

Culture Transformation in the Hybrid Workplace



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The Hybrid Workplace is here to stay. It is also a good change; good for fatigued workers, who would like to reduce their commute. It is good for the kids who have been missing the attention of their busy parents, all absorbed and focused on the compulsions of their careers. Good for the environment, if the local and outstation business commutes reduce and get replaced by digital meetups. It is incredibly good for saving resources that we spent on office spaces and much more in the pre-covid era.

Covid has been around and seems to be in no hurry to leave. With the last 16 months of this pressure, our socio-economic wellbeing has been challenged to the hilt. This pandemic has made us ask questions on many fronts and has also made us look for their answers like never before; the

process continues. In the middle of all this, life has been going on, work too has been going on, and concerns have shifted from keeping things going to vaccine drives to reopening for a second time, etc. etc.

“You can’t assume you’ll return to the same culture that existed pre-pandemic.



There’s been too much change, both at the individual level and at the business level.” - Bryan Hancock, McKinsey

Many leaders and HR Teams have been trying to find the right balance of **back to office vs. work from home**. At the same time, there is a bunch of questions that different set of people are asking. Some organizations are asking questions like: If a certain set of staff members have returned to the workplace because of the nature of their work, is it morally or motivationally appropriate for the other staff members to not return to work? Another set of organizations are asking questions like: Business as usual is fine, but what about the critical and complex client deliveries? Similarly, what about getting teams back to client site to ensure effective delivery? Yet others are asking questions like: Social distancing and safety has been achieved by work from home, but indiscipline from certain sections is on the rise; how do we deal with this, while keeping motivation up?

Some leaders are way ahead in finding ways to adjust to this changed reality while others still have a catch-up to do. Some of us are dealing with surprises and others are dealing with outright challenges.

After a recent study², Gartner shared that:

- Only 1% of the HR leaders surveyed expect all of their employees to work full-time in the office.
- 59% percent of HR leaders said their organization will let employees work remotely occasionally with approval from their manager – a 21% point increase since November 2020.
- Additionally, among 241 HR leaders, nearly half (49%) reported they will let employees work remotely on certain days and nearly one-third (32%) will let employees work remotely all the time.

From The Economist to Gartner to McKinsey to social media, forums are abuzz with discussions and write-ups on this return to workplace post covid. Out of all that is being discussed, one theme surfaces time and again and will survive the sift: the **Hybrid workplace and a need for culture transformation to make this a high-performance enabling transition**.

In such a hybrid workplace, employee experience is going to be crucial to *unleash* their talent and recruit their *willing* effort. Only from an optimized employee experience will a sense of *connectedness and belonging* emerge. Furthermore, the overall workplace will need to find *effective ways of connecting, fostering problem-solving, keeping innovation alive, and continuing to inspire each other* despite the intermittent contact, this hybrid workplace will bring. Such will be the outcomes required from the culture transformation required to manage the hybrid workplace.

Here are 3 crucial activators to create such a culture transformation:

- 1. An energetic-purposeful style of leadership from top leaders and senior management:** Gone are the days when a leader could either create magic out of hectic action or manage to inspire and charm crowds with lofty speeches and compelling townhalls to create
- 2. A focused-agile approach from mid and frontline managers:** The multi-tasking and parallel processing approach that many managers have had is a ship-sinking approach in a hybrid workplace. People are already managing one too many priorities from work to life. Hence, managers will have to have an *OKR like sharp and focused approach: quarter-on-quarter, month-on-month down to even week-on-week focus on the essentials*. Additionally, never before has agile cycles of working been so critical for all industries and businesses. Usher in an approach of doing things in sprints and achieving outcomes aligned perfectly to customer expectations/feedback. Forget the traditional goal-setting approaches for now – become purpose-driven, nimble, and **focused-agile**. This is a crucial shift of focus for managers

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- Bill Schaninger

magical performance. Now is the time to combine these approaches, *engage with people and deliver with people*. Do not leave everything to your superheroes to get done, post your downloads and invitations; they will not be able to pull as much load anymore in the hybrid workplace. Get into the action with your teams. This is the only way people will look-up to you, follow you, and get done whatever is the need of the hour. Hence leaders will need to:

- Develop a compelling vision along with the masses and simultaneously / subsequently in an **energetic-purposeful manner** deliver the vision with an enabling execution focus.
- On this path, talking will not be enough, leading the way with a clear demonstration of accountability, responsibility, and high-quality action by the leaders will be essential. *Be present, be seen, be in action, and contribute measurably to your teams.*



to preserve and grow customers. Hence:

- Enable a ***focused-agile*** work environment, with small and clear targets and short timelines for all functions and all roles. Get closures as fast as possible and as consistently as possible within weeks, if not in days. Make it a point to deliver on all *Strategic Customer Priorities in real-time*.
- Ensure there is no more madness in your methods – every manager has to practice a structured targeting of situations/problems and focus on solutions, in the here and now.

3. A responsible-responsive attitude towards work from every role-holder: Everyone needs to get this clear: *All slack is gone, buffers will not hold, and cushions do not matter in an already bleeding socio-*

economic situation. This is how it will be for at least the next 6-8 quarters. No one can take anything for granted in this new economy. There is no margin for laxities and ball-dropping. Every organization is strained, and ***we cannot put ourselves at any more risk***. This must be the mantra of every

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individual in the spirit of being a true organizational citizen. Hence:

- Here is what everyone’s day has to start with: **no more hiding in the pack**. Minimal efforts, lack of responsible actions, and doing the minimum possible will not yield effective results: pull your load, fully, going forward only be **responsible-responsive**.
- Discipline, discipline, discipline – in life, at work, and in learning is the only way to be in this chaotic world. This is the only way you will be able to *Play to Win*.

Some of this may seem simplistic; indeed, it is. That is the idea. Make simple, fundamental changes, and usher in a transformation that will help us *Survive, Revive and Thrive*.

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The time has come for all of us to join hands and create a mindset of living and enhancing the new normal. The time has come for all of us to join hands and make this a successful NextGen change. #hybridworkplaceforall #welcomehybridworkplace

*Reference: Mckinsey, and Gartner