

Why Empowering Your Hybrid Workers to Co-Create a Winning Return to Office Plan Leads to Longterm Gain



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Picture this: You've just spent a year working remotely, and now your company is transitioning to a hybrid work model. Yet they've not asked you to help create this model: no surveys, no focus groups, no all-hands meetings where you had a voice. How would you feel? Probably the way many employees at Amazon, Starbucks, Disney, Apple, and Lyft do: outraged and frustrated, resistant and non-compliant.

Imagine wearing a suit tailored for someone else. It's uncomfortable and ill-fitting, isn't it? That's precisely what

happens when organizations impose a one-size-fits-all hybrid work model upon their employees. In a recent Gartner survey, 14% of digital workers prefer their hybrid work environment to be mandated. However, the majority (77%) desire a say in creating their hybrid work model.

It's crucial for leaders to let their employees co-create the hybrid work model, as I always tell my clients, in the return to office. Why? Because engagement, retention and productivity are at stake – and that means the future of your company.

Hybrid work models: One size doesn't fit all

Just like an orchestra with musicians playing different instruments, a hybrid workforce consists of employees with varying needs and preferences. The key to a harmonious performance is a conductor who allows each musician to contribute their expertise and create a masterpiece. In the same vein, when organizations involve employees in designing their hybrid schedules, they unleash the potential for a truly harmonious work experience.

Organizations must acknowledge that employee needs have shifted and respond thoughtfully to maintain productivity and avoid attrition. After all, a well-tailored suit makes you feel confident and ready to conquer the world. By co-creating a hybrid model, employees feel more invested in their work, driving their engagement and productivity to new heights.

Finding the right hybrid model is like cooking the perfect dish. It requires the right mix of ingredients, tailored to individual tastes, to create a delectable culinary experience. When employees contribute to designing their hybrid schedules, they can find the perfect balance between remote work and in-office days, catering to their personal and professional needs. This results in a more satisfied, motivated and

productive workforce.

A successful hybrid model is like a well-prepared potluck, where everyone brings their favorite dish to the table. By encouraging employees to participate in creating their hybrid schedules, organizations foster a sense of collaboration and mutual understanding. This leads to a more engaged workforce, as employees feel their opinions are valued and taken into account.

Additionally, involving employees in the process promotes trust and transparency. This level of openness can reduce the likelihood of miscommunication or misunderstanding, further boosting employee satisfaction and commitment to the organization.

Related: You Should Let Your Team Decide Their Approach to Hybrid Work. A Behavioral Economist Explains Why and How You Should Do It.

Unleash the power of the perfect hybrid meeting

If hybrid meetings were a dish, they'd be a poorly mixed salad, with soggy lettuce and too much dressing. They're ranked as the second-least productive type of meeting by the respondents to the Gartner survey, with 47% of digital workers preferring virtual meetings with audio and/or video. In-person meetings, on the other hand, are seen as the most productive (46%). It's time to make hybrid meetings as appetizing as a well-prepared meal.

Digital workplace leaders must facilitate productivity in hybrid meetings by ensuring all participants can see and hear everyone clearly, interact with in-meeting content sharing and conversation, join with just one button or link, and seamlessly move across operating systems and devices. So,

let's toss that salad properly and enjoy every bite.

By allowing employees to contribute to shaping their hybrid work model, organizations can better understand their employees' preferences when it comes to meetings. This, in turn, can help refine the approach to hybrid meetings, making them more effective and enjoyable for all involved. When employees have a say in crafting their hybrid schedules, they can better balance their time between virtual and in-person meetings, optimizing productivity and engagement.

Employee monitoring: The double-edged sword

Employee monitoring is like having a camera crew following you around, capturing your every move. It can be invasive and disconcerting, especially when it's driven by mistrust. However, when approached with the highest level of trust, employee monitoring can provide valuable insights into productivity and work outcomes. In fact, the Gartner survey finds 96% of employees are more willing to accept monitoring if it leads to assistance that benefits them. So, let's turn that invasive camera crew into a supportive production team.

Progressive organizations are pursuing radical transparency around data collection, giving employees an opportunity to opt-in to information and data gathering. When monitoring is seen as a tool for support rather than control, employees are more likely to embrace it and thrive.

By involving employees in the development of their hybrid schedules, organizations can foster a sense of trust and collaboration. This, in turn, makes employees more receptive to monitoring initiatives that aim to improve their work experience.

Return to office: A smorgasbord of motivators

Returning to the office is like attending a buffet with a diverse array of dishes. Gartner's survey revealed a variety of motivators for digital workers to return to the office, including "facetime" (40%), workplace amenities (45%), and consequences (10%). Companies need to recognize that different employees have different tastes and should not force them to consume the same bland dish.

As the workplace evolves, so does the employee experience. HR must partner with digital workplace leaders to craft the desired digital employee experience that caters to individual needs and preferences. When employees can choose their favorite dishes, they'll be more motivated, engaged and productive.

Involving employees in the creation of their hybrid schedules allows organizations to better understand their employees' motivations for returning to the office. This understanding can help tailor the office environment and experience to accommodate the unique needs and preferences of each worker, ultimately increasing employee satisfaction and retention.

Related: [78% of Employers Are Using Remote Work Tools to Spy on You. Here's a More Effective \(and Ethical\) Approach to Tracking Employee Productivity.](#)

The invisible barriers to co-creation

When it comes to involving employees in creating their hybrid work schedules, some leaders may unknowingly fall prey to cognitive biases. These mental shortcuts can cloud judgment and hinder effective decision-making, leading to suboptimal

outcomes. Let's examine two specific cognitive biases that may prevent leaders from seeking employee buy-in for co-creating hybrid work schedules: the status quo bias and the empathy gap.

The status quo bias is a cognitive bias that causes individuals to prefer the current state of affairs over change. It's like eating the same dish every day because you know you like it, even if there's a more delicious option out there. This bias can prevent leaders from considering new approaches to hybrid work schedules, as they might feel it's safer to maintain existing practices.

Leaders affected by the status quo bias may be reluctant to give employees a say in shaping their hybrid work schedules, fearing that it may disrupt established routines and processes. However, by sticking to the familiar, leaders may overlook the significant benefits of employee engagement, retention, and productivity that come from co-creating hybrid work models.

To overcome the status quo bias, leaders should remind themselves of the importance of adapting to the changing work landscape and the potential rewards of involving employees in the decision-making process. By embracing change and stepping out of their comfort zones, leaders can create an environment that fosters innovation, collaboration, and success.

The empathy gap is a cognitive bias that causes people to struggle to understand others' emotions and needs when they're not experiencing the same feelings themselves. It's like trying to describe the taste of a delicious dessert to someone who's never tried it before. This bias can create a disconnect between leaders and employees, leading to a lack of understanding of the importance of co-creating hybrid work schedules.

Leaders affected by the empathy gap may underestimate the

value that employees place on having a say in their hybrid work schedules, assuming that their preferences align with those of the organization. This could result in a top-down approach to hybrid work models, which may negatively impact employee engagement, retention, and productivity.

To overcome the empathy gap, leaders should make a conscious effort to empathize with employees and understand their perspectives. This can involve engaging in active listening, seeking feedback and genuinely considering employee input when making decisions about hybrid work schedules.

By recognizing and addressing the impact of cognitive biases like the status quo bias and the empathy gap, leaders can make more informed decisions and ensure that they're not inadvertently hindering employee buy-in for co-creating hybrid work schedules. In doing so, they can create an environment that supports collaboration, innovation and growth, setting the stage for a truly successful hybrid work model.

Conclusion

The hybrid work revolution is here, and it's essential for organizations to allow employees to have a say in creating their hybrid schedules. By doing so, they'll foster engagement, retention and productivity. By transforming hybrid meetings, adopting a collaborative approach to employee monitoring, and understanding the diverse motivators for returning to the office, organizations can create a harmonious and effective hybrid work environment. Co-creating the hybrid work model with employees is like composing a beautiful symphony. It allows each individual to play their part, contributing their unique skills and expertise to create a harmonious and productive work experience. By empowering employees to participate in shaping their hybrid schedules, organizations will reap the rewards of an engaged, motivated, and high-performing workforce, ready to face the challenges of

the modern business landscape. Embrace the hybrid work revolution and let your employees be the conductors of their own success.

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