benefit as a [treasury of novel ideas](#). As a situation changes, ideas that seemed more practical and useful in the past may appear less so in the future, and vice versa. The group can thus always go back to past ideas and re-rank them accordingly.

My experience implementing it for clients reveals similar outcomes. At first, many participants – especially the more extroverted, high-status, and optimistic ones – complain about the "dry" nature of the process. They miss the fun and engagement of collaborative ideas flying around the table.

In contrast, more introverted participants take to the process pretty quickly, finding it a relief from the cognitive overload of a noisy environment where they can't hear themselves think. So do more pessimistic and lower-status ones, relieved by not having to feel judged for their ideas and less worried about criticizing the ideas of others in the evaluation stage.

After two or three sessions, even the extroverts tend to come around. They acknowledge, even if sometimes grudgingly, that the process seems to produce more novel ideas than traditional in-person brainstorming. In fact, hybrid groups trained on this process, who have the option of doing steps 1-5 in-person, nearly always prefer to do virtual brainstorming for these initial steps, while doing step 6 in the office.

That approach creates the maximum number of novel ideas, gaining an innovation advantage. It also provided the optimal experience for the most group members, balancing the preferences of introverts and extroverts, optimists and pessimists, lower-status and higher-status members. Team leaders who wisely prioritize focusing on integrating introverts, pessimists, and lower-status team members into the team – which is more difficult than extroverts, pessimists, and higher-status members – find virtual brainstorming especially beneficial.

Artificial Intelligence Gives Remote Creativity a New Boost

A major opportunity for improvement of innovation is integrating generative AI into the creative process. I shared with Saul a real-life example from one of my clients, a late-stage tech startup with over 120 staff deciding on whether to make a bold move that could redefine its future. Picture a company teeming with talented individuals yet grappling with a common dilemma in today's digital age: the trade-off between remote work benefits and the challenges of fostering innovation.

Their team thrived in a remote environment, showing remarkable productivity and collaboration. The switch to remote work brought about numerous benefits: flexible schedules, no commute and the comfort of working from home. Employees reported higher job satisfaction and better work-life balance, leading to increased output and efficiency. However, they hit a roadblock when it came to one critical aspect: innovation.

Enter Generative AI. It's a game-changer, considering GPT-4's impressive feats of creativity — outperforming 91% of humans on a variation of the Alternative Uses Test and surpassing 99% in the Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking. We're swiftly reaching a point where there are hardly any creativity benchmarks that AI can't master.

AI's ability to generate novel ideas and solutions is unprecedented. By processing vast amounts of data and identifying patterns that humans might overlook, AI can offer fresh perspectives that enhance human creativity. It's not about replacing human ingenuity but augmenting it with AI's computational power. How did this integration transform their approach to innovation? By embedding AI into their creative processes, they not only matched but exceeded pre-pandemic levels of innovation. This AI-driven strategy catalyzed fresh, groundbreaking ideas, fostering an environment where creativity flourished without the constraints of physical collaboration.

Imagine brainstorming sessions where AI tools are used to suggest ideas, play devil's advocate, or provide data-driven insights. This integration led to more diverse and comprehensive ideation, pushing the boundaries of conventional thinking.

Specifically, I helped my client learn how to not only do virtual brainstorming, which helped boost their innovation, but also leverage Generative AI to transform how individuals

brainstormed and developed ideas before bringing them to a collaborative team setting. This approach offered an opportunity to boost remote creativity and innovation to enhance the quality of ideas and reduce the reliance on traditional in-person brainstorming sessions and spontaneous interactions. Here are the steps involved in the process.

1. Initial idea generation

An individual can start by inputting a basic concept or problem statement into a Generative AI tool. The AI can then generate a range of ideas, perspectives and solutions based on its vast knowledge base and data processing capabilities. This step can help in exploring various angles and possibilities that one might not consider in a conventional brainstorming session.

For instance, if the individual is looking to develop a new product feature, the AI can propose multiple variations and enhancements based on current market trends, consumer feedback, and competitive analysis.

2. Refining and evaluating ideas

Once a range of ideas is generated, the individual can use AI to evaluate their viability. AI algorithms can assess the potential impact, feasibility and market readiness of these ideas by analyzing relevant data points. This step helps in shortlisting the most promising ideas that are worth discussing in a team setting.

In our product feature example, the AI can help prioritize which features are likely to have the greatest user impact or are most feasible to develop based on technical analysis and market data.

3. Enhancing creativity with AI-assisted tools

Individuals can use AI-assisted design tools, predictive analytics, and simulation software to further develop and visualize their ideas. This can add depth and clarity to the concepts, making them more tangible and easier to communicate with colleagues.

Consider an individual brainstorming a new marketing campaign. AI tools can help create preliminary designs, simulate customer responses and even draft potential marketing copy, providing a solid base for further team development.

4. Collaborative integration

After developing a well-rounded idea independently, the individual can bring these AI-enhanced ideas to their team. This approach ensures that the ideas brought to the table are already well-thought-out, data-backed, and innovative, making the team discussions more productive and focused.

If the idea involves a new business process improvement, the individual can present a detailed AI-generated proposal, complete with efficiency projections and implementation strategies, making the collaborative review process more efficient and goal-oriented.

Finally, as these ideas are discussed and refined within the team, the feedback and additional insights can be fed back into the AI system. This creates a continuous loop of improvement and innovation, where ideas are constantly enhanced and updated based on collaborative inputs.

In a software development project, feedback from team discussions can be used to refine the AI-generated feature concepts, ensuring that the final product aligns with both technical feasibility and team vision.

By leveraging Generative AI in this manner, individuals can transform the brainstorming process, making it more independent yet equally, if not more, effective — whether they are remote or in the office. This method not only reduces the necessity for traditional in-person brainstorming but also enhances the quality and depth of ideas brought to collaborative discussions. In an era where remote and hybrid work models are prevalent, such AI-enhanced individual brainstorming will become a cornerstone of innovation and creativity in businesses.

The impact of this AI integration was so profound that it led to a significant strategic shift. The company decided to release their $1.2 million annual office lease, a bold move signaling their commitment to a new, AI-enhanced mode of operation. This wasn't just a cost-cutting measure; it was a reinvestment into the company's growth and future.

The decision to let go of the office space was strategic. The freed-up funds were channeled into areas that promised more growth, like research and development, marketing, and further AI integration. This shift signifies a deeper understanding that the future of work lies not in physical spaces but in digital and intellectual realms.

This scenario underscores a broader trend in the future of work. AI isn't just a tool for automating tasks or enhancing productivity; it's becoming a vital ally in driving creative thinking and innovation, especially in remote work settings.

Serendipitous Idea Generation for Hybrid and Remote Teams

In-Person Serendipitous Idea Generation

"Okay, I give you the virtual brainstorming and leveraging Generative AI, that makes sense," said Saul, less grudgingly than before, after I outlined the benefits of this practice over in-person

brainstorming. "I'll have to have my teams experiment with it and see how we can make it fit our needs."

However, he went on to say that "I still don't see how we can replace the serendipitous idea generation of hallway conversations. Brainstorming is great for when we have a specific project or goal around which we're trying to innovate. But at least a third of our best innovation ideas come from serendipitous conversations, which then morph into brainstorming sessions. We've had almost no such serendipitous conversations in the many months of lockdowns. If we don't return to the office full-time, we're going to lose our innovation competitive advantage to rivals who do so and gain the benefits of serendipity."

My response was asking him what he did to facilitate serendipitous conversations among the product team during the lockdowns. He said he did everything he could think of: he encouraged team members to have such conversation; he organized team meetings hoping that members would have such discussions on the sidelines; he even did regular videoconference happy hours with small breakout groups, aiming both to facilitate connection to company culture and also to have members drop in the small groups spark conversations about innovative ideas. Nothing worked!

At that point, I praised him for doing more than most leaders in his position tried to do. However, I gently highlighted how all his methods in essence transposed in-office practices on the virtual environment. Trying to shoehorn in-office culture on such a different context resulted in a very uncomfortable fit, and that just doesn't work for something as spontaneous and creative as serendipitous innovation.

Virtual Serendipitous Idea Generation

To facilitate serendipity in virtual settings, you need to use a native virtual format, instead of trying to fit the square peg of in-office formats into the round hole of virtual collaboration. Besides that format, you need to tap into the underlying motivations that facilitate the creativity, spontaneity, and collaboration behind serendipitous innovation.

In my work helping companies transition to the future of work, whether for hybrid teams or full-time virtual teams, idea generation serendipity came from creating a specific venue for it and incentivizing collaboration without forcing it. An especially successful tactic involved setting up various venues in whatever collaborative software the organization was using specifically devoted to serendipitous innovation.

For example, organizations using Microsoft Teams would have each team set up a team-specific channel for members to share innovative ideas relevant for the team's work; larger business units would establish channels for ideas applicable to the whole business unit; and there would be a channel for ideas appropriate for whole company. Then, when anyone has an idea, they would share that idea in the pertinent channel.

Everyone would be encouraged to pay attention to notifications in that channel. Seeing a new post, they would check it out. If they found it relevant, they would respond with additional thoughts building on the initial idea. Responses would snowball, and sufficiently good ideas would then lead to next steps, often a virtual brainstorming session.

This approach combines a native virtual format with people's natural motivations to contribute, collaborate, and claim credit. The initial idea poster and the subsequent contributors aren't motivated simply by the goal of advancing the team, business unit, and organization, even though that's of course part of their goal set. The initial poster is motivated by the possibility of sharing an idea that might be recognized as sufficiently innovative, practical, and useful to implement, with some revisions. The contributors, in turn, are motivated by the natural desire to give advice, especially advice that's visible to and useful for others in their team, business unit, or even the whole organization.

This dynamic also fits well the different personalities of optimists and pessimists. You'll find that the former will generally be the ones to post initial ideas. Their strength is innovative and entrepreneurial thinking, but their flaw is being risk-blind to the potential problems in the idea. In turn, pessimists will overwhelmingly serve to build on and improve the idea, pointing out its potential flaws and helping address them.

Remember to avoid undervaluing the contributions of pessimists. It's too common to pay excessive attention to the initial ideas and overly reward optimists – and I say this as an inveterate optimist myself, who has 20 ideas before breakfast and thinks they're all brilliant! Through the combination of personal bitter experience and research on optimism and pessimism, I have learned the necessity of letting pessimistic colleagues vet and improve my ideas. My clients have found a great deal of benefit in highly valuing such devil's advocate perspectives as well. That's why you should both praise and reward not only the generators of innovative ideas, but also the two-three people who most contributed to improving and finalizing the idea.

"I never thought of it that way" said Saul after I described these tactics for virtual serendipitous idea generation. "It's definitely worth experimenting with while we're still forced to work fully remotely. If you're right, I withdraw my objections to your model of most workers hybrid and a minority fully remote."

He was as good as his word, and did some serious experimentation over the next couple of weeks until the third planning meeting. His staff felt surprise at how many innovative ideas they produced using this innovative methodology. It seems that their creative energies were waiting to be unleashed, and this methodology for both serendipitous and intentional virtual brainstorming provided the outlet.

Chapter 13: Adapt Your Culture: Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Hybrid and Remote Work

Do you think minority groups, such as African Americans, want more or less time in the office compared to white people? Take a few seconds to come up with a guess.

Here is the answer. Slack conducted a survey on this topic among knowledge workers - those who did their work based on their expertise - and divided it by demographics.

They found that 21% of all White knowledge workers wanted a return to full-time in-office work. What would be your guess as to how many Black knowledge workers wanted a return to full-time in-office work?

The answer: only 3% of all Black knowledge workers would want to return to full-time work in the office. That's a huge difference!

What explains this enormous disparity? Well, unfortunately, Black professionals are still subject to discrimination and microaggressions in the office. They are less vulnerable to such issues when they work remotely much or all of the time.

In addition, Black professionals have to expend more effort to fit into the dominant cultural modality in the workplace, which is determined by traditional White culture. They have to do what is called code-switching: adjusting their style of speech, appearance, and behavior. That code-switching takes energy that could be spent better doing actual productive work.

Similar findings apply to other underprivileged groups. That includes not only ethnic and racial minorities but also women.

Women still bear more of the childcare and household burden and are much more likely to want substantial or full-time remote work. For instance, a Conference Board survey found that 33% of men question the wisdom of returning to the office. However, for women, the comparable number is 50%.

It is important to know what it takes to achieve inclusivity and diversity and spot potential roadblocks that could hurt the efforts of an organization. The following are the most effective best practices for promoting diversity and inclusion inside an organization as it develops an effective approach to hybrid and remote collaboration.

Addressing Communication Issues

Inclusion is meant to ensure that everyone feels like their work matters. To begin with, you must address discrimination in the remote workplace, whether for hybrid or fully-remote teams.

Research has shown minorities deal with bullying on video calls and harassment via chat and email, as well as other online settings. Another problem relates to who gets to speak and who

gets interrupted. [Surveys demonstrate](#) that men frequently interrupt or ignore women in virtual meetings, even more so than at in-person ones.

So when bullying and interruptions happen in virtual meetings, take the time to address why it is happening. You can say something like, "Please let them complete their point before asking questions. Use the raised hand function so that we can come back to your suggestion afterward."

Mentoring and Sponsorship for Minorities

To help increase equality within your team, create a formal focus on minorities in your [hybrid and remote mentoring program](#). This setup is especially important for women and other underrepresented minority groups in the higher ranks of organizations.

[Research shows](#) that one of the primary reasons such groups fail to advance stems from the lack of informal mentoring and sponsorship. Given the increased challenges for mentoring hybrid and remote employees, your mentoring program must benefit minority groups. Doing so requires ensuring accountability by requiring reports from mentors and mentees on their progress.

Virtual DEI Training

Another great tool is [training](#) that focuses on dissuading discrimination during virtual meetings, chats, and emails. This will help your team [build skills](#) in avoiding such problems and especially help minorities feel supported as you build a more collaborative atmosphere.

By acknowledging these problems, you can create policies to address these occurrences and regularly check in with your team as you build a collaborative atmosphere.

Conducting Internal Surveys

Creating a diverse, inclusive, and equitable office culture requires recognizing these problems and taking action to remedy them. An easy way to start advocating is to [conduct internal surveys](#) to determine those issues.

The best surveys will ask your minority staff about their experiences with the problems outlined above and other diversity-related challenges. Also, ask them what they believe might be the most effective ways of solving these problems. Integrate the best solutions they propose into your plans to address the situation.

You have probably heard the famous phrase, "what gets measured gets managed." Once you know the nature and extent of the problems, you can work to change them systematically, rather than only in one-off, ad-hoc situations. Measure the problem, create a plan to fix it, then measure how well you are improving it.

Chapter 14: Adapt Your Culture: Upskill Employees for the Hybrid-First Model

Your hybrid workers must learn to divide their work activities. Previously, they spent their time either fully remotely or fully in-office. Now, they must learn to do different things at home and in the office.

Training in Hybrid Work

The office will be, primarily, a place of collaboration: with their whole team, with individual colleagues, or with cross-functional teams. Secondarily, it will serve as a place to work on tasks on which they anticipate a frequent need to consult with fellow team members. These might include tasks that are more complex. It might also be tasks with which they're less familiar than other team members.

Your staff must learn how to organize and plan their activities and communication differently than before to maximize their effectiveness both in the office and at home. At home, they'll work on their individual tasks. They'll also prepare for and communicate about collaborative tasks before coming to the office.

Given how infrequently they'll be coming to the office, each in-office hour will have more at stake. Failing to prepare effectively for such in-office activities will not only undermine their productivity, but also that of their team members.

Changing the way we work takes a great deal of energy and effort. The lockdowns caused an ad-hoc, emergency shift to remote work. As a result, many employees - and companies - developed suboptimal patterns of collaboration. By providing company-wide guidance on best practices for hybrid work, and training your employees on doing so, you'll help upskill them and thus set them up for success for your new permanent set-up.

Training in Virtual Communication and Collaboration

If you haven't done so yet, make sure to provide training in effective virtual communication and in effective virtual collaboration. Too few companies provided such training during the pandemic. They perceived remote work as a temporary response to an emergency. Given that you'll be shifting to hybrid work permanently, with some workers remaining full-time remote, it's time to upskill your workers in this field.

It's notoriously hard to communicate successfully even in-person. That's why many experts made a good living before the pandemic helping leaders and teams improve their

communication. Quality communication becomes much more difficult when in-office teams become virtual teams. One of the biggest problems stems from much more communication shifting to text through collaboration apps such as Slack and Microsoft Teams. As a result, much of the nonverbal communication is lost, leading to a huge increase in miscommunication.

That's especially challenging since a key purpose of nonverbals is to communicate our emotions. You're probably not surprised to learn that moving to virtual work has sorely endangered our emotional connection and mutual understanding.

Phone calls and videoconferences help address these problems to some extent. Still, even videoconferencing doesn't convey nearly as much body language as in-person meetings. When you have 8 people in small boxes on your laptop screen it's hard to read their body language well. Also, you only get the body language of facial expressions, and miss the 90% of the body that's not on camera.

The same applies to virtual collaboration. In the office, face-to-face interactions help employees notice problems and nip them in the bud. You pop into each other's office, or run into each other in the hallway, or share a meal in the cafeteria. You might talk briefly about the project you're working on together. You'll catch potential problems while getting on the same page about next steps toward solving them.

Unfortunately, this just doesn't happen in virtual settings. There's no natural way to have these casual interactions that are surprisingly vital to effective collaboration and teamwork. There are particular challenges around people-related problems. Body language and voice tone are especially important to noticing brewing conflicts. Thus, we may miss them in virtual contexts: challenges in virtual communication thus contribute to virtual collaboration problems.

Training in effective virtual communication and collaboration helps address these problems. For instance, training in emotional and social intelligence as adapted to virtual settings will help employees communicate and collaborate much more effectively.

A case in point: they need to ask intentionally how other people feel, not just how they think, about their proposed ideas. Previously, in the office, people's feelings came through easily through body language and tone of voice. Of course, that doesn't happen in virtual work environments. It's important to teach people to "read the room" deliberately in order to improve virtual collaboration. Many other techniques exist for effective virtual communication and collaboration.

Training in Work/Life Balance

Provide guidelines for and training in work/life balance, customized for hybrid and fully-remote employees. As surveys indicate (1, 2), many staff feel:
- Overworked
- Burned out
- Unable to disconnect
- Obliged to respond to work messages outside of work hours

Unfortunately, some team leaders encourage such behaviors. It falls to senior leaders, then, to reinforce the boundaries. That includes regular public reminders to employees to stick to preset hours and discouraging the sending of any form of communication after hours. It also includes communicating to mid- and lower-level managers that you won't tolerate them encouraging burnout to meet their goals.

Ask them to speak privately with and discourage any employees who regularly work more than full-time hours. Establish a wellness team empowered to contact employees who regularly log on to your collaboration technology or send emails more than a couple of hours after the workday ends or begins. The only exception should be an unexpected emergency that shouldn't happen more often than once per month.

Note: if employees are underperforming, it doesn't mean they should simply work more and violate these boundaries. It might mean they need more professional development in how to work effectively. It might also mean that they're overloaded with tasks that should be handed off to someone else, or even postponed if some are not high priority. It might even mean they're no longer the right fit for the job. What you don't want is someone burning out and resigning, and then have no one left to handle their mountain of tasks.

Chapter 15: Adapt Your Culture: Revise Performance Evaluations

Too many managers and companies still rely on "time in the office" as a primary measure of evaluating performance. That transformed into "time logged on" during the pandemic's remote work. Such a focus led to a race to the bottom of employees logging in more time, including after hours. Doing so not only compromises work/life balance and mental health. It also fails to measure what truly matters in employee performance: how much they contribute to the company's bottom line.

As the surveys cited earlier show, many employees do feel concerned about the possibility that working remotely might undermine their career growth, compared to those who come to the office. Top leaders also feel some concerns about this potential problem. A focus on contribution to the company in performance evaluation, combined with regularly scheduled evaluations, will allay such concerns.

Move your employee performance evaluation system away from relying on time worked. Instead, focus on employee productivity. On the one hand, that involves their performance on individual tasks. On the other, that involves their contribution to collaborative projects, mostly in their own team, but also in temporary cross-functional project teams and ad-hoc committees.

The companies I helped guide transitioned to regular, usually weekly or at least every 2 weeks, performance evaluations of team members by team leaders. Some also added an occasional 360-degree evaluation component by one's teammates and other stakeholders once every month or couple of months.

The weekly performance evaluation takes place during brief check-in and review meetings of 15-30 minutes of each team member with their team leader. These should be in-person for hybrid workers and virtual for fully remote workers. 24 hours before each meeting, the employee submits a concise report, containing:
- Their top three accomplishments - whether individual or collaborative - for the past week, and any other relevant accomplishments, compared to what they planned to accomplish
- Any challenges, anticipated or unanticipated, that they experienced in achieving their goals for the week
- How they addressed these challenges and/or how they plan to address these challenges going forward
- Their efforts to improve their professional development against goals that the employee agreed to with the team leader on their quarterly review
- A numerical self-evaluation of their performance for the week on all of these areas, typically on a range of 0 to 4 (0 = greatly below expectation, 1 = somewhat below expectations, 2 = meeting expectations, 3 = somewhat exceeding expectations, 4 = greatly exceeding expectations)
- Their plans for next week's top three accomplishments, addressing challenges, professional growth, and any other relevant plans for next week

The supervisor then responds to the report in writing at least two hours before the meeting. That involves:
- Comparing and assessing the accomplishments for this week against the plan from the

prior week
- Evaluating how the team member addressed any challenges remaining from the past week, as well as new ones arising this week
- Assessing their professional growth against previously-set goals for the quarter
- Approving or suggesting revisions to the employee's plans for next week
- Either approves the employee's self-evaluation or suggests they discuss it at the weekly meeting

During the check-in meeting, the team leader and member discuss anything that needs to be clarified from the report. The leader coaches the employee as needed on improving their ability to accomplish weekly goals, address challenges, make the best decisions, cultivate relationships effectively, and grow professionally. The supervisor also addresses any issues surrounding the self-evaluation, revising it up or down. They explain their reasoning, give the employee a chance to respond, and then the supervisor makes the final call.

This rating is important, as it gets fed into the team member's quarterly performance report. The report is largely determined by the weekly evaluations, which make up anywhere from 60-80% of the employee's final score for the quarter. If you have team evaluations, they should make up about 20%. The supervisor also gives an overall score for the quarter, which makes up the remaining 20%.

With this task-based performance evaluation system, each employee knows, very clearly, how they're doing at all times. They know what they need to do to improve, both in their tasks and in their professional growth. Problems can be caught and addressed early, rather than blindsiding team members in their quarterly review. This system minimizes concerns about career growth via proximity to supervisors by team members who come to the office a couple of days per week vs. those working remotely. You'll want to evaluate how well this system functions for your context over time, and adapt it to your needs.

Chapter 16: Adapt Your Culture: Excellence From Anywhere

A [January 2022 Slack survey](#) of over 10,000 knowledge workers and their leaders shows that the top concern for executives about hybrid and remote work is "proximity bias." In summary, 41% feel worried about the negative impact on work culture from the prospect of inequality among office-centric, hybrid, and fully remote employees.

As different workers make varying choices about how much time to spend in the office, their concerns range from decreased career mobility for those who spend less face time with their supervisor, to resentment building up against the staff who have the most flexibility in where to work. Leaders who want to seize a competitive advantage in the future of work need to use research-based best practices by creating a culture of "Excellence from Anywhere" to address these concerns.

Why haven't leaders addressed the obvious problem of proximity bias? Any reasonable external observer could predict the issues arising from differences in time spent in the office.

Unfortunately, leaders often fail to see the clear threat in front of their noses. You might have heard of [black swans](#): low-probability, high-impact threats. Well, the opposite kind of threats are called [gray rhinos](#): obvious dangers that we fail to see because of our [cognitive biases](#).

Many organizations may need some employees to come in full-time. For example, one of my clients is a high-tech manufacturing company with over 25,000 employees. It needs many employees to be on the factory floor.

Others at the same company need to come in on a hybrid schedule: Some R&D staff, for example, innovate better if they access equipment in the labs. Some others may have team leaders that want them to come in once a week to facilitate team cohesion, even if they can do all their work remotely. And still other employees have team leaders that permit them to do full-time remote work.

Such differences over flexibility have the potential to create tension among employees. Addressing these potential cultural divides is vital to prevent a sense of "haves" and "have-nots" from developing, as well as pre-empting career-limiting face-time differences with supervisors. Leaders can address this by focusing on a shared culture of Excellence from Anywhere, as we did at the company discussed above. This term refers to a flexible organizational culture that takes into account the nature of an employee's work and promotes task-based policies, allowing remote work whenever possible.

The Excellence from Anywhere strategy addresses concerns about divides by [focusing on deliverables](#), regardless of where you work. Doing so also involves adopting best practices for hybrid and remote [collaboration](#) and [innovation](#).

By valuing deliverables, collaboration, and innovation through a focus on a shared work culture of Excellence from Anywhere, you can instill in your employees a focus on deliverables. The core idea is to get all of your workforce to pull together to achieve business outcomes: The

location doesn't matter.

This work culture addresses concerns about fairness by reframing the conversation to focus on accomplishing shared goals, rather than the method of doing so. After all, no one wants their colleagues to have to commute out of spite.

But what about face time with the boss? Well, that's a major benefit of revising performance evaluations from the traditional, high-stakes, large-scale quarterly or even annual performance evaluations to much more frequent weekly or biweekly, low-stakes, brief performance evaluations in the form or one-on-one check-ins. This type of brief and frequent performance evaluation meeting mitigates concerns about face time, since all get at least some personalized attention from their team leader. But more importantly, it addresses underlying concerns about career mobility by giving all staff a clear indication of where they stand at all times. After all, it's hard to tell how much any employee should worry about not being able to chat by the watercooler with their boss. Knowing exactly where they stand is the key concern for employees, and they can take proactive action if they see their standing suffer.

The Excellence from Anywhere approach reframes the conversation over career standing and workplace flexibility to help everyone focus on pulling together to achieve shared business objectives—prioritizing deliverables rather than where and how you work. It also involves giving all employees personalized face time with the boss and a constant knowledge of where they stand at all times, alleviating career mobility concerns.

Chapter 17: How to Measure the Success of Your Hybrid Work Model

With 74% of US companies transitioning to a permanent hybrid work model, leaders are turning their attention to measuring the success of their hybrid work model. That's because there's a single traditional office-centric model of M-F 9-5 in the office, but many ways to do hybrid work. Moreover, what works well for one company's culture and working style may not work well elsewhere, even within the same industry. So how should a leader evaluate whether the model they adopted is optimal for their company's needs, or whether it needs refinement?

The first step involves establishing clear success metrics. Unfortunately, relatively few companies measure important aspects of the hybrid work transition. For example, a new report from Omdia finds that 54% of organizations find that productivity improved from adopting a more hybrid working style, but only 22% of organizations established metrics to quantify productivity improvements from hybrid work.

As the saying goes, "what gets measured, gets managed." It's important to remember the full saying: "What gets measured gets managed - even when it's pointless to measure and manage it, and even if it harms the purpose of the organization to do so." The second part of the saying points to the importance of carefully selected metrics that are both meaningful to the organization's success and can be effectively measured, ideally quantitative and objectively, but if needed qualitatively and subjectively.

A Hybrid Work Model Is a Strategic Decision

From my experience helping organizations transition to hybrid work, it's important for the whole C-suite to be actively involved in formulating the metrics, and for the Board to approve them. Too often, busy executives feel the natural inclination to throw it in HR's lap and have them figure it out.

That's a mistake. A transition to a permanent hybrid work model is a strategic decision about the company's long-term future. It requires an accordant degree of attention and care at the highest levels of an organization. Otherwise, the C-suite will not be coordinated and fail to get on the same page about what counts as "success" in hybrid work, and find themselves in a mess six months after their hybrid work transition.

It's a best practice for the C-suite to determine the metrics at an offsite where they can distance themselves from the day-to-day bustle and make long-term strategic choices. Prior to the offsite, it's valuable to evaluate initial metrics, including getting a baseline of quantitative and objective measures, as well as doing a thorough survey and some focus group interviews with employees and mid-level managers to assess subjective and qualitative ones. While there's plenty of external data on hybrid work preferences, each company has a unique culture, systems and processes, and talent. Thus, the C-suite will find internal data very useful in their decision-making at the offsite.

Which Success Metrics Matter for Your Hybrid Work Model?

Based on the experience of my clients, companies focus on a variety of success metrics, each of which may be more or less important. Each of these metrics should be measured before establishing a permanent hybrid work policy, to get a baseline. Then, the metrics need to be evaluated every quarter, to evaluate the impact of refinements to the hybrid work policy.

Retention offers a clear-to-measure hard success metric, one both quantitative and objective. A related metric, recruitment, is a softer metric: it's harder to measure and more qualitative in nature. External benchmarks definitely indicate offering more remote work facilitates both retention and recruitment. For instance, a survey of 1,000 HR leaders finds that 95% of respondents believe offering hybrid work to be important for recruitment, and 60% perceive hybrid work to boost retention. And in a report by Owl Labs that surveyed 2,300 full-time US workers, 52% indicated they would be willing to take a pay cut of 5% or more to be able to choose where they could work.

Thus, if the C-suite chooses to adopt a more flexible policy, I recommend my clients put it on their website "Join Us" page, as did one of my clients, the University of Southern California's Information Sciences Institute. HR will inevitably find they get an uptick in inquiries from job applicants referencing this policy, as well as potential hires showing enthusiasm for it in interviews. That enthusiasm is something that can be measured.

A key metric, performance, may be harder or easier to measure depending on the nature of the work. For instance, a study published in the National Bureau of Economic Review reported on a randomized control trial comparing the performance of software engineers assigned to a hybrid schedule vs. an office-centric schedule. Engineers who worked in a hybrid model wrote 8% more code over a six-month period. Writing code is a standardized and objective measure of productivity and provides strong evidence of higher productivity with at least some remote work. If there is no option to have such clear performance measurement, use regular weekly assessments of performance from supervisors. But avoid software tracking programs, because the Owl Labs report finds that it causes 45% of employees to feel stressed.

Collaboration and innovation are critical metrics to effective team performance, but measuring them isn't easy. Evaluating them requires relying on more qualitative assessments from team leaders and team members. Moreover, by training teams in effective hybrid innovation and collaboration techniques, you can improve these metrics.

Several hard-to-measure metrics are important for an organization's culture and talent management: morale, engagement, well-being, happiness, burnout, intent to leave, and quiet quitting. For instance, the Owl Labs report indicates that 46% of employees would quiet quit if forced back to the office full-time, meaning do the bare minimum needed to avoid getting fired. Getting at these metrics requires the use of more qualitative and subjective approaches, such as customized surveys specifically adapted to hybrid and remote work policies. As part of doing the survey, it's helpful to ask respondents to opt into participating in focus groups around these issues. Then, in the focus groups, you can dig deeper into the survey questions and get at people's underlying feelings and motivations.

One way to get at wellbeing and burnout involves a hard metric: employees taking sick days. By measuring how that changes over time - seasonally adjusted - you can evaluate the impact of your policies on employee mental and physical health.

Diversity, equity, and inclusion represents an often-overlooked but critically important metric impacted by hybrid work. We know that underrepresented groups strongly prefer more remote work. Thus, my clients who chose to have a mostly office-centric schedule had to invest substantial resources into boosting their DEI to compensate for the inevitable loss of underrepresented talent.

Measuring DEI is quite easy and objective: look at the retention of underrepresented rank-and-file staff and leaders as the hybrid work strategy gets implemented. Also, make sure that your surveys allow staff to self-identify relevant demographic categories so that you can measure DEI as it relates to engagement, morale, and so on.

Last, but far from least, my clients also consider professional and leadership development, and onboarding and integration of junior team members. A Conference Board survey finds 58% of employees would leave without adequate professional development, and that applies even more so to underrepresented groups. Leadership development is critical to the long-term continuity of any company. And onboarding and integration of junior staff is a fundamental need for success. Yet most companies struggle with figuring out how to do these well in a hybrid setting.

Measuring professional development is best done through more subjective tools, such as surveys and focus groups. You can also assess how much staff improve in the areas where they received professional development, and compare in-person vs. remote modalities of delivering learning. Evaluating leadership development is easier and more quantitative and objective. Assess how well your newly-promoted leaders succeed based on performance evaluations and 360 degree reviews. Onboarding and integrating new staff involves performance evaluations by supervisors and measurements of their productivity.

Leadership Offsite

Once you have the baseline data from these diverse metrics, at the offsite the C-suite needs to determine which metrics matter most to your organization. Choose the top three to five metrics, and weigh their importance relative to each other. Using these metrics, the C-suite can then decide on a course of action on hybrid work that would best optimize for their desired outcomes. Next, determine a plan of action to implement this new policy, including using appropriate metrics to measure success.

As you implement the policy, if you find the metrics aren't as good as you'd like, revise the policy and see how that revision impacts your metrics. Likewise, consider running experiments to compare alternative versions of hybrid policy. For instance, you can have one day a week in the office in one location and two days in another, and assess how that impacts your metrics. Reassess and revise your approach once a month for the first three months, and then once a quarter going forward. By adopting this approach, my clients found they can most effectively reach the metrics they set out for their permanent hybrid model.

Conclusion

The best approach to the future of work involves a hybrid-first model with some limited full-time remote options. Doing so will enable you to excel in retention and recruitment, maximize collaboration, leverage innovation, boost productivity, re-energize your company culture, offer substantial cost savings, and manage a wide variety of risks. In transitioning strategically to a hybrid-first model, you'll want to survey your employees to get both information and buy-in. Use that information to help your team leaders make decisions about what their team's schedule will look like. Based on that, downsize your office space and reshape it to focus on collaboration versus individual work. Revise your performance evaluation to focus on tasks, not time spent, and ensure a regular weekly evaluation process. Adapt your culture to the new hybrid-first model, including DEI-related issues. Train your staff to succeed in this model and offer appropriate funding for their home office needs. Taking these steps will maximize your competitive advantage in the most important resource: your people.

Appendix 1: Template Questions for Post-Pandemic Work Arrangements Survey

Brief description: The questions below are meant as a "menu of options" for organizations to pick and choose questions that most suit their needs, as well as include additional questions particular to their own context. Having said that, I strongly recommend you ask at least the first seven and the last three questions. Note that any of these questions can be modified to ask about "your teammates" – such modification is a best practice to solicit more honest responses on sensitive questions. I would recommend, for questions you believe might be sensitive, asking two separate questions, one about the employee's own perspective, and one about what they believe their co-workers to think.

After the pandemic has passed, which of these would be your preferred working style?
- ● A) Fully remote, coming in once a quarter for team-building retreat
- ● B) 1 day a week in the office, the rest at home
- ● C) 2 days a week in the office
- ● D) 3 days a week in the office
- ● E) 4 days a week in the office
- ● F) Full-time in the office

After the pandemic has passed, which of these do you think would be the preferred working style of your supervisor for you?
- ● A) Fully remote, coming in once a quarter for team-building retreat
- ● B) 1 day a week in the office, the rest at home
- ● C) 2 days a week in the office
- ● D) 3 days a week in the office
- ● E) 4 days a week in the office
- ● F) Full-time in the office

After the pandemic has passed, which of these do you think would be the preferred working style of the largest number of the coworkers you know?
- ● A) Fully remote, coming in once a quarter for team-building retreat
- ● B) 1 day a week in the office, the rest at home
- ● C) 2 days a week in the office
- ● D) 3 days a week in the office
- ● E) 4 days a week in the office
- ● F) Full-time in the office

How likely would you be to recommend working here to peers in your professional network if this organization had a full-time in-office policy?
- • A) Not at all
- • B) Slightly recommend
- • C) Moderately recommend
- • D) Strongly recommend
- • E) Very strongly recommend

How likely would you be to recommend working here to peers in your professional network if this organization had a hybrid policy of having all workers in the office 1-3 days per week?
- • A) Not at all
- • B) Slightly recommend
- • C) Moderately recommend
- • D) Strongly recommend
- • E) Very strongly recommend

How likely would you be to recommend working here to peers in your professional network if this organization had a flexible hybrid policy of having most workers in the office 1-3 days per week, while allowing those who preferred to and were successful at working fully remotely to work fully remotely?
- • A) Not at all
- • B) Slightly recommend
- • C) Moderately recommend
- • D) Strongly recommend
- • E) Very strongly recommend

How likely would you be to recommend working here to peers in your professional network if this organization was fully remote?
- A) Not at all
- B) Slightly recommend
- C) Moderately recommend
- D) Strongly recommend
- E) Very strongly recommend

How would this organization having a full-time in-office policy impact the likelihood of co-workers you know looking for a different job?
- A) Substantially more likely
- B) Moderately more likely
- C) Neither more nor less likely
- D) Moderately less likely
- E) Substantially less likely

How would this organization having a hybrid policy of having all workers in the office 1-3 days per week impact the likelihood of co-workers you know looking for a different job?
- A) Substantially more likely
- B) Moderately more likely
- C) Neither more nor less likely
- D) Moderately less likely
- E) Substantially less likely

How would this organization having a flexible hybrid policy of having most workers in the office 1-3 days per week, while allowing those who preferred to and were successful at working fully remotely to work fully remotely, impact the likelihood of co-workers you know looking for a different job?
- A) Substantially more likely
- B) Moderately more likely
- C) Neither more nor less likely
- D) Moderately less likely
- E) Substantially less likely

How would this organization being fully remote impact the likelihood of co-workers you know looking for a different job?
- A) Substantially more likely
- B) Moderately more likely
- C) Neither more nor less likely
- D) Moderately less likely
- E) Substantially less likely

How likely would you be to "go the extra mile" in your work if this organization had a full-time in-office policy?
- A) Not at all likely
- B) Slightly likely
- C) Moderately likely
- D) Highly likely

- E) Very highly likely

How likely would you be to "go the extra mile" in your work if this organization had a hybrid policy of having all workers in the office 1-3 days per week?
- A) Not at all likely
- B) Slightly likely
- C) Moderately likely
- D) Highly likely
- E) Very highly likely

How likely would you be to "go the extra mile" in your work if this organization had a flexible hybrid policy of having most workers in the office 1-3 days per week, while allowing those who preferred to and were successful at working fully remotely to work fully remotely?
- A) Not at all likely
- B) Slightly likely
- C) Moderately likely
- D) Highly likely
- E) Very highly likely

How likely would you be to "go the extra mile" in your work if this organization was fully remote?
- A) Not at all likely
- B) Slightly likely
- C) Moderately likely
- D) Highly likely
- E) Very highly likely

What percentage of future increases in your salary would you be willing to give up for the chance to work from home at least half-time?
- A) 0%
- B) 5%
- C) 10%
- D) 15%
- E) 20%
- F) 25%

What percentage of future increases in your salary would you be willing to give up for the chance to work from home full-time?
- A) 0%
- B) 5%
- C) 10%
- D) 15%
- E) 20%
- F) 25%

How well-adapted do you feel to remote work?
- A) Not at all
- B) Slightly
- C) Moderately

- D) Strongly
- E) Very strongly

How important do you feel it is for you to get funding to help subsidize remote work expenses?
- A) Not at all important
- B) Slightly important
- C) Moderately important
- D) Strongly important
- E) Very strongly important

How important do you feel it is for you to get training in effective virtual communication?
- A) Not at all important
- B) Slightly important
- C) Moderately important
- D) Strongly important
- E) Very strongly important

How important do you feel it is for you to get training in effective virtual collaboration and teamwork?
- A) Not at all important
- B) Slightly important
- C) Moderately important
- D) Strongly important
- E) Very strongly important

How important do you feel it is for you to get virtual mentoring?
- A) Not at all important
- B) Slightly important
- C) Moderately important
- D) Strongly important
- E) Very strongly important

Are you more or less productive working remotely?
- A) Substantially more productive
- B) Moderately more productive
- C) Equally productive as in the office
- D) Moderately less productive
- E) Substantially less productive

Are you more or less productive working on your individual tasks remotely?
- A) Substantially more productive
- B) Moderately more productive
- C) Equally productive as in the office
- D) Moderately less productive
- E) Substantially less productive

Are you more or less productive working on your collaborative tasks with others remotely?
- A) Substantially more productive

- B) Moderately more productive
- C) Equally productive as in the office
- D) Moderately less productive
- E) Substantially less productive

Would you feel concerned about career growth if you work fully remotely while others come to the office, whether hybrid or full-time?
- A) Not at all
- B) Slightly
- C) Moderately
- D) Strongly
- E) Very strongly

Would you feel concerned about career growth if you work on a hybrid schedule of less than half the time in the office while others come to the office full-time?
- A) Not at all
- B) Slightly
- C) Moderately
- D) Strongly
- E) Very strongly

Compared to working in the office, do you feel that remote work causes you to have more or less work/life balance?
- A) Substantially more work/life balance
- B) Moderately more work/life balance
- C) Equal work/life balance
- D) Moderately less work/life balance
- E) Substantially less work/life balance

Compared to working in the office, do you feel that remote work causes you to have more or less stress?
- A) Substantially more stress
- B) Moderately more stress
- C) Equal stress
- D) Moderately less stress
- E) Substantially less stress

Compared to working in the office, do you feel that remote work causes you to be more or less happy?
- A) Substantially more happy
- B) Moderately more happy
- C) Equal happy
- D) Moderately less happy
- E) Substantially less happy

Compared to working in the office, do you feel that remote work causes you to have more or less connection to fellow members of your team?
- A) Substantially more connection
- B) Moderately more connection
- C) Equal connection

- D) Moderately less connection
- E) Substantially less connection

Compared to working in the office, do you feel that remote work causes you to have more or less connection to co-workers who aren't immediate members of your team?
- A) Substantially more connection
- B) Moderately more connection
- C) Equal connection
- D) Moderately less connection
- E) Substantially less connection

Compared to working in the office, do you feel that remote work causes you to have more or less connection to your supervisor?
- A) Substantially more connection
- B) Moderately more connection
- C) Equal connection
- D) Moderately less connection
- E) Substantially less connection

Compared to working in the office, do you feel that remote work causes you to have more or less connection to your company culture?
- A) Substantially more connection
- B) Moderately more connection
- C) Equal connection
- D) Moderately less connection
- E) Substantially less connection

What do you feel to be the biggest benefits of remote work? Please list at least three if possible, but feel free to write more. You're welcome to include additional context to explain your answer further.

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What do you feel to be the biggest challenges of remote work? Please list at least three if possible, but feel free to write more. You're welcome to include additional context to explain your answer further.

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What else do you want us to know about your take on post-pandemic work arrangements?

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Appendix 2: Template Questions for Ongoing Hybrid and Remote Work Preferences Survey

Directions: Please complete this survey to help the organization determine its broad policies toward hybrid and remote work arrangements for the next year, as well as to help individual managers determine their work arrangement plans for their groups. This survey is run through Google Forms and thus fully anonymous. You do have the option at the end of the survey of providing additional and more personalized information that would help us get a better understanding of how to customize work arrangements policies for different groups. You can opt out of doing so if you want to maximize anonymity.

We originally intended to have an across-the-board requirement for everyone to come to the office three days per week starting from late fall 2021. Instead, we adopted a flexible, team-led policy where team leads determined what worked best for their team members. Compared to the original three days per week policy, how do you feel about the team-led approach?
- Team-led policy is much better
- Team-led policy is better
- Team-led policy is neither better nor worse
- Team-led policy is worse
- Team-led policy is much worse

Compared to the original three days per week policy, how do you think most other employees you know feel about the team-led approach?
- Team-led policy is much better
- Team-led policy is better
- Team-led policy is neither better nor worse
- Team-led policy is worse
- Team-led policy is much worse

Compared to the original three days per week policy, does the team-led approach cause you to be:
- Much more likely to recommend working here to your peers
- More likely to recommend working here to your peers
- Neither more nor less likely to recommend working here to your peers
- Less likely to recommend working here to your peers
- Much less likely to recommend working here to your peers

How can the organization's current policy be improved?

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What are your current work arrangements (if your team comes in on a variable schedule, please choose the answer that best represents the average days in the office)?
- Fully remote, coming in once a quarter for team-building retreat
- 1 day a week in the office, the rest at home
- 2 days a week in the office
- 3 days a week in the office
- 4 days a week in the office
- Full-time in the office

How satisfied are you with your current work arrangements?
- Very satisfied
- Satisfied
- Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
- Dissatisfied
- Very dissatisfied

How can your current work arrangements be improved?

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In the next year, which of these would be your preferred working style?
- Fully remote, coming in once a quarter for team-building retreat
- 1 day a week in the office, the rest at home
- 2 days a week in the office
- 3 days a week in the office
- 4 days a week in the office
- Full-time in the office

Do you think your supervisor would prefer for you to come in more or less than the preference you stated above?
- Much more
- More
- About the same
- Less
- Much less

In the next year, which of these do you think would be the preferred working style of most other employees you know?
- Fully remote, coming in once a quarter for team-building retreat
- 1 day a week in the office, the rest at home
- 2 days a week in the office
- 3 days a week in the office
- 4 days a week in the office
- Full-time in the office

Would you be more likely to recommend working here to peers in your professional network if you and your team spent:
- Much more time in the office
- More time in the office
- Equal amount of time in the office
- Less time in the office
- Much less time in the office

How well did you adapt to remote work?
- Very well
- Well
- Neither well nor poorly
- Poorly
- Very poorly

How satisfied are you with the remote office technology support that the organization has provided?
- Very satisfied
- Satisfied
- Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
- Dissatisfied
- Very dissatisfied

How satisfied are you with the remote office furniture support that the organization has provided?
- Very satisfied
- Satisfied
- Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
- Dissatisfied
- Very dissatisfied

What can make you more satisfied with the home office support that the organization has provided?

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How has the home office support that the organization has provided impacted your productivity working remotely?
- It made me much more productive
- It made me more productive
- It had no impact on my productivity
- It made me less productive
- It made me much less productive

Are you more or less productive working on your individual tasks remotely?
- Much more productive
- More productive
- Equally productive

- Less productive
- Much less productive

Are you more or less productive working on your collaborative tasks remotely?
- Much more productive
- More productive
- Equally productive
- Less productive
- Much less productive

Compared to your current work arrangements, what would help make you more productive?
- Much more remote work
- More remote work
- Neither more nor less remote work
- Less remote work
- Much less remote work

Compared to your current work arrangements, what would help you have more work/life balance?
- Much more remote work
- More remote work
- Neither more nor less remote work
- Less remote work
- Much less remote work

Compared to your current work arrangements, what would help you be more energized?
- Much more remote work
- More remote work
- Neither more nor less remote work
- Less remote work
- Much less remote work

Compared to your current work arrangements, what would help you thrive more?
- Much more remote work
- More remote work
- Neither more nor less remote work
- Less remote work
- Much less remote work

Compared to your current work arrangements, what would help you have less stress?
- Much more remote work
- More remote work
- Neither more nor less remote work
- Less remote work

- Much less remote work

Compared to your current work arrangements, what would help you be happier?
- Much more remote work
- More remote work
- Neither more nor less remote work
- Less remote work
- Much less remote work

Compared to your current work arrangements, what would help you have more connection to fellow members of your team?
- Much more remote work
- More remote work
- Neither more nor less remote work
- Less remote work
- Much less remote work

Compared to your current work arrangements, what would help you have more connection to co-workers who aren't immediate members of your team?
- Much more remote work
- More remote work
- Neither more nor less remote work
- Less remote work
- Much less remote work

Compared to your current work arrangements, what would help you have more connection to the culture of the organization?
- Much more remote work
- More remote work
- Neither more nor less remote work
- Less remote work
- Much less remote work

Compared to your current work arrangements, what would help you have more connection to your supervisor?
- Much more remote work
- More remote work
- Neither more nor less remote work
- Less remote work
- Much less remote work

How does the current situation with COVID and any forecasts for COVID in the fall semester impact your responses to these questions and your plans?

- It makes me want much more remote work
- It makes me want more remote work
- It makes me want neither more nor less remote work
- It makes me want less remote work
- It makes me want much less remote work

How much of a burden, in time and/or money, is your commute?

- Heavy burden
- Substantial burden
- Moderate burden
- Slight burden
- Not at all a burden

What do you feel to have been the biggest benefits of remote work over the past year? Please list at least three if possible, but feel free to write more. You're welcome to include additional context to explain your answer further.

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What do you feel to have been the biggest challenges of remote work over the past year? Please list at least three if possible, but feel free to write more. You're welcome to include additional context to explain your answer further.

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What do you feel to have been the biggest benefits of in-office work over the past year (if you did in-office work)? Please list at least three if possible, but feel free to write more. You're welcome to include additional context to explain your answer further.

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What do you feel to have been the biggest challenges of in-office work over the past year (if you did any in-office work)? Please list at least three if possible, but feel free to write more. You're welcome to include additional context to explain your answer further.

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What else would you like us to know about your perspective on hybrid/remote work arrangements to help inform our broad policies and the specific plans of individual supervisors?

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What is your title?

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OPTIONAL: Who is your supervisor? If you choose to provide this information will be aggregated and provided to individual supervisors. Note that if you answer both this and the previous question, it may be possible that your supervisor would identify you, so please skip this question if you want to maximize anonymity.

- _____

Note on References

All references are in the form of links and are located in the electronic version of this manual.

Note on Additional Resources

For additional resources on making the wisest decisions and managing risks in the post-pandemic world, on everything from managing hybrid and remote teams to planning your strategy and career, register for the free Wise Decision Maker Course at https://disasteravoidanceexperts.com/subscribe/

This course has eight video-based modules to help you avoid dangerous threats and maximize golden opportunities by future-proofing your decisions and addressing mental blindspots! The first module involves helping you assess and address any pervasive dangerous judgment errors (cognitive biases) in your workplace. To do so, upon registering for the course, you'll immediately receive a free copy of our "Assessment on Dangerous Judgment Errors in the Workplace."

So register for this free course today at https://disasteravoidanceexperts.com/subscribe/

Author Bio

Dr. Gleb Tsipursky is an internationally-renowned thought leader in future-proofing and cognitive bias risk management. He serves as the CEO of the boutique future-proofing consultancy Disaster Avoidance Experts, which specializes in helping forward-looking leaders avoid dangerous threats and missed opportunities.

A best-selling author of several books, Dr. Gleb is well-known among business leaders for his national bestseller, *Never Go With Your Gut: How Pioneering Leaders Make the Best Decisions and Avoid Business Disasters* (Career Press, 2019). It's the first book to focus on cognitive biases in business leadership and reveal how leaders can overcome these dangerous judgment errors effectively. He also wrote the best-seller on effective professional and personal relationships, called *The Blindspots Between Us: How to Overcome Unconscious Cognitive Bias and Build Better Relationships* (New Harbinger, 2020). It's the first book to focus on cognitive biases in professional and personal relationships and illustrate how we can defeat these dangerous judgment errors in our relationships. Earlier, he wrote *The Truth Seeker's Handbook: A Science-Based Guide* (Intentional Insights, 2017), on how to overcome cognitive biases in all life areas. His new book is *Resilience: Adapt and Plan for the New Abnormal of the COVID-19 Coronavirus Pandemic* (Changemakers Books, 2020). It helps organizations and individuals navigate successfully the major disruption of the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic and succeed in the post-pandemic world. His writing was translated into Chinese, Korean, German, Russian, Polish, and other languages.

Dr. Tsipursky's cutting-edge thought leadership was featured in over 550 articles he published and over 450 interviews he gave to popular venues. These include *Fortune*, *USA Today*, *Fast Company*, *CBS News*, *Time*, *Scientific American*, *Psychology Today*, *Entrepreneur*, *The Conversation*, *Business Insider*, *Government Executive*, *The Chronicle of Philanthropy*, *NPR*, *Inc. Magazine*, and many others.

Dr. Tsipursky's expertise comes from over 20 years of consulting, coaching, speaking, and training for innovative startups, major nonprofits, and Fortune 500 companies. His clients include Aflac, Edison Welding Institute, Honda, IBM, Outreach Corporation, RealManage, The Columbus Foundation, Wells Fargo, the World Wildlife Fund, Xerox, and over a hundred others who achieve outstanding client results.

His expertise also comes from his research and teaching background as a behavioral scientist studying the behavioral economics and cognitive neuroscience of future-proofing, strategic decision making and planning, and cognitive bias risk management strategy in business and other contexts. He spent over 15 years in academia, including 7 years as a professor at the Ohio State University and before that a Fellow at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill. His dozens of peer-reviewed academic publications have appeared in well-respected scholarly journals such as *Behavior and Social Issues*, *Journal of Social and Political Psychology*, and *International Journal of Existential Psychology and Psychotherapy*.

His civic service includes over 4 years as the Chair of the Board of Directors of Intentional Insights, an educational nonprofit advocating for research-based decision-making in all life areas. He also co-founded the Pro-Truth Pledge, a civic project to promote truthfulness and integrity for individual professionals and leaders in the same way that the Better Business Bureau serves as a commitment for businesses. He serves on the Advisory Board of Canonical Debate Lab and Planet Purpose, and is on the Editorial Board of the peer-reviewed journal

Behavior and Social Issues.

A highly in-demand international speaker, Dr. Tsipursky has over two decades of [professional speaking experience](#) across North America, Europe, and Australia, in-person and virtual, and received a [Virtual Speaking Certification](#). He gets [top marks](#) from audiences for his [highly facilitative, interactive, and humor-filled speaking style](#) and the way he thoroughly customizes speeches for diverse audiences. Meeting planners [describe Dr. Tsipursky](#) as "very relatable," as "a snap to work with," and as someone who "does everything that you would want a speaker to do." Drawing on best practices in adult learning, his programs address the wide spectrum of diverse learning styles, as attested by enthusiastic client [testimonials](#) and [references](#). He regularly shares the stage with prominent leaders, for example on a [roundtable panel](#) with the President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen, Secretary General of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies Elhadj As Sy, Chancellor of Austria Brigitte Bierlein, CEO of Penguin Random House Markus Dohle, and billionaire philanthropist and Chair of the Bertelsmann Management Company Liz Mohn. You can also check out this brief [speaker demo video](#), this short TED-style [keynote video](#), this hour-long [opening keynote video](#), this [45-minute webinar](#), and other speaking [videos](#), learn more about [frequently requested programs](#), get information [targeted at meeting planners](#), and see his [Speaker One Sheet](#) for more information on his speaking.

Gleb earned his PhD in the History of Behavioral Science at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 2011, his M.A. at Harvard University in 2004, and his B.A. at New York University in 2002. He lives in and travels from Columbus, OH. In his free time, he enjoys tennis, hiking, and playing with his two cats, and most importantly, he makes sure to spend abundant quality time with his wife to avoid disasters in his personal life.

Follow him on [LinkedIn](#), Twitter [@gleb_tsipursky](#), Instagram [@dr_gleb_tsipursky](#), Medium [@dr_gleb_tsipursky](#), [Facebook](#), [YouTube](#), and [RSS](#). Most importantly, help yourself avoid disasters and maximize success, and get a free copy of the *[Assessment on Dangerous Judgment Errors in the Workplace](#)*, by signing up for his free [Wise Decision Maker Course](#).

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