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Current Trends

Hybrid Working:
The Future of Work

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Defining the Concept:

Hybrid work is a flexible work model that supports a blend of in-office, remote, and on-the-go work styles. It offers employees the autonomy and flexibility to choose to work wherever they are most productive. Hybrid work model is a people-first approach that puts people, their needs, wants and well-being at the center of decision making. Hybrid working when carried out correctly, a collaborative blend of in office and remote employees can lead to a very effective work ecosystem.

Best practices for implementing a Hybrid work Model :

There's no one-size-fits-all model when it comes to hybrid working. People and organizations are unique, and each organization have its own ways of doing things that are completely different from other businesses. However, HR leaders can incorporate these strategies and best practices to approach a hybrid work model that fit their businesses:

- **Gather employees' regular feedback:** This can facilitate alignment with their personal needs and preferences. Based on the responses, HR leaders can segment their workforce and send them customized questionnaires that are more specific to their job roles. Surveying workforce regularly will help HR leaders understand how satisfied employees are with hybrid working arrangements and capture any problems that can be fixed.

- **Facilitate virtual interactive collaboration:** Though hybrid employees may not interact with colleagues daily, the continued usage of virtual platforms can help keep all employees connected to each other and to the organization's shared values and goals.

- **Encourage relationship-building:** Carve out time for employees to hang-out on a video chat, or meet up for coffee. Strengthening relationships outside of work can help engage and motivate employees especially remote employees that may find common interests to bond over.

- **Provide equal benefits for remote employees:** It's essential that you treat remote workers the same as your on-site workers as remote employees may feel they are missing out on the in-house benefits their colleagues enjoy. Also, work should be distributed fairly, so that remote workers don't end up getting overloaded tasks that the on-site workers didn't want. This in return, create a culture of belonging so that everyone, whether they work from home, or from office feels supported, treasured, and working towards the same goals.

- **Set clear guidelines right from the start:** By mapping out a framework of which jobs can be done remotely, which cannot, and which employees are eligible for remote working. Are there a particular number of days when employees have to be in the office?

- **Communicate your plan & celebrate:** To ensure the best outcome for a hybrid workplace initiative you must ensure that the hybrid working plan is carefully communicated to all employees, and to explain what it means for employees and the organization as a whole. Communicating hybrid working is about changing the entire work culture from a static business to an agile one. Creating and launching the first hybrid working strategy is a huge achievement that should be acknowledged and celebrated as a milestone in the organization's history.

- **Test, learn, and evolve:** It's highly unlikely to get hybrid working model right from the first time. Therefore, HR leaders should keep testing, learning and evolving various hybrid models to settle on a model that most fit the organization.

Therefore, there are some main questions for HR leaders to keep in mind when designing a hybrid model[1]:

- Which work is better done in person than virtually? Which work can best be done remotely?

- How will meetings work best? What technology is needed to install so that both remote and in-person employees can contribute effectively?

- How do hybrid social networks work best? And what are other ways to help employees establish high quality relationships, strengthen connections and bolster trust?

- How do we create a culture of inclusion for both in-person office workers and remote workers?

- How do we avoid creating two cultures? Will the in-person culture dominate and disenfranchise the remote culture?

- How can leadership communication to off-site workers be effective as it does to workers in the office?

- How is fairness and transparency going to be managed among all employees?

[1] Implementing a Hybrid work model: https://www.strategicpeoplesolutions.com/posts/implementing-a-hybrid-work-model/

Benefits of well managed hybrid working practices:

Hybrid working offers a considerable benefit for both employees and employers:

- **It boosts organization's brand image:** Offering hybrid working demonstrates that you have a flexible forward-thinking culture with trust at its heart.

- **Better work-life balance:** Having the freedom to work from anywhere at least a few days a week, whether it's home, a co-working space, can have an extremely positive impact on employees' work-life balance and overall job satisfaction.

- **It's cheaper to run a hybrid workplace:** A hybrid workplace is also a more economical workplace, organizations can save huge expenses related to large scale offices and maintenance costs.

- **Reducing the spread of contagious viruses:** Sick employees will have the option to work remotely from home under a blended work arrangement which in return lower the chance of infecting others.

- **Hybrid workplace can help build a crisis resilient culture:** By preparing organizations for potential future lockdowns as many employees already working remotely, so the workplace can easily adapt back to a fully remote environment if necessary.

Hybrid working challenges:

- **Communication & collaboration:**

A hybrid work environment may create a rift between on-site employees and hybrid employees working remotely if they aren't provided with the same access to information, professional development, and recognition as those who are on-site, this can damage employee relationships and hinder collaboration. One reason this happens is distance bias, a natural tendency to pay more attention to and place more value on things or people that are nearby. In a hybrid workforce, employers will need to work even harder to treat all staff equally and to keep their teams feeling connected.

- **Technology solutions:**

Employers embracing a hybrid workforce model will also need to think about what technology solutions will work best for employees working in a hybrid environment. Without good technology, a true hybrid model can't exist. At an absolute minimum, employees need strong internet access, good IT security, and the right software to make it work. Technology can be used to create amazing hybrid experiences, enable new ways of working that keep the workforce connected, promote health and wellbeing, encourage diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) but this requires the right approach and strategy.

● **Maintaining culture:**

With little to no face-to-face interaction among employees, it can be challenging to keep the company's culture alive. During such circumstances, employers can choose to reinforce their existing culture or forge a new culture amidst the new normal. Employers who are keen to reset their company's culture need to figure out what type of culture they want to integrate and to communicate it well through all employees.

● **Rethinking leadership:**

It's harder for employers to observe their staff when they work remotely. So, it becomes necessary to focus on results instead of trying to keep track of the working hours spent on a task. At the same time, employers also need to help their staff acquire the necessary soft skills to manage their teams when they work remotely.

● **Increased risk of cyber-attacks:**

Cyber-attacks become a more pressing concern when employees are working from home or in public spaces. Businesses need to secure their company and employees' data with regular software updates, password management systems, and multi-factor authentication systems, and have a recovery plan in place in case a data breach occurs. It's also a good idea to train hybrid workers on the importance of understanding security risks and how to prevent them.

To approach the challenges of hybrid working:

1. Implement a robust hybrid work policy:

For hybrid working to actually work, there should be a strong hybrid work policy in place. It involves re-onboarding the entire team in the process; set clear expectations, ensure the policy is well communicated among everyone in the organization, and to engage employees in developing the hybrid policy, so they can shape the ways they want to work more productively.

2. Start evolving culture for a hybrid world:

Hybrid work models can be extremely divisive, so it is very important to build a strong hybrid work culture that proactively ensures fair opportunities between hybrid and on-site employees, and to be committed towards prioritizing inclusivity and collaboration among all employees by establishing a sound remote communication system.

Some practices worldwide:

3. Refine hybrid meetings:

Poor communication is behind many of the challenges of hybrid working, so it's essential to take time to ensure hybrid meetings are effective through doing research on hybrid meeting best practices, identify what the most common challenges are, and how to address them, how to ensure that everyone feels included, how to boost participation and engagement, and how to improve the quality of discussion. Eventually, rather than viewing hybrid work as an established model that has plenty of problems, it's better to see it as a promising working opportunity.

Deutsche Bank:

Deutsche Bank is implementing a hybrid working model that enables eligible staff to voluntarily work remotely for a part of their working time. In designing the model, the aim was to deliver a consistent employee experience, ensure a coordinated and well controlled work environment, realize the opportunity to deliver benefits at scale, and ensure to retain the flexibility in response to the evolving market environment.

Lloyds Banking Group:

According to Lloyds Banking Group Annual report 2020, Lloyds carried out behavioral experiments that explains the complex connections between employees' thoughts, emotions, and behavior in the workplace in order to help the bank determine the future look of their offices and ways of working, and to identify the most practical way forward to support its staff in agile working, the bank believe that hybrid working would help attract a broader pool of talent, particularly younger workers.

Eurobank

Eurobank is the first bank in Greece to announce its new Hybrid Work policy adopts combination of working from home and working at the office on a regular basis for its staff. The new hybrid policy aims at ensuring its employees' work-life balance while reducing the Group's environmental footprint by limiting transportation of employees and energy consumption. Eligibility for the remote work model is defined by the nature of each employee's professional role in the bank, and based on the nature of each employee's professional role and the unit they belong to. Additionally, it is adopted by the bank's units whereby physical contact with the customers is not a prerequisite.

OP Financial group, Finland

OP Financial Group's approach to hybrid work combined in-office and remote practices based on customers' needs and OP's business goals. The principles of hybrid work at OP financial group allows to work in diverse ways from multiple locations (for example, working by combining in office, virtual and remote work practices besides using their premises systematically and effectively if necessary. Hybrid work is led according to OP's leadership set principles, and employees' mutual cooperation to foster a smooth transition to hybrid environment.

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