

HR Leaders Monthly

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Authors

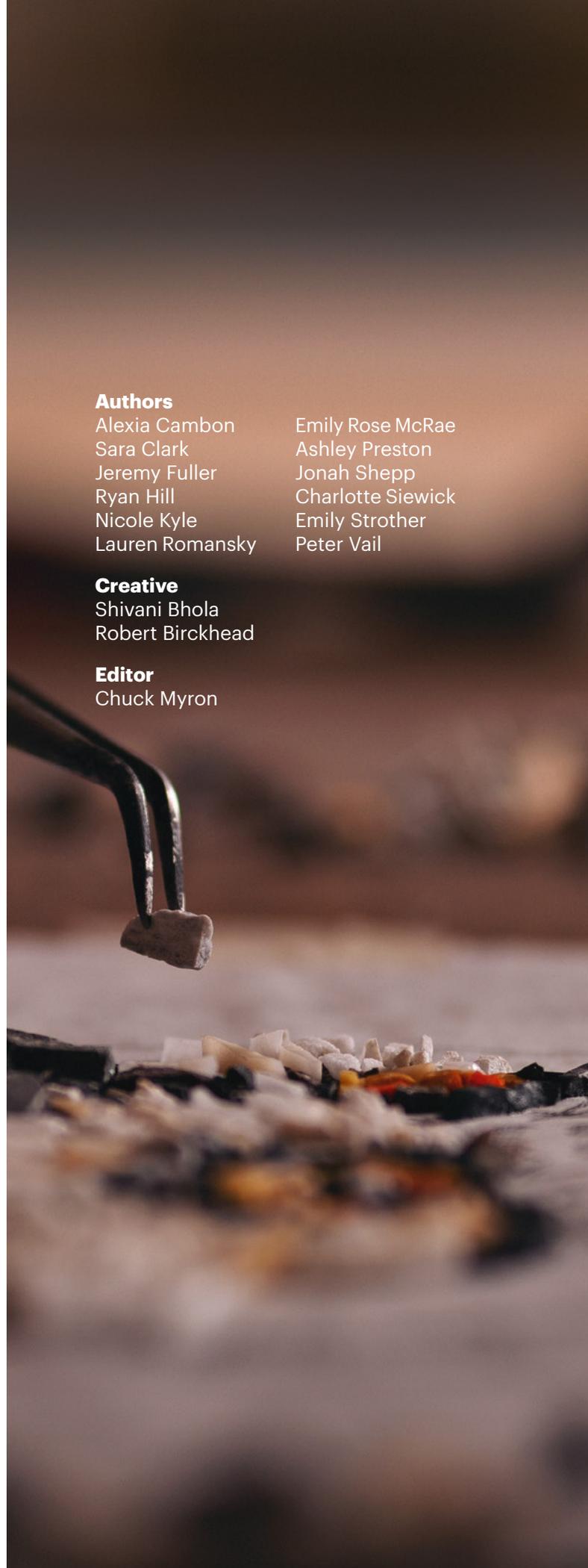
Alexia Cambon	Emily Rose McRae
Sara Clark	Ashley Preston
Jeremy Fuller	Jonah Shepp
Ryan Hill	Charlotte Siewick
Nicole Kyle	Emily Strother
Lauren Romansky	Peter Vail

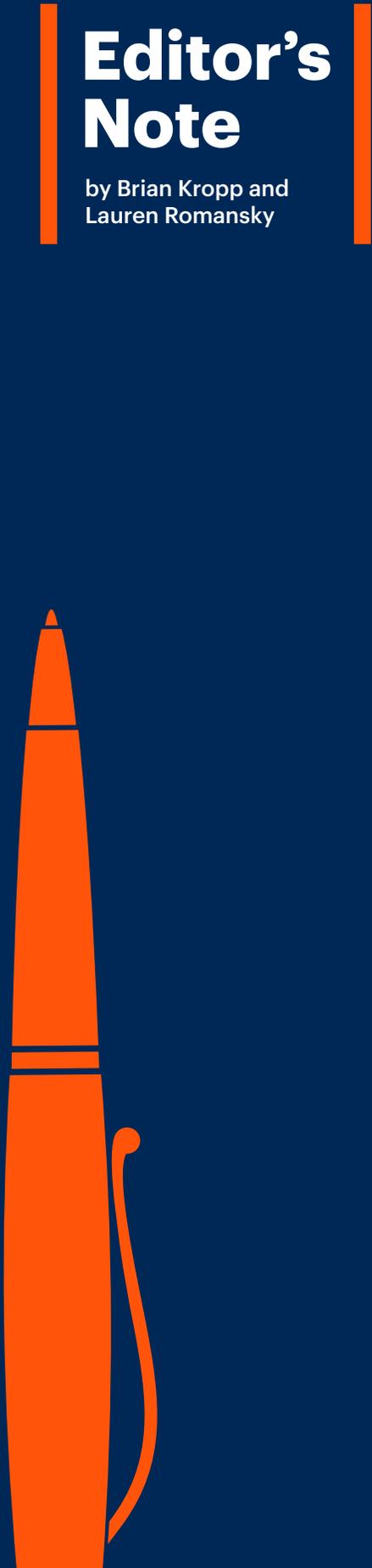
Creative

Shivani Bhola
Robert Birckhead

Editor

Chuck Myron





Editor's Note

by Brian Kropp and
Lauren Romansky

In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic drove a massive shift to remote work at organizations around the world. At the time, we expected some of these changes to be permanent: Many people who began working from home full-time due to the contingencies of the pandemic would never go back to working exclusively in a traditional office setting. As the global economy begins to recover this year, this expectation is proving true. Many organizations are embracing a hybrid model of work, one in which employees split their time between on-site and remote work and have more flexibility in where and when they do their jobs. This enduring change reflects not only employees' desire for flexibility, but also the growing realization that a hybrid arrangement can greatly benefit their productivity and well-being.

At the same time, the hybrid workplace brings its own challenges. Can employees collaborate, build relationships and innovate without the chance encounters and socialization that take place in a shared workspace? Is it fair to offer this kind of radical flexibility to only some employees when others can't have it because of the nature of their work? How do organizations make the hybrid environment inclusive toward diverse talent and avoid excluding employees who prefer remote work? For HR leaders, the evolution of the hybrid work model offers a challenge and an opportunity to redesign roles, employee-manager relationships and other aspects of the employee experience for the postpandemic world.

This issue of HR Leaders Monthly is dedicated to the hybrid workplace, the subject of one of our major research projects this year. In this issue, we examine the hybrid model from all angles, addressing the key questions HR leaders need to answer as they design their hybrid workforce strategies. We introduce the management skills and qualities that drive success in a hybrid environment and discuss how to develop them. We explore how the hybrid world requires employees and leaders to break old habits and build new ones, and we delve into the role talent analytics can play in designing a hybrid workplace. Last but not least, we consider the hybrid workforce from the standpoint of inclusion and discuss ways to extend its benefits equitably to employees of all roles, abilities and genders.



How to Build Manager Empathy

by Sara Clark and Peter Vail

Empathy has not traditionally been a top priority for managers. However, to succeed in the new era of radical flexibility, HR leaders should embrace a holistic strategy of manager development that addresses the three most common barriers to leading with empathy: skill, mindset and capacity.

In the postpandemic world, many employees will work in a hybrid environment with more choices about where, when and how much they work. On average, HR leaders project that 54% of the workforce will work in a hybrid model in the near future.¹ Given the substantial and lasting shifts the workforce has undergone as a result of the pandemic, companies must prioritize empathy in their managers to succeed in this new era of radical flexibility.

Historically, managers have been selected and promoted largely based on their ability to manage and evaluate the performance of employees who could carry out a particular set of tasks. Within the last five years, HR executives have started to hire and develop managers who were poised to be highly effective coaches for their employees. However, the pandemic challenged the assumption that coaching should be the primary function of management.

Meeting the need for empathy requires organizations and their HR functions to develop their managers' skills, awaken their mindsets to manage in new ways and create the capacity throughout the organization to enable this shift. Here's how to adopt a holistic strategy that invests in solutions to all three common manager barriers to leading with empathy (see Figure 1).

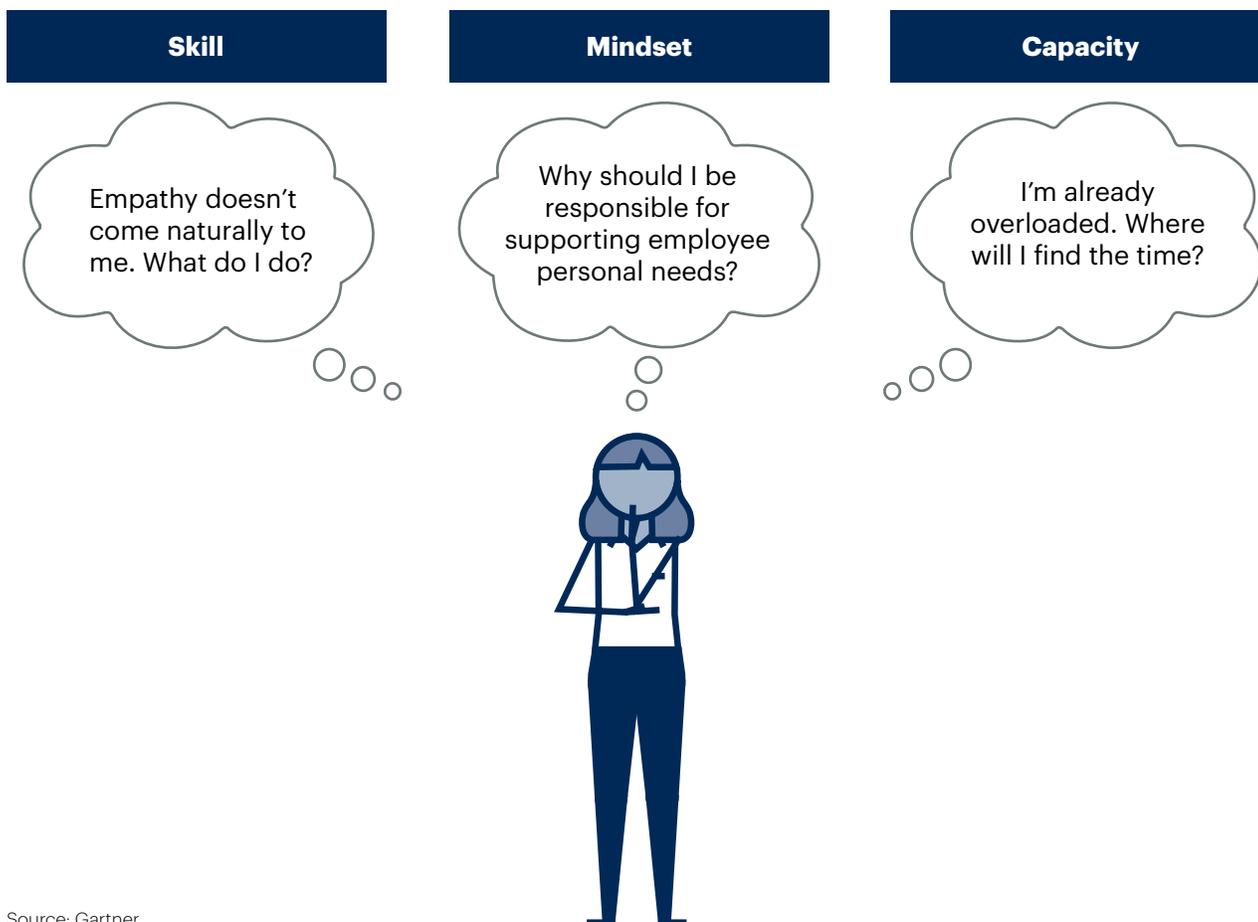
Radical Flexibility Requires Empathetic Managers

Empathy is nothing new. Despite its place in the conventional wisdom of effective leadership, it has yet to become a top priority for organizations. The empathetic manager is someone who can contextualize employee performance and behavior — who

transcends simply understanding the facts of work, proactively asks questions and seeks information to place themselves in their direct reports' contexts.

Empathy requires fostering high levels of trust and care and a culture of acceptance within teams. This is a lot to ask of any individual. Managers must ask questions that produce vulnerable answers without compromising trust, diagnose the root cause of an employee's behavior without making assumptions and demonstrate the social-emotional intelligence necessary to imagine another's feelings. This is challenging enough for a single manager-employee relationship, and it becomes even more difficult as managers face the need to adapt to their team members' wide range of individual preferences and characteristics.

Figure 1. Common Manager Barriers to Empathy



Source: Gartner

Empathy isn't easy, but it's worth it: 89% of HR leaders agree that it's more important now for managers to demonstrate empathy than it was before the pandemic.¹ Employees at organizations with high levels of empathy-based management are more than twice as likely to agree that their work environment is inclusive. This inclusivity clearly pays dividends, as our analysis shows that managers who display high levels of empathy have three times the impact on their employees' performance than those who display low levels.¹

Develop Manager Empathy Through Vulnerable Conversation Practice

Managers often understand empathy conceptually, but they struggle with questions about how to use it as a management tool: Are these questions too personal? How do I create a trusting relationship with my direct reports? How do I talk about social justice? It goes against deeply ingrained assumptions that we should keep work and life separate. Managers need opportunities to practice — and, crucially, room to make mistakes — so they can learn to lead with empathy. Unfortunately, only 52% of 31 learning and development leaders polled in May 2020 report that they're increasing their training focus on soft skills.³

To build empathy, Cisco has managers practice "courageous conversations" with improvisational actors in its Leader Learning Labs. Labs offer managers safe-to-fail learning environments where managers can build confidence in their ability to have vulnerable conversations with employees about relevant topics such as disrupted work-life boundaries, hybrid work uncertainty and anxiety about current events. Managers engage in multiple rounds of role-playing in which they are asked to react in the moment to challenging situations and to respond after an employee's

immediate concerns have been addressed. This practice builds manager empathy, especially by challenging managers to understand the perspectives of others. Importantly, these types of conversations offer managers the opportunity to fail in a safe space, which is rarely given to figures of authority. The actors who lead this role-playing also provide managers with unfiltered feedback rather than the anonymous or tailored feedback they often receive.

Empower a New Manager Mindset by Creating a Network of Support

In a 2021 survey of 75 HR leaders, 74% agreed that managers should prioritize empathy over efficiency.¹ To empathize, managers must situate employee performance within individual contexts, frequently beyond typical work boundaries. However, organizations are struggling to effectively embed empathy within manager workflows in their daily interactions with their teams. Only 35% of the same HR leaders agree it is more important today than it was before the pandemic for managers to focus on factors unrelated to work when evaluating employee performance.¹ This suggests HR leaders recognize the importance of manager empathy but are not always clear on what it means or how to use it.

To empathize, managers must situate employee performance within individual contexts, frequently beyond typical work boundaries.

Goodway Group, a fully remote company since 2007, knows distributed teams face greater challenges with communication and shared visibility. Goodway created a dedicated role,



the team success partner, whose responsibilities include fostering trust and psychological safety and supporting team health. Managers work with team success partners to respond to the unique challenges distributed employees are facing. Together, managers and team success partners facilitate remote psychological safety conversations and support new team member assimilation. Managers' motivation to be empathetic increases when they have a support system that makes it clear that the burden isn't theirs alone. It also increases when organizations invest in roles designed to support them.

Create Manager Capacity for Empathy by Reprioritizing Workstreams

Managers are already overburdened by the demands of the evolving work environment, and actions that drive empathy require both adequate time and attention. While 68% of HR leaders agree managers are overwhelmed by their responsibilities, only 14% of organizations have redefined the manager role to reduce their responsibilities.¹

Recognizing its people team managers faced cognitive overload because of new demands in its distributed work environment, Atlassian made space for empathy by piloting an extreme approach to prioritization that gives managers permission to focus on well-being. The people team reviewed and deprioritized existing projects unless the team determined they were near completion, urgent or broadly impactful. When managers have a workload they can handle, they're able to dedicate time to fostering deeper connections and responding with empathy.

Organizations that equip managers to be empathetic by holistically addressing the three common barriers — skill, mindset and capacity — will achieve outsized returns on performance in the post-COVID-19 world.

¹2021 Gartner Hybrid Work HR Leader Survey

²2020 Gartner Manager of the Future Survey

³Gartner Coronavirus Polling on Leadership and Learning (6 May 2020)

Note: This article was adapted from "What Does It Mean to Be a Manager Today?" (Harvard Business Review).



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Strategies for Extending Flexibility Beyond Knowledge Employees

by Emily Strother

Organizations struggle to give all employees the same flexibility their knowledge workers have. HR leaders can use these strategies to identify opportunities to offer these employees the flexibility they want.

Radical flexibility helps employees feel autonomous by providing flexibility in all aspects of work, not just when and where they work. All employees value flexibility in where they work,

when they work, how much they work, who they work with and what they work on. Moreover, this isn't a temporary change in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the shift in the way people work. Sixty percent of employees expect to work remotely at least once in a typical week after the COVID-19 pandemic is over, compared to only 38% of employees pre-COVID-19.¹

The desire for flexibility in work is important not only to white-collar or knowledge workers but also for workers whose jobs don't meet that description.

At least half of employees who are not knowledge workers want their organization to provide them radical flexibility. Unfortunately, less than a third of those same workers have flexibility in any area of their work (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Flexibility Options Employees Who Aren't Knowledge Workers Value vs. What Their Organizations Offer

Percentage



n = 5,000 employees worldwide; 77 HR leaders
 Source: 2021 Gartner EVP Employee Survey; 2021 Gartner EVP Benchmarking Survey

Many organizations struggle to provide employees who aren't knowledge workers with flexible work options without sacrificing productivity and performance. Unfortunately, this lack of flexibility can lead to inequity among employees. Although radical flexibility initiatives primarily focus on knowledge workers, there are many ways HR leaders can provide flexible work options for all employees (see Figure 2).

HR leaders looking to expand the flexibility they offer their employees who are not knowledge workers should take the following steps:

- Identify team-established boundaries to help provide employees flexible choice.
- Determine the activities within each role that can be flexible.
- Source manager-tested best practices for flexibility.
- Work with cross-functional partners to enable flexibility for all.

Identify Team-Established Boundaries to Help Provide Employees Flexible Choice

Organizations should encourage teams to establish norms around what empowers them to complete their work. This approach won't look the same for all teams, but it ensures employees are accountable for their work and still provides opportunities for flexibility. Allowing more freedom for employees, and particularly those who are not knowledge workers, to choose their work style and preferences based on their type of work, provided they align to team needs, is a natural way to build more flexibility into their workflow.

For example, most of the time, call center employees do not have flexibility over when, where or how much they work. However, managers can set expectations for the work

Figure 2. Sample Flexibility Options for Employees Who Aren't Knowledge Workers
Illustrative



Role	Retail Employee	On-Site Essential Personnel	IT Field Technician
Flexibility Options	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give employees the choice to schedule and trade their own hours. • Provide tenured employees options for what areas they work in and who they work with. • Allow employees to work at different locations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide employees transparency into the types of projects available to them. • Allow employees to share their workstyle preference. • Give employees the choice of when they can start and end each work day. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adjust scheduling as needed (i.e., four 10-hour days, not five eight-hour days). • Allow employees to choose which peers they work with on-site. • Authorize remote work when not on-site.

n = 5,000 employees worldwide; 77 HR leaders
Source: Gartner 2021 EVP Employee Survey; Gartner 2021 EVP Benchmarking Survey

that must get done, the number of days to do it and how many employees are available to work. That enables employees to more confidently ask for flexibility in the days, times and type of work they perform. This allows organizations to meet business and employee needs. HR leaders can equip team leaders and managers to ask questions about the types of work styles that help meet business objectives and how those can be flexed to support freedom of choice among all employees.

Determine the Activities Within Each Role That Can Be Flexible

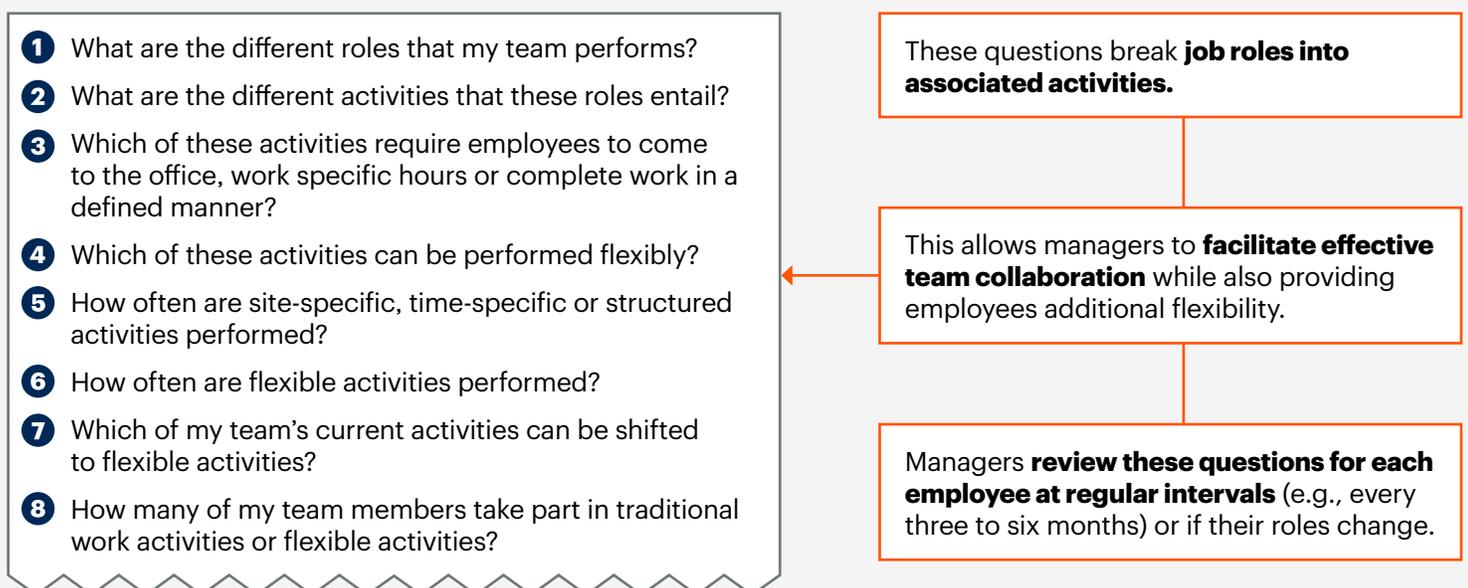
The traditional approach to flexibility, focused on the where and when of work, means that some roles — especially ones that are not knowledge roles — are left behind, considered out of scope for flexibility. Organizations should consider the activities within each role that can be flexed, rather than the role itself, to reveal hidden opportunities for flexibility in all roles, even those

commonly considered ineligible. For example, the role of IT & tech support might be considered inflexible due to the need to be on-call, but breaking down the role into activities reveals some significant opportunities for flexibility. Some tasks or activities, such as configuring employee systems and maintaining services, may have inflexible time and place requirements, but other activities, like answering queries and updating system software, can still be done successfully under more flexible arrangements. HR leaders can help managers understand their employees' work by prompting managers to ask the right questions and map employees' activities to flexible work options (see Figure 3).

Source Manager-Tested Best Practices for Flexibility

Most organizations lean on HR leaders to identify solutions for improving flexible work environments for employees, but HR leaders' direct reports and associates are typically knowledge employees for whom flexibility is

Figure 3. Activities-Based Discussion Guide for Managers



easier to provide. They often don't have firsthand experience managing employees who aren't knowledge workers. However, other managers in the organization do, and these managers may have learned some best practices for providing flexibility that they are already implementing on their teams.

By leveraging the collective wisdom of those working directly with employees who aren't knowledge workers in a flexible environment, HR leaders can identify best practices that work in the context of their employees' real experiences. HR leaders should consider which managers are outperforming when working with a flexible team and identify what they are doing differently. Thus, they can uncover flexible work options already being piloted within the organization and scale them up rather than starting from scratch.

One way to source these best practices is by convening peer cohort groups of managers working with employees who are not knowledge workers to discuss questions like:

- What flexible options can work for my team?
- How can I accommodate different team members' needs?

After a couple of months of piloting and contextualizing flexibility solutions with their teams, the peer cohorts can come back together virtually to discuss what worked and what did

not for their teams. For example, a manager of field technicians might have had a hard time connecting with direct reports who had more flexible schedules because the manager didn't know when to call or visit them on-site. Sharing this challenge in a cohort meeting, the manager hears from a colleague who solved that problem by meeting in the field with the team once a week during lunch to maintain connection.

This approach removes the pressure of having to "get it right" the first time or make sure everyone has the same experience. It gives managers the freedom to try new things, but with guidelines based on what is already working for other teams. It also increases the credibility of these solutions, since they are sourced not from HR but from leaders who work day to day with employees who aren't knowledge workers.

Work With Cross-Functional Partners to Enable Flexibility for All

Most organizations focus on how HR can support flexible work. However, by using a cross-functional team to enable flexibility for all employees, HR leaders can leverage the wisdom, expertise and understanding of business leaders and cross-functional partners to find better solutions and ideas. For example, if employees



are using phones and computers to work away from office locations, IT leaders must be involved in the decision-making. Additionally, business leaders might be able to offer solutions that have worked in their local environments. HR leaders can prioritize establishing a cross-functional flexibility team or committee to identify improvement opportunities for employees working flexibly and better enable organizational collaboration.

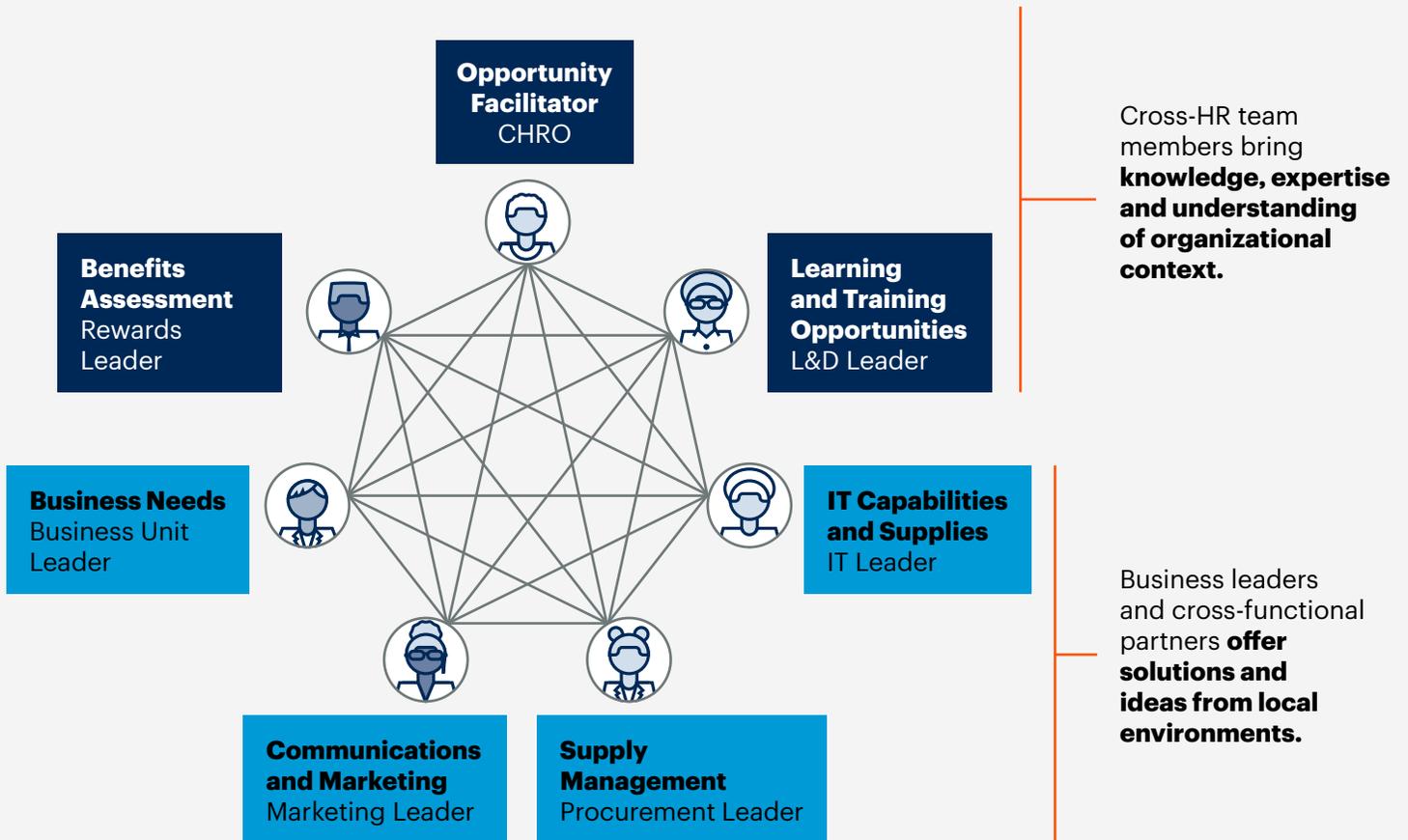
One organization, Rentokil, created a steering committee that meets quarterly with different

functional leaders to identify opportunities to improve flexibility for their employees (see Figure 4).

Organizations that make radical flexibility opportunities available to all employees can ensure they maintain productivity among their teams while still providing choice for employees. Successfully creating radical flexibility options for all employees can increase performance throughout the organization.

¹2021 Gartner EVP Employee Survey (n = 5,000 employees worldwide)

Figure 4. Key Insights of Rentokil’s Cross-Functional Steering Committee



Source: Adapted From Rentokil



Use Talent Analytics to Redesign Your Hybrid Workplace

by Jonah Shepp, Ryan Hill, Nicole Kyle and Emily Rose McRae

HR analytics leaders hold critical insights that can help inform key decisions their organizations need to make about the return to the workplace. Prepandemic data is a valuable tool for designing hybrid-friendly workspaces for the postpandemic environment.

HR analytics leaders are looking to help their organizations make better business decisions as they prepare to bring employees back into the workplace and begin managing a more hybrid workforce. Talent data can be a valuable tool for:

- Organizing the return to the workplace
- Splitting employees' time between in-office and remote work
- Choosing models of hybrid work for individual employees, teams and business units
- Equipping managers to better lead hybrid teams

- Shifting from assigned to shared seating
- Developing long-term strategies for office space allocation

The best solutions to these problems depend on the organization's unique needs and circumstances, but in most cases, business leaders can make better-informed choices using data the talent analytics team already has, or can obtain relatively easily. CHROs and HR analytics leaders should embrace this opportunity to demonstrate the value of talent analytics in making these critical decisions.

If your organization has not experimented with hybrid work in the past, you may not think you have data that is relevant to a hybrid workforce strategy, but prepandemic data can inform postpandemic workforce model decisions. Which employees spend the most time in the office? What spaces do they use most, and for what purposes? Who collaborates with whom, whether or not they are officially on the same team? If you can find answers to these questions in historical data, you can design future strategies around those insights that better reflect how work really gets done in the organization.

The Return to the Workplace

An urgent priority for many employers in the coming months is bringing employees back into shared workspaces while upholding public health best practices and ensuring employees feel safe and supported in the process. Talent analytics can be valuable in planning the return to the workplace and managing the new work environment once the return is underway.

- **Planning the return:** Historical badge or sensor data, as well as organizational network analysis (ONA), can help HR and business unit leaders understand how teams and employees tend to interact and collaborate in a shared space. This analysis can help prioritize who should return to the office and when by identifying which teams benefit most from physical proximity and which can continue to work effectively in a remote setting. Networking and performance data collected during the COVID-19 pandemic, in combination with survey data about employee preferences, can also show which employees or teams are working well in a fully remote environment and which have been struggling. Those working well can therefore be lower priorities for returning to the office.
- **Communicating the plan:** In surveys, employees are often frustrated when they have to answer questions about coming back to the workplace but are not presented with a vision of what they might be coming back to. Though it is impossible to predict exactly how the workplace will evolve in the next normal, hypothesize instead what it will look like in the coming year, while there's still some social distancing, and what it might look like in two or three years. The data described above

can also be used to develop that vision and communicate it to employees.

- **Managing the workplace:** As offices reopen and employees resume in-person interactions, continue collecting data on work patterns to optimize the employee experience and ensure employees have the right mix of spaces to perform collaborative and focused work in the office. If you have data showing how employees move around throughout the day, it can inform decisions about where to place people within the workplace, which is especially important while pandemic-related social distancing and hygiene measures remain in effect.



Assigned or Shared Seating in the Hybrid Office?

Fifty-five percent of organizations tell us they will have more shared seating after the pandemic than before.¹ Prior to the pandemic, 20% of companies had more than 25% of their workforce in shared seating; postpandemic, this is expected to increase to 59% (see Figure 1). When more employees are working remotely at least some of the time, fewer of them will need dedicated individual workspaces.

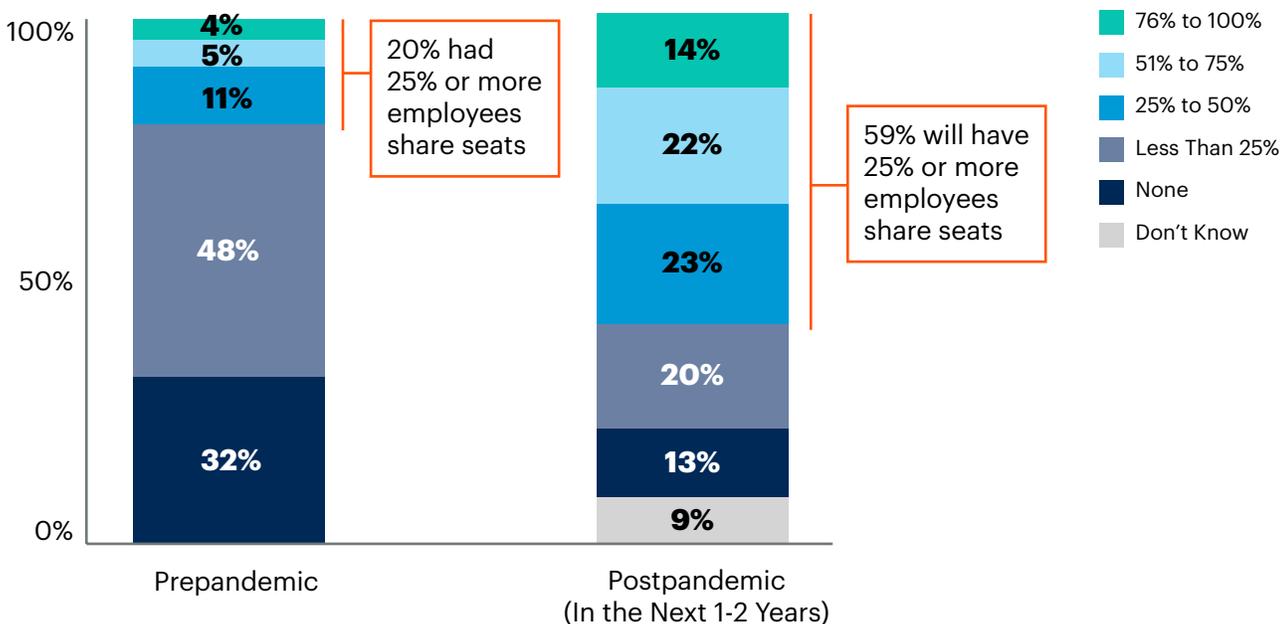
A simple threshold based on badge and access data can help predict how much shared seating your workplace can accommodate. For instance, many organizations plan to use the rule that employees who spend three days a week or more at home give up their assigned seats. So, to figure out your ratio of shared-to-assigned seats, set your threshold, then look at historical badging data to estimate how many days per week, per employee a given team or business unit will work from home. Even prepandemic

When more employees are working remotely at least some of the time, fewer of them will need dedicated individual workspaces.

data can tell you a lot about who will want to work from home in a postpandemic world. It was already common for organizations to assign seats to employees in flexible arrangements who ended up rarely or never using them. If seat utilization rates were low before the pandemic, they will likely be even lower now.

Survey and voice of the employee data can also inform this transition, but only if it is collected purposefully. Knowing that an employee would prefer a dedicated desk or office won't necessarily help determine whether they really need one, especially if they are only coming into the office once or twice a week. It doesn't help you decide what to do when you can't meet their

Figure 1. CRE Leaders' Estimates of Percentage of Employees in Shared Seating
Percentage of Respondents



n = 56 CRE leaders (prepandemic); 127 CRE leaders (postpandemic)

Source: 2021 Gartner CRE Shared Seating Survey

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% because of rounding.



expectations, either. When people say they want a dedicated office, why are they saying that? What does a dedicated office represent for them?

A better approach is to ask employees to rank aspects of a dedicated workspace (e.g., space for personal items, ease of access to colleagues, predictable light and sound environment) in terms of what makes them most effective at work. If you can figure out what purpose the dedicated workplace is serving for employees, you can find ways to fulfill those employee needs and preferences without necessarily having to assign seats.

The seating question relates to the broader logistical challenges of a hybrid workforce: specifically, making sure groups of people who need to work together can be in the office at the same time. To address this, you can use some of the same prepandemic data (work pattern analysis, sensor data, etc.) and look at how teams were operating: How much of their time was spent in groups of more than five, in one-on-one meetings, or in focused solo work? For example, if you see that a team tends to meet on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays, you can encourage them to schedule their collaborative activities on two days instead of three, opening up more flexibility for employees. More recent calendar data can also be useful here, with the caveat that the unusual circumstances of the pandemic may have produced patterns that don't reflect what happens when employees are in the office.

Designing the Workplace of the Future

When we asked executives to tell us the kind of design elements they expected to invest in postpandemic, they expected investment in workstations and individual spaces would fall while investment in collaboration spaces and informal meeting spaces would increase. This is consistent with what we would expect to see for organizations that pursue a hybrid workforce model.

Most organizations are hesitant to make large-scale capital investments right now, given the uncertainty in the business environment and the fact that the hybrid model is still experimental. Total redesigns of the workplace may be off the table for the time being, but talent analytics can inform incremental changes this year and plans for bigger changes in the future.

The first step in designing the future workplace is monitoring how employee work patterns are changing. That means not just who is going to the building, but where employees tend to work, with whom and on what type of activity. For example, suppose ONA data shows that meetings of four to seven people were on the rise before the pandemic, while employee surveys suggest teams prefer to have meetings in person. Thus, the future model for that workplace might include more small conference rooms for meetings of groups that size.

If you can't get that data from a system, you might get it from a survey. To obtain actionable data, ask employees to assess whether they find their home office or the corporate workplace more conducive to specific activities: focused work, meetings, one-on-one collaboration, client interactions and so forth. Complement that with a question about frequency: How much of the workweek do they spend on each of these activities? You can use that data to build employee profiles and cross-reference the profiles against demographic data to ensure your framework is inclusive.

The goal is not only to understand how employees are using space, but also to teach them how to use space more intentionally and specifically. Work pattern analysis data and badge data can help identify patterns and habits employees didn't know they had.

The Path Forward

In the near future, the hybrid work environment will also change the nature of the data you need to collect for actionable talent analytics. As workplaces become less focused on individual workstations and more on collaborative spaces, HR will need to use a wider range of tools to produce actionable insights. For example, badge data is useful for knowing when someone comes into the building, but it doesn't tell you what they're doing in the building. HR analytics leaders thinking long-term about how to support work by improving the workplace experience will increasingly rely on other data (e.g., wifi tracking, sensor data or digital ONA tools) to understand what spaces are being used and how.

As workplaces become less focused on individual workstations and more on collaborative spaces, HR will need to use a wider range of tools to produce actionable insights.

¹2021 Gartner CRE Shared Seating Survey for Corporate Real Estate Leaders and CFO Gartner Research Circle Members



Driving Inclusive Well-Being for Every Employee in the Hybrid World

by Ashley Preston and Lauren Romansky



The sharp increase in hybrid working models in 2021 has left leaders considering the effects on different talent segments' preferences, engagement and performance. HR leaders should guard against iniquity by moving beyond averages to consider how hybrid work may affect different employee segments.

As organizations design hybrid work arrangements, HR leaders should rely on data and analytics, especially around business needs and employee preferences, to shape the strategy. But HR leaders must also look beyond misleading averages to take into account the needs and preferences of different talent

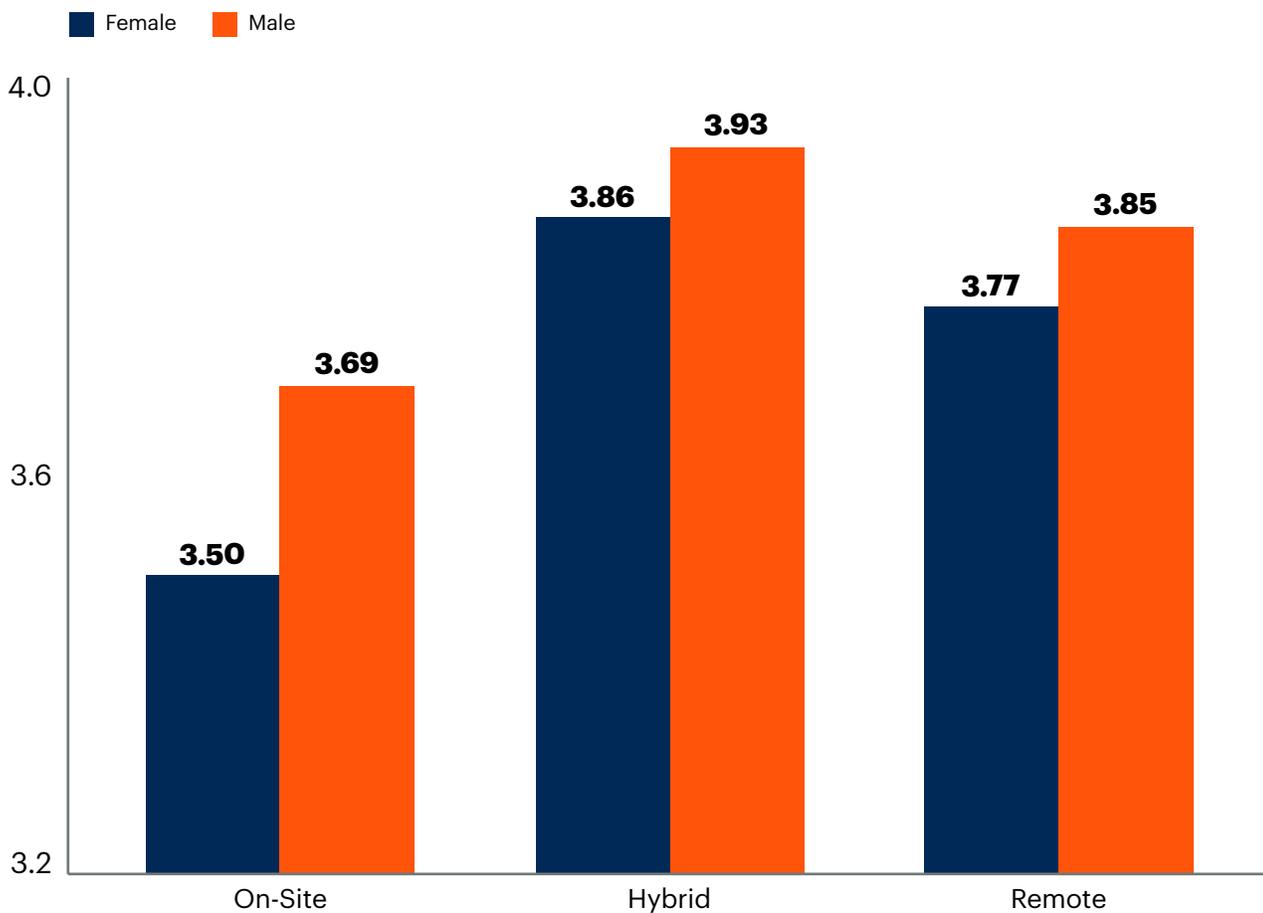
segments that may be underrepresented in the overall figures. Specifically, by looking at how different segments, diversified and intersected in gender, ability and more, perform in hybrid environments, organizations can enable a better employment value proposition (EVP) and ensure their work environments are inclusive for all.

All Types of Employees Can Thrive in Hybrid Environments

The shift to hybrid work has felt disruptive and abrupt for many employees, though many have also welcomed it and found it exciting. As organizations embrace this tension and work toward establishing more permanent hybrid models, they should emphasize the

positive impact hybrid environments can have on employees' overall well-being. In an index based on nine indicators of physical, behavioral, emotional and financial well-being, employees in hybrid environments report the highest levels of well-being, compared to fully on-site and fully remote workers (see Figure 1). While men report higher feelings of well-being than women in all three work arrangements, the gender gap in well-being decreases by over 60% for those in a hybrid environment compared to those in an entirely on-site environment.

Figure 1. Gender Differences in Well-Being Among Work Environment Types
Average Rating



On-Site n = 630, Female n = 378; Hybrid n = 1,452, Female n = 539; Remote n = 949, Female n = 481
Source: 2021 Gartner Hybrid Work Employee Survey

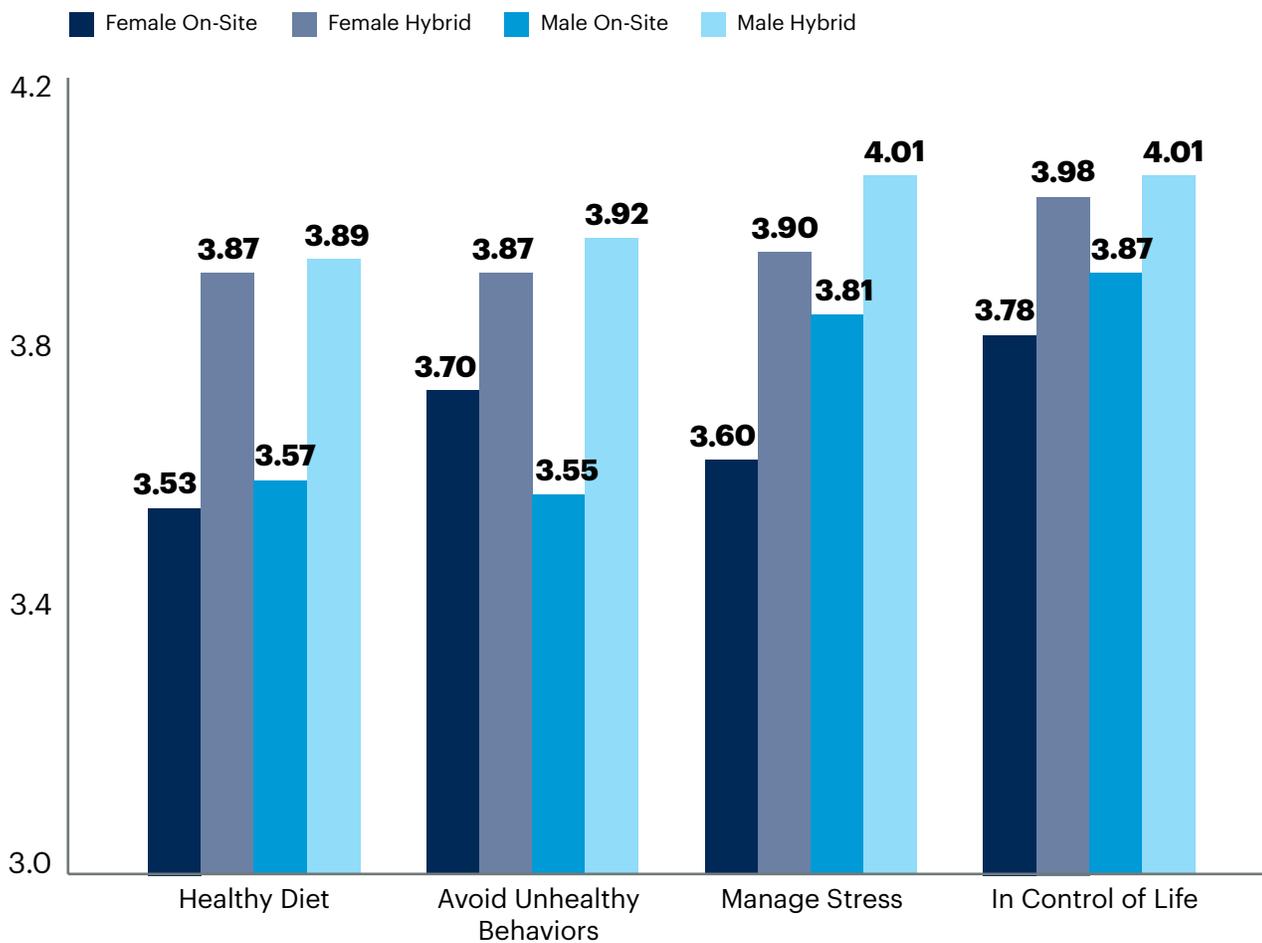
Hybrid Environments Can Enhance Well-Being, but Gender Gaps Remain

To understand how a hybrid work environment helps employees thrive, we examined its impact on employees' ability to manage stress and maintain healthy diets, among other elements of well-being. Both male and female employees in hybrid environments report higher scores on these well-being indicators than those in full-time

on-site environments. Gender gaps in well-being are smaller, but not eliminated, in the hybrid setting (see Figure 2).

To help close these gender gaps, HR leaders should consider ways to support different talent segments in the aspects of well-being with which they tend to struggle, such as financial wellness and professional development. Currently, regardless of work environment, 59% of women somewhat or strongly agree that they feel prepared to meet long-term financial obligations (e.g., retirement), compared to 65% of men¹

Figure 2. Well-Being Differences in Work Arrangements by Gender
Average Agreement



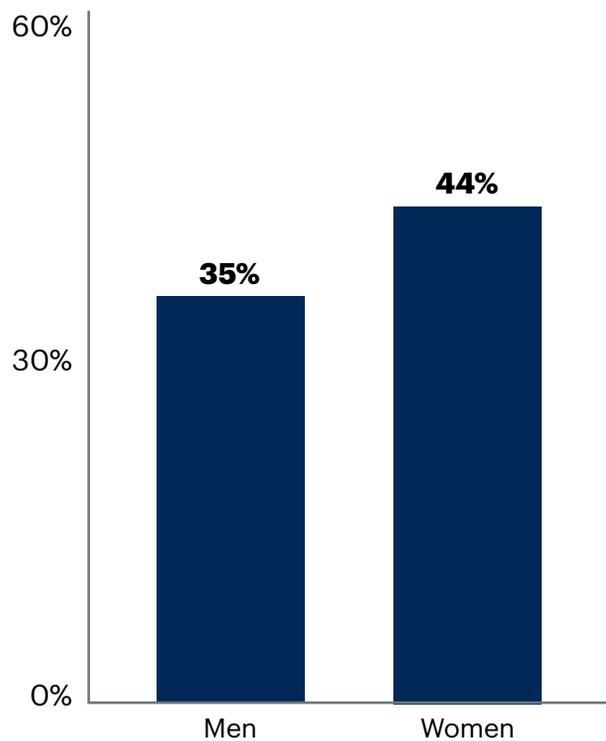
On-Site n = 630, Female n = 378; Hybrid n = 1,452, Female n = 539
Source: 2021 Gartner Hybrid Work Employee Survey

Fewer women (61%) than men (67%) agree that they can pursue their professional goals or personal passions without too much difficulty. To close this gap, organizations should engage with women in their workforce to learn how to help them feel financially and professionally secure in their new, hybrid work environments.

Employees' emotional well-being should also be taken into consideration. Forty-four percent of women experience burnout, compared to 35% of men, as organizations transition their working models (see Figure 3). This burnout can be partly tied to the effects of the pandemic, of course, but organizations should recognize that hybrid environments pose some of the same risks of burnout as fully remote arrangements do. And these risks are not distributed evenly among the workforce.

Employees who have gradually redefined work boundaries or noticed a deterioration in work-life separation are at risk of burnout, given the rapid rate of change in which they've been operating. In fact, 16% of women strongly agree that they feel emotionally drained from their work, compared to 11% of men.¹ To boost employees' emotional well-being, organizations can explore various offerings that enable employees to prioritize their own self-care, such as employee assistance programs, meeting-free days or fitness incentives.

Figure 3. Feelings of Burnout
By Gender



n = 3,001

Q: To what extent do you agree with the following statement? I feel burnt out.

Source: 2021 Gartner Inclusion Initiatives Employee Survey



Both Men and Women Find Hybrid Environments More Inclusive

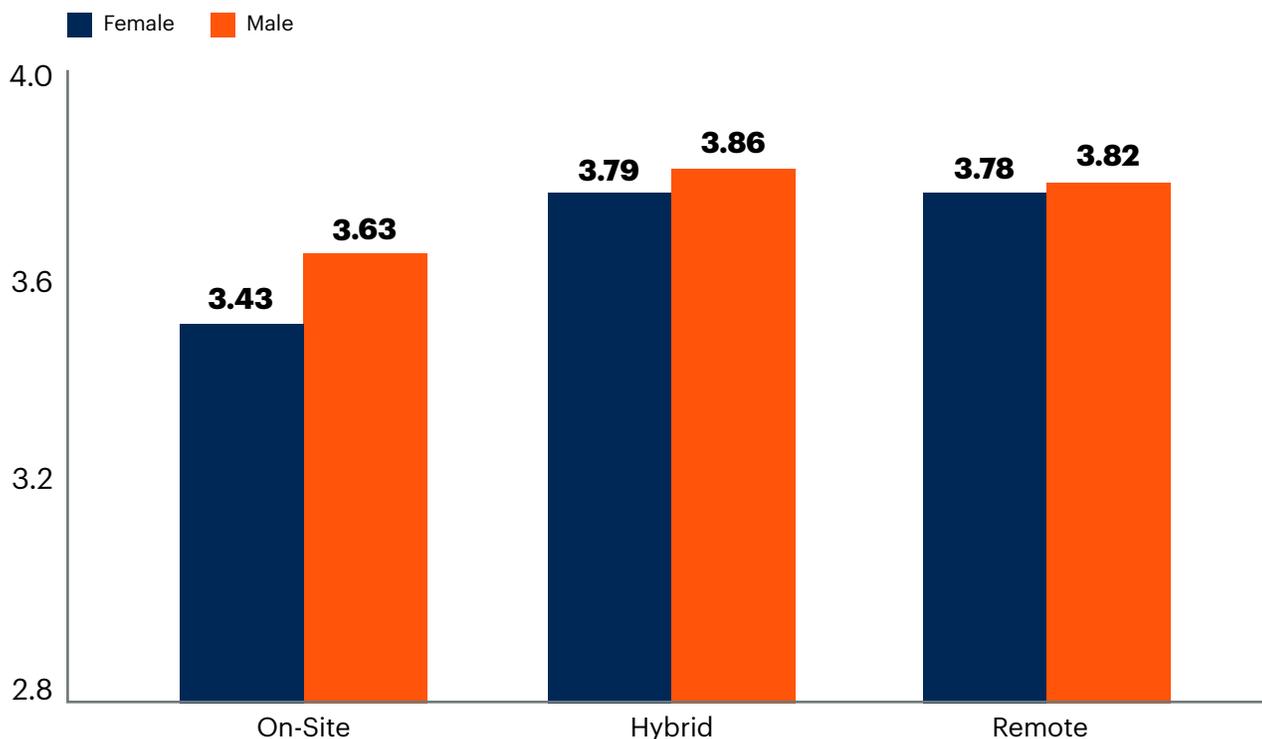
In addition to greater overall well-being, hybrid employees experience a greater overall sense of inclusion, compared to fully on-site or fully remote workers. Although feelings of inclusion increase among both men and women, women still report lower rates of inclusion than men do (see Figure 4).

As it stands, only 50% of women somewhat or strongly agree that senior leadership acts in their best interests, compared to 55% of men.¹ To ensure women thrive in the hybrid environment, senior leaders should take into account the different preferences that women in the workforce might have. For example, more entry-level women than entry-level men (58% vs.

50%) report a preference to work remotely two to five days a week. Using this kind of preference data, HR leaders can identify ways to better include and accommodate the work styles and preferences of each talent segment.¹

However, it is important not to create new inequities in responding to employee preferences. For example, if your organization receives and accommodates a greater number of requests for remote work from female employees, does your office become male-dominated and unwelcoming to women? Do women miss out on opportunities for advancement because they get less in-person face time with their managers? Are they seen as less dedicated and penalized in performance evaluations? In designing an inclusive hybrid work environment, HR leaders must anticipate these potential trade-offs and plan for hidden consequences.

Figure 4. Gender Differences in Inclusion Across Work Environments
Average Well-Being

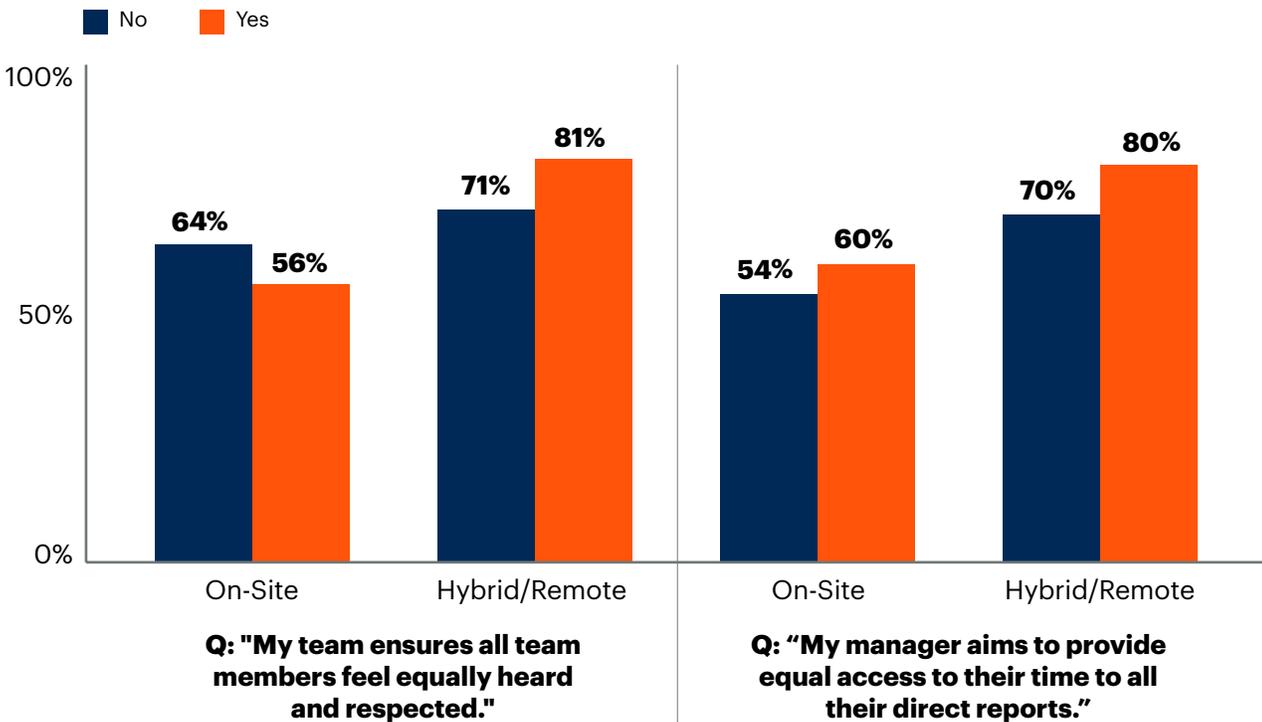


On-site n = 630, Female n = 378; Hybrid n = 1,452, Female n = 539;
Remote n = 949, Female n = 481

Source: 2021 Gartner Hybrid Work Employee Survey

Figure 5. How Employees With Disabilities View Hybrid Environments

Percentage of Knowledge Workers With Disabilities Who Agree



n = 2,410 hybrid/remote knowledge workers with disabilities

Source: 2021 Gartner Hybrid Work Employee Survey

Employees With Disabilities Respond Favorably to Hybrid Environments

Another potential upside for inclusion in the hybrid environment concerns employees with disabilities. Organizations that have taken the opportunity to redesign work for the entire workforce are well-positioned to also rethink the way they onboard and accommodate employees with disabilities. The pandemic revealed that employees with disabilities tend to prefer hybrid environments, where they feel they receive fairer treatment from both managers and the organization. Specifically, employees with disabilities are more likely in a hybrid environment to report that their team ensures everyone feels equally respected and that their managers aim to provide all direct reports with equal access to their time (see Figure 5).

Conclusion

Organizations want to capture the present opportunity to redesign work. To do so, they must take into account the varied impacts hybrid environments have on different talent segments. As new processes, incentives and offerings are developed to support hybrid arrangements, HR leaders should regularly monitor employees' well-being and inclusion to ensure that each talent segment receives equitable opportunities for growth and success.

¹2021 Gartner Hybrid Workforce AER Panel Survey

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Interview

Unlearn Obsolete Collaboration Habits With Alastair Simpson

by Charlotte Siewick

Alastair Simpson, Dropbox's VP of design, shares about the partnership between Dropbox's people and design teams to design the company's new Virtual First work environment, and how Dropbox helps HR leaders and employees unlearn outdated work habits and collaborate more intentionally.



Alastair Simpson VP of Design at Dropbox

Alastair Simpson leads the design team at Dropbox across brand, product design, writing, research, ops and the future of work. He works to turn human-centered design inward to design the future of work at Dropbox, called Virtual First.

Dropbox announced its transition to a “Virtual First” company in October 2020. Now, working outside an office will be the primary experience for all employees. We spoke with Alastair Simpson, Dropbox’s VP of design, to learn about the partnership between Dropbox’s people and design teams and how Dropbox helps business leaders and employees unlearn outdated work habits to shift to a Virtual First mindset.

In your own words, what is Virtual First?

Virtual First is a shift in how we work. With Virtual First, we’ll need to rethink everything from our schedules to our social contracts. This means challenging some of our basic assumptions about how great work gets done — leading to better work and quality of life for our teams. It’s not telecommuting from Mars. But it is fundamentally different from just combining in-person work with remote work.

While our teams will work from home most of the time, we still believe that in-person engagement is critical to preserving human connection and culture. When it’s safe to return to the office, employees will come together for intentional collaboration — like strategy meetings, in-person learning experiences and team events — in physical spaces called Dropbox studios. This gives us the ability to gather for meaningful moments of in-person collaboration and build community without a daily commute.

Can you tell us more about your role on Virtual First as the VP of design? Why did the design team get involved in the future of work at Dropbox?

As VP of design, I am jointly accountable with our chief people officer; we’re co-leads on the Virtual First team. This project has such a wide impact across teams, and designers are natural facilitators in matrixed organizations. We needed a strong partnership between design and the people team to break down silos across the organization. We also wanted to take an inclusive approach.

Design has always been incredibly important at Dropbox — we create simple, intuitive and well-designed products for our clients. Virtual First was a unique situation where our product strategy directly informed our people strategy. We wanted to turn our human-centered design

approach inward to support our people, too. Humans are fundamental to Virtual First, so it was a great way to bring people and design together for a common cause. I would advocate for more HR leaders to partner with design.

Human-Centered Design

A problem-solving approach involving the human perspective at each step of the problem-solving process.

Who should be responsible for work design in the organization, and how do you see HR’s role in that dynamic?

The people team ensures that we have the foundational structures in place to keep our teams healthy, while design focuses on the systems and practices that make effective work happen. Research, experimentation and exploration are core to innovating in this space, alongside policy and governance. By working together, the teams act as a balancing force between compliance and innovation. Our shared ownership model ensures that everything, from new rules to our tools, sets Dropboxers up for success.

What has been an advantage of the partnership?

Research has been one of the most fruitful collaborations. The design and people teams triangulate insights from employee diary studies (analyzing employee calendars), employee sentiment surveys and people analytics to better understand employees’ nuanced and complex needs. For example, we saw positive sentiment around working from home in employee surveys, but employees were also concerned about managing work-life balance and incorporating flexible time into their calendars. We delved further into this data via diary studies with pilot groups, which gave us more insight into the challenges and benefits of working from home. We’ve used these insights to adjust our practices and policies.

As a designer, what do you think are the most important assumptions about work that we have to confront moving forward?

- **The traditional 9 to 5 is dead.** Concepts like “core collaboration hours,” which are four-hour time blocks where teams are available for synchronous collaboration (responding to teammates, discussing ideas, etc.), asynchronous collaboration by default and nonlinear workdays (an eight-hour day that does not follow the standard 9-to-5 convention) will give people freedom to manage their workdays in ways that fit their lives.
- **We need to meet talent where they are.** Talent is abundant, but opportunities have not yet been evenly distributed. As we embrace Virtual First, we’ll be able to hire talented people everywhere and become more inclusive in how we design and build products.
- **Wellness is no longer optional.** We must safeguard our workforce from burnout and make well-being a key performance indicator of high performing teams.

Let’s talk about how your team designed Virtual First. How did Dropbox decide that collaboration and community building would be the main purpose for Dropbox studios?

We listened to employees as the pandemic hit. Through that, we learned employees missed in-person collaboration and meaningful moments. As a designer who works with cross-functional partners and facilitates groups, I know firsthand that my team, for example, needs to be together to collaborate in key, difficult moments. It’s important to come together as human beings — coming together as colleagues, breaking bread — to build trust and community.

The pandemic was difficult, but it leveled the playing field for many employees. We wanted to preserve the best aspects of both remote and in-person; the best of remote allows employees the flexibility and freedom with how they live, work and set up their days. The best of in-person allows human connection. We needed to be as prescriptive as possible with what Dropbox studios would be used for. It needed to be special when employees came together.

Virtual First is a major change from employees’ old ways of working; teams need to be more intentional about when they come together in the Dropbox studios, for example. What’s hard about making the switch to Virtual First?

It’s incredibly hard to unlearn habits — even when they no longer serve us. We’re trying to emphasize to employees that shifting mindsets from colocated to remote, and from synchronous to asynchronous by default, is a huge shift for everybody. Work has always been 9 to 5, in the office, and working with your hands — not your head or heart. All of us need to unlearn those habits, not just Dropbox employees.

To make the switch to asynchronous by default, it’s important that employees know they have permission to say “no” to a meeting. Here’s a small anecdote. I got a meeting request for a 30-minute meeting with five people. In total, that’s 150 minutes. I replied what I thought about the problem and solution, and said if we need to meet to align, that’s OK, but it shouldn’t be our first response. We ended up not meeting, as we solved the problem in a few minutes asynchronously.

How does Dropbox help its employees “unlearn” these outdated habits?

We have our Virtual First toolkit, a practical set of guidelines and practices (not processes), that help employees make this transition. It’s focused on practices like using an individual change mindset and supporting your own well-being. Think “hands, head and heart.” We’re piloting resources in the toolkit with 100 people and are asking what is or isn’t working — we’re listening to our people diligently. Inspiring behavior change companywide is extremely difficult, so we’re taking a learning mindset with rolling out Virtual First. We don’t expect to get it right on our first try.

We’re also leaning into leadership role modeling. With our nonlinear work days, leaders build and share their schedules, too. I shared my calendar internally and on our blog; on Friday’s I finish work at 1 p.m. and take my kids to soccer. We’re already hearing feedback that people now feel permission to feed their kids at lunch and have dinner with their kids, guilt-free.

What key takeaways have you learned so far in transitioning to Virtual First?

We conducted a large research study with employees across the company to unpack how employees are comprehending and adopting Virtual First practices. Here's what we learned:

- **People need concrete guidance and support** to shift to new ways of working, especially for unlearning the intangible aspects of our culture (shared, unspoken behaviors and norms). We're developing resources (i.e., toolkit, training) on the most critical behaviors and strategies.
- **All-day synchronous work causes burnout.** Instead, working together in short bursts can be especially productive for virtual teams. The goal is to empower a more flexible and nimble workforce.
- **Relationships may seem harder to establish in a virtual world,** especially for new hires and people earlier in their careers. We're rolling out new tools to foster serendipitous connection and are appointing cultural champions across the company to strengthen our remote community.

“Partnering with design on Dropbox’s future of work strategy helped us [people leaders] create a more comprehensive strategy that connects to the business overall — Virtual First influences not only how we work together, but also how effectively we build products. Working with design brought a fresh perspective on people issues like relocation, benefits and perks, and the end-to-end employee experience.”

Allison Vendt, Dropbox’s global head of people strategy and operations and analytics





3 Outdated Assumptions That Damage Your Hybrid Work Design

by Alexia Cambon

For decades, work design has been based on inherited assumptions that have damaging implications for equity, innovation and performance. The pandemic has revealed how outdated these assumptions are and given HR leaders an opportunity to make work design less office-centric and more human-centric.

The eight-hour work day was first passed into law in Illinois in 1867, and in 1926, Henry Ford — possibly influenced by U.S. labor unions — instituted an eight-hour work day for his manufacturing staff. Placing the eight-hour work day from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. made sense in the industrial world, where one of the primary conditions required for success on the manufacturing belt was adequate lighting. Thus, a reasonable system was based on a reasonable assumption: Work takes place from 9 in the morning until 5 in the afternoon, when natural light is most abundant.

This system endured past the Industrial Age, and organizations still hang onto it now, even though natural daylight is no longer a

prerequisite for most work. The majority of the workforce today is made up of knowledge workers who are not only able to work at any time of day, but who, in some cases, may actually perform better outside the usual 9-to-5 framework. The 9-to-5 workday is one example of a system we have retained based on an outdated assumption: that work must be done at certain times of day.

Outdated assumptions that inform work design are everywhere, and it is hard to unsee them once you start looking for them. This became apparent to us as we began researching what we deemed the fundamental work design shift of the hybrid future: from office-centric work design to human-centric work design.

Consider another system we have inherited, this time from the 1950s, when knowledge work became more common. Workers found themselves commuting from their suburban homes to work in offices in the city, and the best way to get work done was to meet in conference rooms. This made sense in an era when asynchronous work meant waiting for a memo to be hand-delivered 10 floors down, and a reasonable response time would be several days if not weeks. But the invention of the internet, and the subsequent innovations that followed — email, Google Drive, Microsoft Teams — means asynchronous work is now just as effective, if not more so, than synchronous work. So why are we still hanging onto a culture of meetings?

If one thing has become clear about work during the COVID-19 pandemic, it's that when we force workers to operate in systems that are based on outdated assumptions, bad things happen. We know that the global workforce is tired. Fatigue and burnout were some of the most commonly cited concerns among senior leaders about their workforce in 2020. Much of this burnout is the result of the collective trauma and grief the world

has experienced during the pandemic, but how much of it also relates to being forced to work in a system that is based on outdated assumptions?

Remote working has shined a light on how outdated many of these systems are, and how tired employees have become from being forced to operate in them. Forty-two percent of current remote workers think they are working too hard in their jobs, and one in three remote workers have become less enthusiastic about their role in the last year.¹ HR leaders are aware of this: 96% of them have become increasingly concerned about employee well-being during the pandemic.² It is listed as their top concern in our HR leader survey of 2021, almost twice as concerning as outcomes such as productivity and innovation.

The truth of the matter is that outdated assumptions are driving many of HR leaders' decisions about redesigning work for the hybrid future. This is exacerbating employee fatigue by creating systems unfit for the realities of the environment. We found three primary assumptions at the root of many harmful work design strategies:

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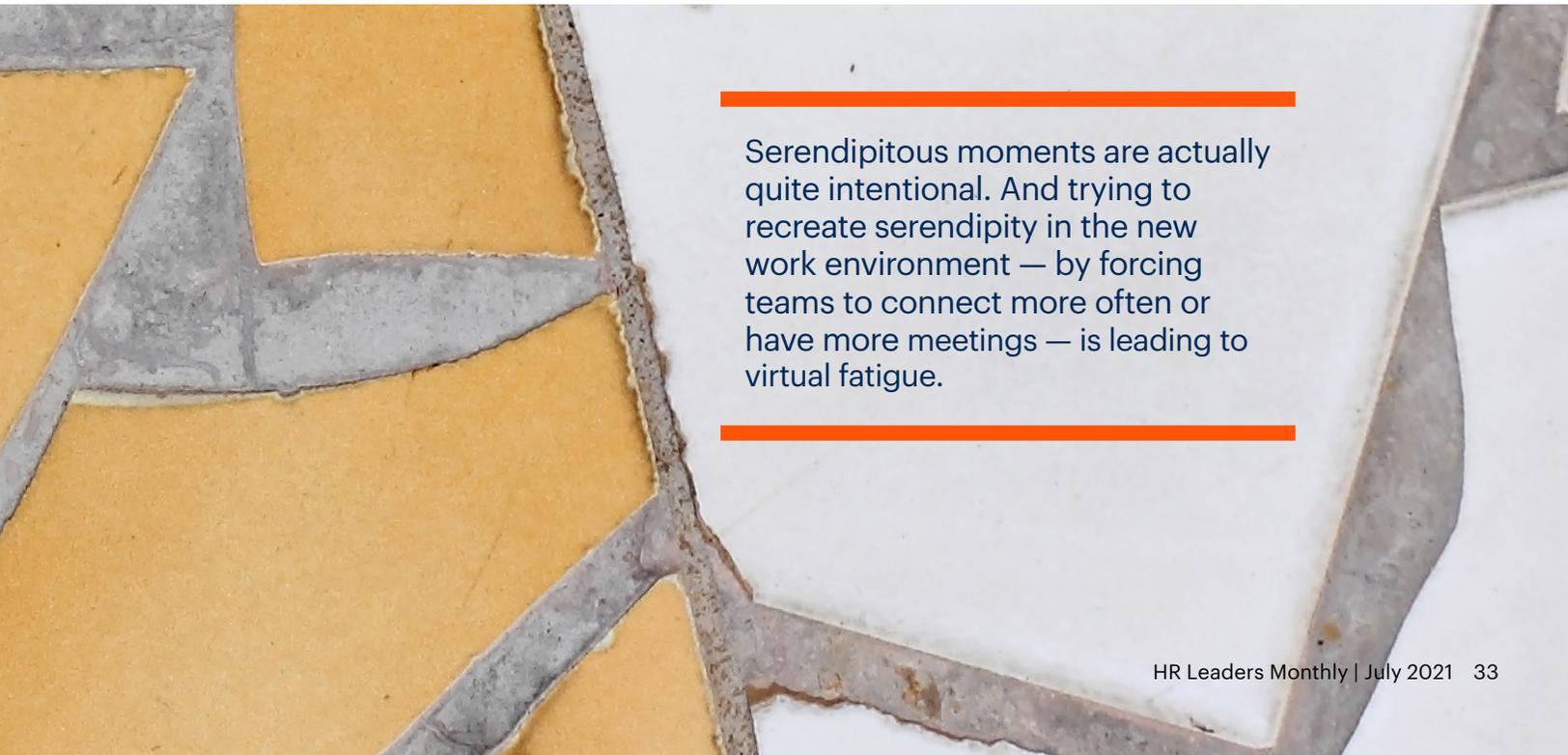
"Consistency Is the Key Ingredient of Equity"

Having grown accustomed to providing consistent work conditions, consistent work hours and consistent access to managers in the office, many HR leaders we spoke to insisted on the importance of consistent employee experiences as a way of ensuring fairness. "If I give everyone the same thing, no one can accuse me of inequity," the thinking goes. This rationale does not work in the hybrid world, where experiences almost by default will always be inconsistent from person to person. Progressive HR leaders recognize that individual experiences are consumed differently based on background, life experience and personality, so the premise that an experience could ever be equal is flawed.

Aiming for equality of experience is an outdated mode of working that was already causing harm in the office-based world. Aiming for equality of opportunity, however, is the better way to equity in the hybrid world, and this is the new principle that human-centric design must be based on. Employees can decide for themselves what their most productive and engaging work experience should be, and we must provide them the flexibility (and thus equal opportunity) to design this themselves.

"Serendipity Is the Key Ingredient of Innovation"

In every conversation we had with HR leaders, we heard them mourning the loss of the "water-cooler moment." "Everything is scheduled in the virtual world; nothing is serendipitous," was the most common refrain. HR leaders voiced their concerns that without serendipity, there could be no innovation: 73% of HR leaders believe that innovation arises through spontaneous interactions.² It is undoubtedly true that conversations are easier to strike up in the office, with colleagues physically close at hand. However, when we spoke to progressive HR leaders, they emphasized that the intention of getting up from your desk, walking to the water-cooler and starting the chat was more important than the conversation itself. In other words, serendipitous moments are actually quite intentional. And trying to recreate serendipity in the new work environment — by forcing teams to connect more often or have more meetings — is leading to virtual fatigue. Indeed, our research found that remote or hybrid knowledge workers who saw an increase in meeting time-spend during the pandemic were 24% more likely to feel emotionally drained from their work than those who did not.¹



Serendipitous moments are actually quite intentional. And trying to recreate serendipity in the new work environment — by forcing teams to connect more often or have more meetings — is leading to virtual fatigue.

Aiming for innovation by chance is our second outdated mode of working, and aiming for innovation by design is the second new principle behind human-centric design. In this more distributed world, teams innovate more effectively when we empower them to think more intentionally about how, where and when to collaborate.

"Visibility Is the Key Ingredient of Performance"

We may think that we have moved past the era of presenteeism, when seeing employees at their desks meant more to a manager than the quality of their work. However, it became clear as we researched this topic that organizations still value visibility highly and become anxious when they don't have it. Sixty-nine percent of HR leaders agree that managers have less visibility into employee work patterns in the new work environment.² As a result, we have seen a vast increase in monitoring systems that can help them get some of that visibility back. Seventy-seven percent of HR leaders are encouraging more frequent manager-employee check-ins as a way to monitor productivity, and investments in tracking technology have shot up in the last year.²

But visibility as a driver of performance is yet another myth we have taken too long to bust, and basing management practices around it is causing employees harm. Thirty-nine percent of remote workers worry about their organization tracking them, and 36% admit to sometimes pretending to be working because of the expectation to be "on" at all times.¹ Software has been created that allows employees to emulate mouse clicks when they are away from their desk: today's equivalent of leaving your coat on the back of your chair when you leave the office. Clearly, recreating that visibility is not the way forward. And progressive HR leaders agree, telling us that visibility is nowhere near as important to performance as is commonly thought, and that employers really never had it in the office. Seeing employees at their desks is no guarantee that they are working, and maybe that's OK. Maybe they don't need to be working every second of every day.

Aiming for performance by inputs is our third outdated mode of working. Instead, aiming for performance by outcomes becomes our

third new principle behind human-centric work design. Rather than looking over employees' shoulders to see if they are working, managers must contextualize employees' performance by relying less on what they see and becoming more skilled at asking questions to understand how employees feel.

¹ 2021 Gartner Hybrid Work Employee Survey

² 2021 Gartner Hybrid Work HR Leader Survey





Break Down Barriers to Intentional Collaboration

by Charlotte Siewick

In the hybrid environment, employees have more options for when, where and how to collaborate. This requires a new strategy for enabling intentional collaboration. To achieve this, HR leaders must identify and eliminate the barriers that prevent employees from collaborating intentionally.

Collaboration in a hybrid work environment is a top-of-mind concern for HR leaders. In fact, 71% of HR leaders are more concerned about employee collaboration this year than they were before the COVID-19 pandemic.¹ These concerns make sense, given the drastic shifts in how employees work together in a hybrid world. In the remote work environment, interactions are more often scheduled than spontaneous, and they mostly occur through screens. Employees don't experience the happenstance, serendipitous interactions that occur in the office, and even a simple interaction like asking a co-worker about last weekend requires

intentionality. These everyday decisions forebode a problem in the future hybrid environment: No playbook for how to collaborate in the hybrid world exists, and that puts innovation at risk.

To unleash innovation in this context, HR leaders must empower employees to collaborate more intentionally, which means equipping them with a strong awareness of how, where and when they should collaborate. Organizations can't leave collaboration to chance. Teams of knowledge workers that collaborate intentionally are nearly three times more likely to achieve high team innovation than teams that do not use an intentional approach.²

In conversations with HR leaders, we identified three barriers that prevent employees from collaborating intentionally in the hybrid world, along with progressive approaches to overcoming them (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Three Barriers to Intentional Collaboration in the Hybrid World



Source: Gartner

Barrier: Restricted Worksite Options

At organizations that adopt a hybrid model, many employees flow between multiple work sites, including their homes, the office and third spaces (e.g., a library, coffee shop or co-working space).

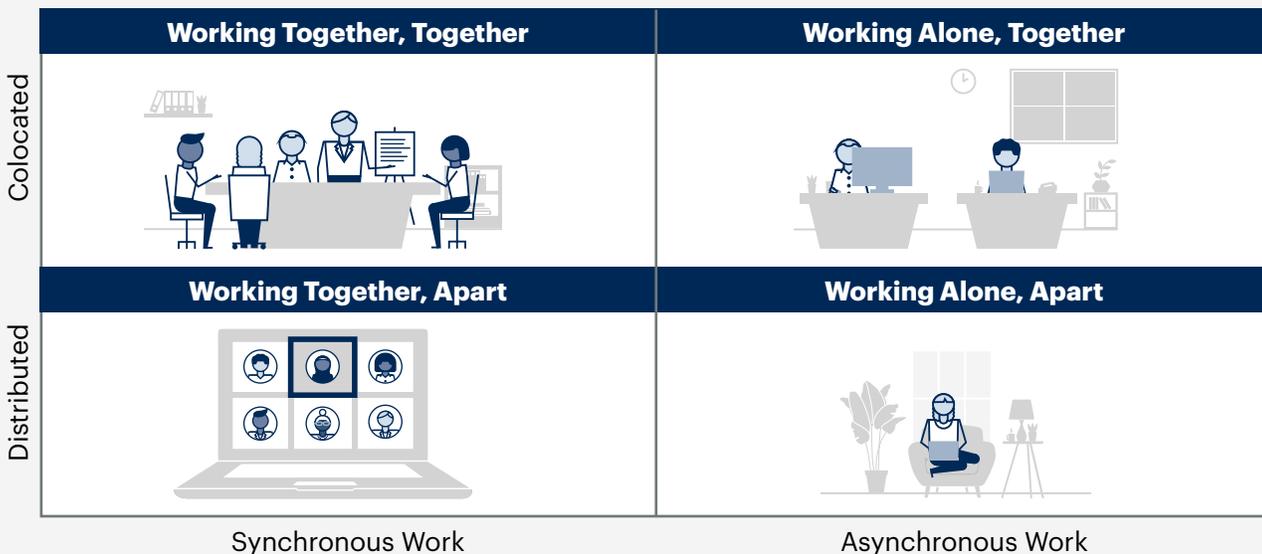
However, due to geography, home situations and other factors, some employees may not have access to productive workspaces, which restricts their options. For some employees, the home office space may not be suitable for long-term work. For others, it may be impractical to commute to the office regularly due to distance or personal needs. These restrictions pose a challenge when employees have conflicting expectations or needs for flexible work. This barrier has important implications for the organization’s employee value proposition because employees expect more flexibility in the long term: 67% of employees say their expectations for working flexibly have increased since last year.²

Solution: Empower Equitable Access to Worksite Options

As organizations reconfigure their real estate for a hybrid workforce, it’s an HR imperative to empower employees to have equitable access to different worksites (see Figure 2). For many organizations, this means thinking more intentionally about the different ways employees collaborate — distributed, colocated, synchronously and asynchronously — and

Figure 2. Four Collaboration Modes in the Hybrid Environment

Collaboration Modes Charted by Location and Time-Spend



Source: Gartner (2021)

investing equally in each. For employees who will continue to work from home at least some of the time, HR should invest in improving their personalized worksites (e.g., with ergonomic chairs, caregiver support or fitness memberships). For those who can't easily access the office but enjoy working alongside peers, the organization should subsidize memberships to co-working spaces. Organizations must also offer guidance on the use cases and advantages of each workspace so employees know when and how to use each most effectively.

Barrier: Fatigue From Legacy Collaboration Habits

In the remote world, employees primarily collaborate over video calls, often resulting in back-to-back meetings and fatigue. Hybrid employees who have seen an increase in the amount of time spent in one-on-one meetings with peers are 1.37 times more likely to feel emotionally drained from work.² HR leaders recognize this threat: 76% of HR leaders agree that an increase in the number of virtual touchpoints employees face in their work puts them at risk for burnout.¹ On top of this challenge, employees take on the added administrative task of optimizing how they collaborate. Adding more tasks without assisting employees in handling them more efficiently is a recipe for burnout.

Solution: Work Asynchronously by Default

To mitigate fatigue from legacy collaboration habits, HR leaders must free up employee time by having employees work asynchronously, not synchronously, by default. Resetting this habit involves three critical steps:

- Limit synchronous collaboration by setting core collaboration hours when employees should be available to collaborate synchronously, if needed.
- Have employees block time for focused work and personal time (i.e., wellness breaks, caretaking responsibilities).
- Employ nonlinear scheduling so employees know they can design their workweek around when work happens best for them, not just 9 to 5.

To assist employees in changing these deep-seated collaboration habits, HR leaders should encourage leadership role modeling, like having leaders share their flexible work schedules and personal stories on the company intranet. Leadership role modeling shows employees that the organization not only allows, but also encourages them to dedicate time to collaborating more intentionally in the ways that are best for their work and life needs. To further enforce the reset, HR leaders should set up dedicated times for teams to meet and align on their hybrid collaboration strategies.



Barrier: Non-Inclusive Team Environments

At most organizations, it's the managers' responsibility to set and improve hybrid collaboration norms for their teams. Despite managers' best intentions, having them set these norms prevents intentional collaboration if employees don't have a platform to improve their team's collaboration. Thus, a manager-led approach creates collaboration patterns that work for some, but not all team members. For example, if most of the team is colocated, and one employee always joins team meetings remotely, the remote team member may struggle to be heard during team meetings. If remote employees don't have a platform to speak up, ongoing concerns may go unnoticed. Noninclusive team norms risk a situation in which employees feel disengaged from their teams and can't contribute to the best of their abilities.

Solution: Democratize Team Health Improvements

To build the organization's intentional collaboration strategy inclusively, all team members must have an equal voice in sharing what is or isn't working. HR leaders can encourage managers and their teams to hear all voices equally by creating a team health diagnostic that allows team members to anonymously rate their team health and make challenges visible to all team members. Teams can use results from the diagnostic to identify focus areas and continually improve. To drive employee ownership of improving team health, HR should provide self-service tools and resources directly aligned to these focus areas.

Intentional collaboration is a journey, not a destination, and all levels of the business must take an active role in setting the organization on a course for success. Leadership must serve as a role model for the organization's vision of new collaboration behaviors for the future of work. HR leaders must provide concrete guidance, tools and resources to support employees. For strong team health, teams must democratize how they improve their collaboration strategies, and they must take ownership of them.

¹ 2021 Gartner Hybrid Work HR Leader Survey

² 2021 Gartner Hybrid Work Employee Survey



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5 Ways to Rethink Role Design for Hybrid Work

by Jeremy Fuller



HR leaders now have an opportunity to change role design in ways that will help their organizations realize the benefits of hybrid and flexible working. These five strategies for rethinking role design will help HR leaders optimize roles for the hybrid future of work.

For many organizations, reopening the office in the postpandemic world means moving to a hybrid working model where employees split their work time between the office and home. Employees have proven they can be productive working from home, and many want to continue. In fact, if given the choice, 68% of workers currently working in hybrid or remote environments would prefer an arrangement where they split the workweek between remote and on-site days. Another 27% would prefer to work remotely five days a week. Only 4% of workers currently working in hybrid or remote environments say they want to work only in the office.¹

HR leaders who prepare their organizations for hybrid work will not only keep up with employee expectations but unlock a host of talent and business advantages:

- When employees have the flexibility to choose where, when and how they work, organizations see gains in both inclusion and performance. Employees with high flexibility are three times more likely to experience high levels of inclusion and are twice as likely to be high-performing.²
- Job candidates increasingly seek flexibility. In the past year, 65% of candidates have discontinued an application process because of unmet expectations, with work-life balance the most common reason other than compensation. Today, 42% of candidates expect to influence the job design of a role (e.g., where and when they work).³
- Organizations that provide locational flexibility can access a wider talent pool and improve diversity.

To enable successful hybrid work, HR leaders must go beyond sorting existing roles into buckets of hybrid-capable and office-only jobs. Instead of being limited by role design from the on-site world, HR leaders should take this opportunity to rethink role design for hybrid work. Here, we cover five different ways HR leaders can adapt role design to realize the benefits of hybrid working.

1 Start From Tasks, Not Roles

Instead of asking which roles can be performed remotely, HR leaders should work with managers and business unit leaders to examine which tasks must be performed in the office and which can be performed at home or another location. Analyzing tasks can reveal opportunities to improve flexibility and give managers and

employees greater clarity on where, when and how they can best accomplish work.

HR leaders should consider two dimensions to decide which tasks are well-suited for hybrid work (see Figure 1):

1. Feasibility of delivering outcomes: Does the task rely on face-to-face interactions with customers or benefit from synchronous collaboration with co-workers? If either is true, the flexibility of when and where to perform the task may be limited.
2. Portability of resources: Does the task require the use of specific equipment or technology? Employees may be required to work on-site to access it.

As much as possible, HR leaders should strive to treat flexibility as the default and look for opportunities to redesign tasks not currently suited for hybrid work.

Figure 1. Task Analysis for Hybrid Work

High	<p>Offer partial flexibility. Improve feasibility. Examples: in-person client interactions; onboarding and coaching; brainstorming sessions</p>	<p>Offer complete location and schedule flexibility. Examples: focus work; asynchronous collaboration</p>
Portability	<p>Continue working on-site. Examples: physical work (such as installation or transportation); retail work</p>	<p>Offer partial flexibility. Improve portability. Examples: work in secure computer systems; use of special equipment</p>
Low	Low	High
	Feasibility	

Source: Gartner

2 Expand Project Talent Pools

Another benefit of starting from tasks, not roles, is that it helps expand the talent pools HR leaders can access for key projects. For example, Unilever employs a project staffing process that starts with breaking projects into bite-sized tasks and then identifying which skills are required to complete each task. Once HR and business leaders compile this information, they can cast a wide net to source talent for projects, going beyond role descriptions to find employees from throughout the organization with the specific skills required. Moving from role-based to skills-based project staffing gives employees greater flexibility to pursue new development opportunities and find projects that meet personal and professional goals. It also allows Unilever to tap into varied sources of talent and spot opportunities for outsourcing and automation.

Breaking projects into tasks can increase opportunities for employees to choose tasks that fit their hybrid working preferences, regardless of job title. It can also help organizations identify opportunities to automate or otherwise redesign tasks restricting employee flexibility.

3 Empower Teams to Design Hybrid Roles

Questions of role design are often best addressed by teams. Hybrid work arrangements can reveal tension between team goals and employee preferences, so teams need the autonomy to decide how to harmonize the two. To define the roles team members will play, teams can take two steps:

1. Define the “what” — Teams identify the types of work that have the greatest impact, and they determine the products and deliverables that will help them accomplish business objectives. Teams have the flexibility to design their own workflows and choose which tasks they need to complete.
2. Align on the “how” — Teams explore ways of working that unlock impact and that balance team needs with individual preferences. This involves questions of distributing tasks across the team, agreeing on meeting cadence, and understanding individual and team capacity.

This approach gives teams the freedom to establish ways of working that improve well-being, spur innovation and enable performance.

4 Create New Roles to Support Hybrid Work

Certain challenges and opportunities unique to hybrid work environments may best be addressed by creating entirely new roles. For example, Goodway Group’s people experience team created a dedicated team success partner (TSP) role to support virtual collaboration. As a fully remote company since 2007, Goodway Group realized teams needed support to self-calibrate norms for when, where and how to work together. TSPs partner with teams throughout the organization to build trust and psychological safety, help teams set priorities, and solve challenges.

The loss of work-life boundaries in hybrid working has also drawn greater attention to the importance of mental and physical well-being, and some organizations are beginning to design new dedicated roles to support mental health. Westpac, an Australian financial services company, added a chief mental health officer role that leads its efforts to better understand the drivers of mental health and create initiatives to support employee mental health.⁴

5 Invest in New Technology

In the longer term, investments in new technologies such as automation or AI can change the nature of many existing roles. These technologies cut down on time-intensive, rote tasks that limit flexible scheduling and/or must be performed in the office. Automation can also enable flexibility in other ways; for example, PayPal has started using automated translation to enable English-speaking employees to engage with customers who speak other languages, potentially broadening the range of times customer-facing employees can work.⁵ For companies looking to support employees working outside the typical 9-to-5 window, AI can help answer routine employee questions for HR or IT on a 24/7 basis. Other technologies, such as augmented reality and virtual reality, can enable immersive brainstorming sessions for remote teams,

challenging assumptions that highly collaborative jobs must always or often be performed on-site. Augmented and virtual reality can also replace traditionally in-person interactions with clients. In the real estate industry, for example, many companies have used virtual or augmented reality for property tours.

Conclusion

The past year's experiment with remote work has fundamentally changed employee expectations about work and challenged many of HR leaders' basic assumptions for what individuals and teams need to be successful. Reverting to old ways of working is neither possible nor desirable. Instead, HR leaders must embrace experimentation to figure out what drives well-being and performance in the world of hybrid work.

Role design will be a critical place of experimentation to unlock hybrid work's opportunities for better employee experiences, greater equity and improved performance. Certain roles face constraints on hybrid working due to reliance on special equipment, facilities or face-to-face interactions, but creative adaptations to role design can make some of these roles far more flexible than they first appear. HR leaders who take this opportunity to rethink role design will position their organizations to adapt to continued uncertainty and thrive in the future of hybrid work.

¹ 2021 Gartner Hybrid Work Employee Survey

² 2021 Gartner Hybrid Work Employee Survey

³ 2020 Gartner Candidate Survey

⁴ [David Burroughs](#), NSW Government.

⁵ [Robots Welcome to Take Over, as Pandemic Accelerates Automation](#), The New York Times.



Quant Corner

Balance Collaboration Modes to Drive Innovation

by Peter Vail



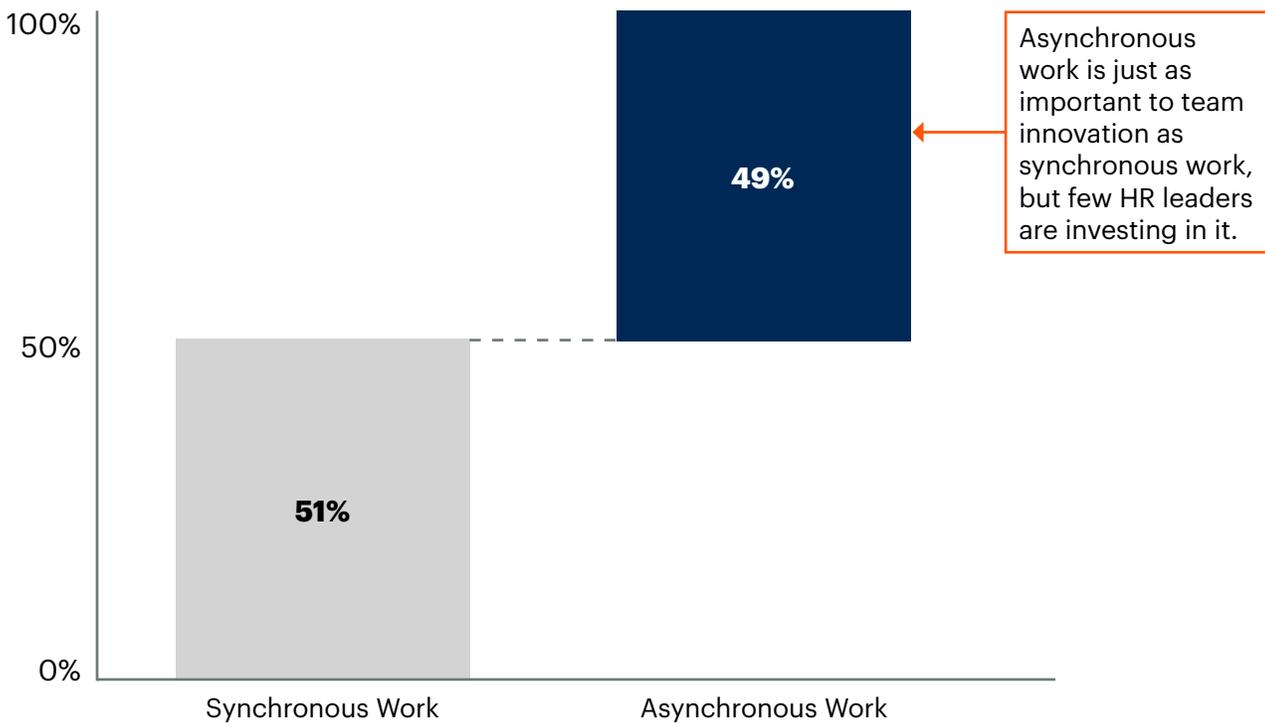
A key concern of business leaders implementing flexible work models is how to maintain their teams' innovation in a decentralized work environment. When we asked HR leaders to select the collaboration mode they felt was most conducive to innovation on their teams, nearly nine out of 10 selected synchronous work — work teams do concurrently — as the most effective way for teams to innovate.

Contrary to this conventional wisdom, our analysis of hybrid and remote knowledge workers finds that synchronous and asynchronous

collaboration modes are equally important in driving team innovation. Although many business leaders are used to relying on synchronous modes of collaboration as the default approach, flexible work requires a more holistic approach that balances both asynchronous and synchronous collaboration. By encouraging teams to agree upon protected asynchronous time for their teams, this creates a win-win for the organization and employees: Organizations see improved innovation, and employees can more effectively harmonize work and life.

Impact of Synchronous vs. Asynchronous Work on Team Innovation

Percentage of Variance in Team Innovation Explained



n = 2,410 hybrid/remote knowledge workers

Source: 2021 Gartner Hybrid Work Employee Survey