

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

2nd Edition

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Empowering leaders
and organizations to
avoid business disasters

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Dedication and Acknowledgment

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

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Executive Summary

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

Introduction

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

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

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

Yet so many leaders are [failing to live by that maxim](#). They instead prefer to do what’s comfortable for them, even if it devastates employee morale and engagement. They fail to recognize how doing so deeply undercuts the bottom line through decreasing productivity, growing turnover, and subpar recruitment. The current call by many leaders for employees to return to the office full-time represents an egregious and self-defeating example of top executives choosing to do what’s comfortable for them over what’s best for their people and their bottom line.

We can see that in some reversals by large employers who realized they screwed up. That’s why Google, after many months of insisting all employees return to their campus, on May 5 – so long before the Delta surge - [backtracked](#) from its plans and permitted full-time remote work to many in the face of mass employee resistance and resignations. Amazon [did the same](#) for similar reasons on June 10.

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

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

This book relies on my interviews with 47 mid-level and 14 senior leaders in 12 companies which I advised on developing and implementing a strategic approach to returning to the office and leading hybrid and remote teams after the pandemic. It reveals the challenges that top leaders had to overcome in the process. It also reveals the best practices they used to do so,

which you can use as a benchmark for your own return to the office and leadership of hybrid and remote teams in the post-COVID world..

Chapter 1: What Does the Research on Returning to the Office Say?

Several in-depth, independent, and large-scale research surveys on returning to the office were published recently. All of the surveys revealed strong preferences for working from home after the pandemic at least half the time for the majority, and for a quarter, full-time remote work.

A [Harvard Business School study](#) on remote workers found that:

- 27% hope to work remotely full-time
- 61% would like to work 2-3 days a week from home
- Only 18% want to go back to the office full-time

A [study by the Society for Human Resource Management](#) discovered the following:

- 52% would like to work from home permanently full-time if herd immunity to COVID is never achieved
- 34% would still like to work from home full-time and permanently even if herd immunity was achieved
- 35% would accept a reduction in salary to work from home permanently

[Another survey](#) of those working from home had these top-line findings:

- 42% say if their current company does not continue to offer remote work options long term, they will look for another job
- 68% perceive a hybrid model of significant remote and in-person work as the ideal model
- 87% would prefer to work remotely at least some of the time
- 80% report they adapted well to full-time remote work
- 76% of employees consider benefits when evaluating whether to stay in a job, and they list remote work, flexible schedules, and mobility opportunities as the top three benefits
- 34% want resources to help set up a home office, and 33% want resources to subsidize other remote work expenses
- 35% report working more hours and 54% report taking less time off
- 50% are not concerned about their career growth
- 43% of remote workers say that they would be nervous about their job security if they worked remotely full-time, while others returned to the work site
- 26% plan to look for a job with a different employer after the pandemic, and of these, 34% want to find a job where they can work remotely and 80% are concerned about their career growth
- 48% feel more pressure to be online all the time while working remotely
- 39% find it difficult to socialize with co-workers
- Remote worker connection to company culture improved from 36% in May 2020 to 47% in March 2021, showing that working remotely may actually boost company culture
- 42% of workers who plan to leave their current employer would grade their employer's efforts to maintain culture during the pandemic as a "C" or lower compared to 30% of all workers

A [fourth survey of remote workers finds](#):

- 46% would look for a different job if their current employer doesn't offer some remote work after the pandemic
- 54% would be willing to stay in their job if not offered some remote work after the pandemic, but be less willing to go the extra mile

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

A [fifth survey's](#) key findings on staff working remotely in the pandemic:

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

Here's a [sixth survey](#) (including both remote and non-remote workers):

- 47% of employees say they would likely leave their job if it didn't offer a hybrid work model once the pandemic ends
- 41% say they would be willing to take a job with a lower salary if their company offered a hybrid work model
- Asked about the top benefit of hybrid work, 38% cite the top benefit of hybrid work as less time and money spent commuting, 34% say work/life balance, and 21% list improved work performance

Finally, a [Microsoft study](#) of remote and non-remote employees, combining survey responded with data from LinkedIn and Microsoft 365 products, found that:

- 73% of employees want flexible remote work options to be permanent
- 66% of leaders are planning to remodel their company spaces for hybrid work
- 67% of employees want at least some in-person collaboration after the pandemic

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Here are the **key conclusions of a [meta-analysis](#) comparing all of these studies:**

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

Chapter 2: Back to the Past?

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

Surveys taken during the pandemic show that two-thirds ([1](#), [2](#)) of all US workers worked remotely some of the time, and over a half full-time. Thus, those who can do their work in a hybrid model applies to the large majority of all US workers.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Other reasons involve challenges specifically related to remote work. Many list concerns about

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

It was already clear that US Delta cases were [starting to rise](#) in early June. There was also clear evidence that countries with high vaccination rates, like [the United Kingdom](#) and [Israel](#), were experiencing a surge in cases in May.

Still, a lot of [large companies](#), [mid-size firms](#), and even the [federal government](#) are compelling unwilling employees to return to the office. [More than a third](#) of those who worked remotely during the peak of the pandemic have already complied. A majority of the remainder are expected to follow by the end of August or early-mid fall, just when [schools reopen](#) - and this will happen despite [Delta infections are forecast to explode](#).

Of course, the Delta variant [caused many employees forced to return to the office to quite](#) to quit, due to fears about [breakthrough infections](#). Recent data shows that waning vaccine immunity after 6 months results in vaccine efficacy [falling to 39%](#) against Delta.

Although a handful of companies revised their return to office plans based on the Delta surge, many changes were temporary fixes rather than true pivots. For example, Apple [delayed](#) its return to the office from September to October. Unfortunately, this one-month delay shows that it did not grasp the gravity of the situation.

Aside from forecasts that Delta cases [will surge](#) in October, there is a more pressing problem to consider. Employers need to face the reality that [vaccine immunity wanes after a few months](#).

It's not simply the Delta spike, but the implications of Delta for our future. There are [new variants](#) appearing regularly that seem even more dangerous than Delta. For example, Delta Plus is a [newer variant](#) that, compared to Delta, contains a mutation that makes it easier for the virus to escape our immune system and thus undercuts vaccine efficacy. It's [already](#) in the US and many other countries.

While leaders would like to think that they are making data-driven decisions, they have obviously ignored the data. And they're unable to say that they weren't warned about the rising COVID infections. Even while being aware of the increasing danger, they are still pushing for a return to the traditional office setup.

Though the Delta variant may be a short-term issue, it comes with multiple similar scenarios as

part of the long tail risk of new waves due to other variants. [Research](#) on why Boards of Directors fire CEOs shows denying such negative reality as one of the top reasons. This denial is due to another cognitive bias, called the [ostrich effect](#). It is based on the mythical notion of ostriches burying their heads in the sand when facing danger.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Chapter 4: Competitive Advantage in the New Normal

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

On the flip side, many top leaders cited recruitment as a major driver of their hybrid-first models. Over 90% of the companies I helped planned for a major recruitment ramp-up for the post-COVID world. They cited a desire to appeal to the best candidates as a key reason for their shift.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Of course, it requires an adaptation of [risk management protocols](#) to ensure employees harden their home office against disruptions. It also requires additional risk management strategies to

ensure that employees living in areas prone to disruptions such as hurricanes have others cross-trained and ready to take on their work in case of any disruptions for that employee.

Chapter 5: Return to the Office Best Practices

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

Survey Your Staff

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

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

After the pandemic has passed, which of these would be your preferred working style?

- A) Fully remote, coming in once a quarter for team-building retreat
- B) 1 day a week in the office, the rest at home
- C) 2 days a week in the office
- D) 3 days a week in the office
- E) 4 days a week in the office
- F) Full-time in the office

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

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

Team-Led Choices for Remote Work

Avoid simply declaring a consistent policy from the top, or allowing individual employees to determine autonomously what they will do. Instead, the [best practice](#) is for the leadership to provide broad but flexible guidelines for the whole company and then let teams determine what works best for them. Empower each team leader to determine, in consultation with other team leaders and their team members, how each team should function. The choice should be driven by the goals and collaborative capacities of each team rather than the personal preferences of the team leader. The outcome for each team should range from fully remote, with in-person team-building retreats once a quarter, to two days remote and three in the office.

The top leadership should encourage team leaders to permit, wherever possible, team

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

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

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

Reshape Your Office Space

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Revising Performance Evaluation

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

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

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

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

The weekly performance evaluation takes place during brief check-in and review meetings of 15-30 minutes of each team member with their team leader. These should be in-person for hybrid workers and virtual for fully remote workers. 24 hours before each meeting, the employee submits a concise report, containing:

- Their top three accomplishments - whether individual or collaborative - for the past week, and any other relevant accomplishments, compared to what they planned to accomplish
- Any challenges, anticipated or unanticipated, that they experienced in achieving their goals for the week
- How they addressed these challenges and/or how they plan to address these challenges going forward
- Their efforts to improve their professional development against goals that the employee agreed to with the team leader on their quarterly review
- A numerical self-evaluation of their performance for the week on all of these areas, typically on a range of 0 to 4 (0 = greatly below expectation, 1 = somewhat below expectations, 2 = meeting expectations, 3 = somewhat exceeding expectations, 4 = greatly exceeding expectations)
- Their plans for next week's top three accomplishments, addressing challenges, professional growth, and any other relevant plans for next week

The supervisor then responds to the report in writing at least two hours before the meeting. That involves:

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

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

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

remaining 20%.

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

Adapt Your Culture: Virtual Collaboration

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

Why Did Corporate Culture and Collaboration Suffer During the Pandemic?

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

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

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

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

Many companies try to replace the office culture glue of social and emotional connection with numerous virtual team meetings. On top of that are the semi-forced socializations of Zoom

happy hours and similar activities that transpose in-person bonding events onto virtual formats. Unfortunately, such activities [don't work well](#).

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

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

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

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

You need to replace bonding activities from office culture with bonding activities designed for a virtual format. These activities should be specifically distinct from office culture-based ones, so that our gut reactions don't have elevated expectations. They should also take advantage of digital technology.

Morning Update

A valuable activity designed for a hybrid or fully-remote format that almost all of my clients implemented is a "Morning Update" for each 4-8 people team inside their company. The team establishes a separate space in their collaboration software dedicated to personal, non-work discussions by team members. Every morning - whether they come to the office or work at home - all team members send a message answering the following questions:

- 1) How are you doing overall?
- 2) How are you feeling right now?
- 3) What's been interesting in your life recently outside of work?
- 4) What's going on in your work: what's going well, and what are some challenges?
- 5) What is one thing about you that most other team members do not know about?

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

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

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

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

Digital Co-Working

Encourage all members of a team to spend an hour or more per day coworking digitally with their teammates when they're not in the office. What this means is getting on a Zoom or Microsoft Teams call, turning microphones off but leaving speakers on with video optional, and then working on your own tasks. That way, no sounds will be coming through unless a team member deliberately turns on their microphone to ask a question or make a comment. This experience replicates the benefit of a shared cubicle space, where you work alongside your team members, but on your own work. You get to bond with each other, chat about how things are going in work and life, ask and answer quick clarifying questions, and mentor each other as needed.

However, note that this isn't meant to be a work meeting, and you shouldn't intend to have any lengthy conversations during it; do a separate call with a teammate if you need to have a longer chat. If you have specific teammates with whom you're collaborating more intensely, you should do a coworking session with them daily in addition to broader coworking with the team as a whole. Such digital coworking doesn't cause the drain of a typical Zoom meeting; team members typically find it energizing and bonding, helping them both get their work done while feeling more connected to fellow team members.

Physical and Mental Breaks

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

Those and similar physical and mental breaks, [research shows](#), decrease burnout, improve

productivity, and reduce mistakes. That's why you should strongly encourage your employees to take at least a 10-minute break every hour during remote work. At least half of those breaks should involve [physical activity](#), such as stretching or walking around, to counteract the [dangerous effects](#) of prolonged sitting.

Establish Mentoring (In-Person and Virtual)

A big challenge with telework relates to the loss of mentoring for junior staff from senior colleagues. To address the loss of mentoring support, pair up your junior and/or younger members with senior staff. That applies especially to the junior staff who stay working remotely, but will also benefit those who occasionally come to the office.

This will be good not just for the guidance that mentors can give. It will also help address the lack of social connection in a virtual workplace, for both senior and junior employees. Mentors and mentees should also consider a co-working session with each other daily, or at least weekly. Again, this session shouldn't be intended as a meeting, but a time to work on your own tasks, while asking clarifying questions as needed.

Make sure to have one senior staff member from the junior colleague's immediate team, but also two from outside the team: one from the same business unit but a different team, and one from a different business unit. One of the biggest challenges for company culture for remote workers is the decrease in cross-functional connections across staff. For instance, [research shows](#) that the number of connections made by new hires in the workplace decreased by 17% during the pandemic, compared to the period before the pandemic. Since the successful accomplishment of company goals often requires cross-functional collaboration, such loss of connections does not bode well for long-term company success.

Fortunately, [scholars found](#) that connecting junior staff working remotely to senior staff during the pandemic worked very effectively to expand the network of junior staff. You should follow this research to inform your mentoring program.

As you make your plans, prepare for [cultural re-onboarding](#) as part of your return to the office. That involves rebuilding a sense of connection and belonging among your employees, between each other and to the company culture - practices, habits, norms, and values - as a whole. Make sure to educate your employees on how the culture will be different in a hybrid-first model with some staff fully remote. Give your employees sufficient time to prepare themselves mentally, emotionally, and practically for a return to the office. Seek their buy-in for reintegration into an office-based culture.

Adapt Your Culture: Virtual Innovation

Traditional Innovation Practices

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

company's planning meeting on the post-vaccine return to office and the future of work.

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

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

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

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

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

Traditional Brainstorming

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

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

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

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

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

Sadly, these benefits come with costs attached. One of the biggest problems is called [production blocking](#).

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

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

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

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

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

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

A final problem relates to group size. The more people you get in a traditional brainstorming session, the [less ideas](#) you get per person. Scholars attribute this loss of efficiency to a

phenomenon called [social loafing](#). The more people participate, the more tempting it is for each individual to not work quite as hard at generating ideas. They feel – rightfully so – that they can skate by with less effort and engagement. That’s why research finds that the most efficient size of traditional brainstorming groups for the maximum number of novel ideas per person is 2.

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

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

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

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

Virtual Brainstorming

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

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

Step 1: Initial Idea Generation

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

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

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

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

Step 2: Idea Cleanup

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

Step 3: Idea Evaluation

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

Step 4: Revised Idea Generation

After commenting on and rating ideas, team members do another round of idea generation, either revising previous ideas based on feedback or sharing new ones inspired by seeing what

others generated. In both cases, the process taps the benefits of synergy through gaining the perspectives of other team members.

Step 4: Cleanup of Revised Ideas

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

Step 5: Evaluation of Revised Ideas

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

Step 6: Meet to Discuss Ideas

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

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

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

Does Virtual Brainstorming Work?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Serendipitous Idea Generation for Hybrid and Remote Teams

In-Person Serendipitous Idea Generation

“Okay, I give you the virtual brainstorming, that makes sense,” said Saul, less grudgingly than before, after I outlined the benefits of this practice over in-person brainstorming. “I’ll have to have my teams experiment with it and see how we can make it fit our needs.”

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

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

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

Virtual Serendipitous Idea Generation

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

He was as good as his word, and did some serious experimentation over the next couple of weeks until the third planning meeting. His staff felt surprise at how many innovative ideas they

produced using this innovative methodology. It seems that their creative energies were waiting to be unleashed, and this methodology for both serendipitous and intentional virtual brainstorming provided the outlet.

Adapt Your Culture: Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in the New Normal

Surveys find that there's a much greater desire among minorities for a hybrid or fully remote model. A case in point: a [study by Slack](#) found that 79% of white knowledge workers wanted either a hybrid or fully remote model, but a whopping 97% of Black knowledge workers preferred such work. The study suggests that hybrid and especially fully remote work facilitates DEI concerns because it reduces instances of overt and covert discrimination.

Still, while overall remote work helps minorities, discrimination continues in the digital world, according to a [recent report](#) from the nonprofit Project Include. Technology-based forms of discrimination range from public bullying of minorities on group video calls to one-on-one harassment via chat and email, along with other issues.

Another problem relates to who gets to speak and who gets interrupted. [Surveys find](#) that women are harmed by moving all meetings to video calls, since men much more frequently interrupt or ignore women in virtual meetings than during in-person ones.

You should assume that some or all of these problems are happening in your company, unless you have a strong reason to believe otherwise. Survey your employees to find out what's happening in DEI and remote work. Institute appropriate policies, monitoring, and training to address these problems. You'll want to make a refresher in DEI-related training a part of your cultural re-onboarding.

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

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

Training in Hybrid Work

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

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

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

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

Training in Virtual Communication and Collaboration

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

It's notoriously hard to communicate successfully even in-person. That's why many experts made a good living before the pandemic helping leaders and teams improve their communication. Quality communication becomes much more difficult when in-office teams become virtual teams. One of the biggest problems stems from much more communication shifting to text through collaboration apps such as Slack and Microsoft Teams. As a result, much of the nonverbal communication is lost, leading to a huge increase in miscommunication.

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

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

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

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

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

employees communicate and collaborate much more effectively.

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

Training in Work/Life Balance

Provide guidelines for and training in work/life balance, customized for hybrid and fully-remote employees. As surveys indicate ([1](#), [2](#)), many staff feel:

- Overworked
- Burned out
- Unable to disconnect
- Obligated to respond to work messages outside of work hours

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

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

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

Funding for Home Offices

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

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

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

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

Conclusion

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

Appendix: Template Questions for Post-Pandemic Work Arrangements Survey

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

After the pandemic has passed, which of these would be your preferred working style?

- A) Fully remote, coming in once a quarter for team-building retreat
- B) 1 day a week in the office, the rest at home
- C) 2 days a week in the office
- D) 3 days a week in the office
- E) 4 days a week in the office
- F) Full-time in the office

After the pandemic has passed, which of these do you think would be the preferred working style of your supervisor for you?

- A) Fully remote, coming in once a quarter for team-building retreat
- B) 1 day a week in the office, the rest at home
- C) 2 days a week in the office
- D) 3 days a week in the office
- E) 4 days a week in the office
- F) Full-time in the office

After the pandemic has passed, which of these do you think would be the preferred working style of the largest number of the coworkers you know?

- A) Fully remote, coming in once a quarter for team-building retreat
- B) 1 day a week in the office, the rest at home
- C) 2 days a week in the office
- D) 3 days a week in the office
- E) 4 days a week in the office
- F) Full-time in the office

How likely would you be to recommend working here to peers in your professional network if this organization had a full-time in-office policy?

- A) Not at all
- B) Slightly recommend
- C) Moderately recommend
- D) Strongly recommend
- E) Very strongly recommend

How likely would you be to recommend working here to peers in your professional network if this organization had a hybrid policy of having all workers in the office 1-3 days per week?

- A) Not at all
- B) Slightly recommend
- C) Moderately recommend
- D) Strongly recommend
- E) Very strongly recommend

How likely would you be to recommend working here to peers in your professional network if this organization had a flexible hybrid policy of having most workers in the office 1-3 days per week, while allowing those who preferred to and were successful at working fully remotely to work fully remotely?

- A) Not at all
- B) Slightly recommend
- C) Moderately recommend
- D) Strongly recommend
- E) Very strongly recommend

How likely would you be to recommend working here to peers in your professional network if this organization was fully remote?

- A) Not at all
- B) Slightly recommend
- C) Moderately recommend
- D) Strongly recommend
- E) Very strongly recommend

How would this organization having a full-time in-office policy impact the likelihood of co-workers you know looking for a different job?

- A) Substantially more likely
- B) Moderately more likely
- C) Neither more nor less likely
- D) Moderately less likely
- E) Substantially less likely

How would this organization having a hybrid policy of having all workers in the office 1-3 days per week impact the likelihood of co-workers you know looking for a different job?

- A) Substantially more likely
- B) Moderately more likely
- C) Neither more nor less likely
- D) Moderately less likely
- E) Substantially less likely

How would this organization having a flexible hybrid policy of having most workers in the office 1-3 days per week, while allowing those who preferred to and were successful at working fully remotely to work fully remotely, impact the likelihood of co-workers you know looking for a different job?

- A) Substantially more likely
- B) Moderately more likely
- C) Neither more nor less likely
- D) Moderately less likely
- E) Substantially less likely

How would this organization being fully remote impact the likelihood of co-workers you know looking for a different job?

- A) Substantially more likely
- B) Moderately more likely
- C) Neither more nor less likely
- D) Moderately less likely
- E) Substantially less likely

How likely would you be to “go the extra mile” in your work if this organization had a full-time in-office policy?

- A) Not at all likely
- B) Slightly likely
- C) Moderately likely
- D) Highly likely

- E) Very highly likely

How likely would you be to “go the extra mile” in your work if this organization had a hybrid policy of having all workers in the office 1-3 days per week?

- A) Not at all likely
- B) Slightly likely
- C) Moderately likely
- D) Highly likely
- E) Very highly likely

How likely would you be to “go the extra mile” in your work if this organization had a flexible hybrid policy of having most workers in the office 1-3 days per week, while allowing those who preferred to and were successful at working fully remotely to work fully remotely?

- A) Not at all likely
- B) Slightly likely
- C) Moderately likely
- D) Highly likely
- E) Very highly likely

How likely would you be to “go the extra mile” in your work if this organization was fully remote?

- A) Not at all likely
- B) Slightly likely
- C) Moderately likely
- D) Highly likely
- E) Very highly likely

What percentage of future increases in your salary would you be willing to give up for the chance to work from home at least half-time?

- A) 0%
- B) 5%
- C) 10%
- D) 15%
- E) 20%
- F) 25%

What percentage of future increases in your salary would you be willing to give up for the chance to work from home full-time?

- A) 0%
- B) 5%
- C) 10%
- D) 15%
- E) 20%
- F) 25%

How well-adapted do you feel to remote work?

- A) Not at all
- B) Slightly
- C) Moderately

- D) Strongly
- E) Very strongly

How important do you feel it is for you to get funding to help subsidize remote work expenses?

- A) Not at all important
- B) Slightly important
- C) Moderately important
- D) Strongly important
- E) Very strongly important

How important do you feel it is for you to get training in effective virtual communication?

- A) Not at all important
- B) Slightly important
- C) Moderately important
- D) Strongly important
- E) Very strongly important

How important do you feel it is for you to get training in effective virtual collaboration and teamwork?

- A) Not at all important
- B) Slightly important
- C) Moderately important
- D) Strongly important
- E) Very strongly important

How important do you feel it is for you to get virtual mentoring?

- A) Not at all important
- B) Slightly important
- C) Moderately important
- D) Strongly important
- E) Very strongly important

Are you more or less productive working remotely?

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

Are you more or less productive working on your individual tasks remotely?

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

Are you more or less productive working on your collaborative tasks with others remotely?

- A) Substantially more productive

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

Would you feel concerned about career growth if you work fully remotely while others come to the office, whether hybrid or full-time?

- A) Not at all
- B) Slightly
- C) Moderately
- D) Strongly
- E) Very strongly

Would you feel concerned about career growth if you work on a hybrid schedule of less than half the time in the office while others come to the office full-time?

- A) Not at all
- B) Slightly
- C) Moderately
- D) Strongly
- E) Very strongly

Compared to working in the office, do you feel that remote work causes you to have more or less work/life balance?

- A) Substantially more work/life balance
- B) Moderately more work/life balance
- C) Equal work/life balance
- D) Moderately less work/life balance
- E) Substantially less work/life balance

Compared to working in the office, do you feel that remote work causes you to have more or less stress?

- A) Substantially more stress
- B) Moderately more stress
- C) Equal stress
- D) Moderately less stress
- E) Substantially less stress

Compared to working in the office, do you feel that remote work causes you to be more or less happy?

- A) Substantially more happy
- B) Moderately more happy
- C) Equal happy
- D) Moderately less happy
- E) Substantially less happy

Compared to working in the office, do you feel that remote work causes you to have more or less connection to fellow members of your team?

- A) Substantially more connection
- B) Moderately more connection
- C) Equal connection

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

Compared to working in the office, do you feel that remote work causes you to have more or less connection to co-workers who aren't immediate members of your team?

- A) Substantially more connection
- B) Moderately more connection
- C) Equal connection
- D) Moderately less connection
- E) Substantially less connection

Compared to working in the office, do you feel that remote work causes you to have more or less connection to your supervisor?

- A) Substantially more connection
- B) Moderately more connection
- C) Equal connection
- D) Moderately less connection
- E) Substantially less connection

Compared to working in the office, do you feel that remote work causes you to have more or less connection to your company culture?

- A) Substantially more connection
- B) Moderately more connection
- C) Equal connection
- D) Moderately less connection
- E) Substantially less connection

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

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

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

Note on References

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

Note on Additional Resources

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

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

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

Author Bio

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

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

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

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

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

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

Behavior and Social Issues.

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

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

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

Contact

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