



HYBRID WORKING

Hybrid Working

Preparing Companies for a Future Environment of Performance, Connection and Culture

Executive Summary

These are the **communication and leadership** challenges surrounding the transition out of lockdown into a hybrid or flexible working environment:

- **Aligning people** to the changes the organisation needs
- Aligning the implementation with the **human reality** – taking account of workers' temporary disequilibrium and long-term aspiration.
- Using the disruption of COVID to make a **quantum leap forward** to a workplace that's both digitally and emotionally superior to what went before.

Businesses can get ahead by preparing people to navigate the challenges before they arrive. The kind of communication and leadership needed for a successful transition is **flexible, agile and empathic**.

Working Voices can support organisations with the following initiatives:

1. **Preparing front-line supervisors and managers to lead and manage teams in a hybrid or flexible workplace model by educating them in how to optimize their workplace experience**
2. **Providing training and communication to help teams adapt to the new processes**
3. **Developing a strategy around building close-knit teams and relationships**
4. **Getting early buy-in from leaders so their enthusiasm is communicated**
5. **Growing a culture of agility, inclusion and collaboration**

(adapted from Deloitte Insights¹)

¹ **Deloitte Insights** – [Designing Adaptive Workplaces](#) – How the public sector can capitalize on lessons learned from COVID-19 10th February 2021

Contents

Part 1 - The Future Of The Workplace

- The Hybrid Workplace and the 'Great Reset'
- Fostering the Right Interactions
- The Importance of Employee Engagement

Part 2 - Necessary Up-Skilling And Reskilling

- Where Working Voices Fits In
- Development Opportunities
- The Hybrid Workplace and the 'Great Reset'

Outline

Business needs to **prepare people now** before the seismic influence of the pandemic on future work patterns is felt – we know it's coming.

When the global pandemic hit, most leaders were ill-prepared. Many Working Voices' clients reacted quickly and decisively to get support to the people who needed it. But it was **reactive**; we were in the teeth of the storm by the time we understood it. One year on, we know the storm will eventually clear and can be fully prepared for that moment. But it's imperative organisations distribute **the tools required for the operation** before the signal arrives for it to begin.

There's some uncertainty. A few organisations are thinking about **new ways of configuring** both **office space** and **working day** to maximise the value of having people in the same space again. Others seem to envisage an office environment largely **unchanged from pre-COVID days**. A Deloitte Insights² study published in February 2021 goes into more detail describing the issues and solutions being explored – we look at an extract below.

But that uncertainty doesn't suggest anyone should adopt a 'wait-and-see' approach. While we may not yet know the number of people who'll be in the office and for how many days a week, it's clear huge numbers will be combining remote working with office time i.e., **hybrid or flexible working**. We need to think, work and communicate in ways that reflect that.

The pressing question is **how will employee's physical presence in the office add value** for both company and individual? Merely ordering them back will not be enough to maximise the benefits of having them there. And it's the same for remote working: what are the benefits and is each individual experiencing them?

Leaders will need to work with and around human behaviour and emotions, understanding how to engage and inspire. **Flexibility and emotional intelligence** will be vital, particularly in the turbulent period before the 'new normal' takes shape and everyone settles into it. New norms can only be established smoothly with **employee engagement**.

The WEF White Paper Resetting the Future of Work Agenda (**Written in collaboration with our partner Mercer**)³ has this to say about workplace culture:

Developing a culture that is aligned and embodies the very nature of the newly agile organization is vital to ensuring that employees feel empowered to continue doing their jobs while being proud to work at the organization. Managers and employees will experience varying level of changes as the organization moves into a network structure – managers having less authority due to the easing of reporting lines; employees adapting in a more fluid environment with less structure or stability in their roles. Being transparent and clearly articulating the future organization’s vision and values is key and it is important to provide transitional support to ease employees’ concerns during this phase.

In the next three sections we look at this in more depth.

Fostering the Right Interactions

Does the leadership know how to combine decisiveness with flexibility? That **balance** will be essential for maximising the benefits and warding off the uncertainties of reorganisation.

As social beings, we know there’s value in face-to-face interactions. It’s just **not clear how interactions will take place** from now on.

There’ll be **turbulence** around the change: employee’s expectations may differ from those of their employers; lockdown experiences have been contrasting and extreme, ranging from trauma and exhaustion to idealistic optimism.

One survey quoted in The Times⁴ reports that half of all workers would try to change jobs if they couldn’t work in their preferred location, yet only one in ten believed their employers would allow them the choice. Two-thirds of all workers preferred a hybrid or flexible set-up with only half believing their employer would actually allow it. Such surveys are not a good basis for predicting final outcomes but indicate the current levels of **doubt and inconsistency circulating** now.

Amidst that uncertainty there’s a need to be alert to **the risk of a breakdown of trust and motivation**. Leaders must provide both stability through being decisive, and empathy by showing flexibility. **Workers want to influence** how they work, where they work and when they work and not feel entirely passive in these decisions.

However, it’s a great opportunity. **Businesses can demonstrate their values, ethos and philosophy** through real actions with their employees. But they only have once chance to get it right.

The Importance of Engagement

Even the best logistical solutions fail when they don’t have buy-in at all levels, so it’s vital the components for **optimising employee engagement** are fully understood. They include:

- A clear **mission** or sense of purpose for people to get inspired and passionate about
- **Emotionally astute** or sensitive leaders
- Respect and **inclusion for all people** and types of working styles

³ **World Economic Forum (In collaboration with Mercer)** – Resetting the Future of Work Agenda: [Disruption and Renewal in a Post-COVID World](#)

⁴ **The Times**, Thursday February 18th, 2021 – Half of staff would quit if denied Flexible working

- Investment in the **skills of line management** – rather than regarding people management as a side effect of promotion
- Provision of the right **environment for productive working** – mental, emotional and physical

The reintegration of people into the workspace and the adaptations required will **vary with each individual**. Leaders will need to know the thoughts and feelings of each person they're responsible for. Only then can they know how to get everyone fully engaged with the proposal.

In its January 2016 analysis *The Worldwide Employee Engagement Crisis*⁵, Gallup suggests one sure-fire way to get employee engagement wrong is to measure their happiness or sense of satisfaction levels, and then try to cater to their wants. This could be seen as a 'contractual employee' model where the employee is seen

rather like a customer, having only a transactional relationship with the company. But everyone works at their best when **the company's interests and their own are aligned**. Given that worldwide, only 13% of employees working for an organisation are engaged⁶, there's a pressing need for leaders to effectively communicate their vision.

Where Working Voices Can Support You

Here are the key steps identified by Deloitte⁷ required to transform into adaptive workplaces. The elements Working Voices can provide support with are in **bold**:

1. Assess and stabilize current telework operations (policies, **culture**, tools, and **collaboration**).
2. Conduct a mobility analysis and establish expectations and norms around adaptive workplaces.
3. **Prepare front-line supervisors and managers to lead and manage teams in a hybrid workplace model and educate staff on how to optimize their workplace experience.**
4. Pilot new performance management processes, including use of organizational network analysis to ensure the health, engagement, and productivity of your workforce, wherever they are working from.
5. Assess your portfolio of virtual collaboration tools and technologies and stay abreast of the rapidly evolving universe of collaboration apps that are continually improving the virtual work experience.
6. **Invest in training and communication to help teams adapt to new processes.** The organization needs a management core that knows how to lead in a hybrid setup and understands how to set goals and evaluate performance that way.
7. **Develop a strategy to build teams and relationships** (within the organization and outside with external partners, prospective employees, and new customers) that don't depend solely on in-person interactions.
8. **Communicate successes early on and get buy-in from leaders.** Large-scale change takes time to get embedded within the organization, so if changes don't show clear results quickly, there could be less patience for experimentation.

⁵ **Gallup Workplace** January 7th, 2016. [The Worldwide Employee Engagement Crisis](#)
By Annamarie Mann and Jim Harter

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*

Development Opportunities

Working Voices has assembled **Flexible Working Practices packages** to develop precisely the skills identified here. They're deliverable at two levels: Leader/Manager and Employee.

The key learning skills offered in the Employee package are:

- Creating a culture of **autonomy** – based on Lencioni's Five Dysfunctions of a Team
- Fostering **psychological safety** in teams
- Building and **sustaining relationships** no matter the working environment
- Focusing on **team cohesion** first, then on achieving tasks
- **Emotional Intelligence** competencies
- Practical ways to take account of **individual preferences** in effective team working

The key skills in the Leaders' package are:

- **Communicating change** effectively: informing, energizing, collaborating & reassuring teams throughout the process
- Developing individual leaders' own **delivery styles** and methods
- Ensuring **alignment** with the overall goal
- **Inspiring** colleagues with humanity, clarity and authenticity
- Understanding **different perspectives** and concerns; taking into account any unhelpful biases and assumptions
- Teaching managers to **coach teams** towards success
- Underlining the importance of **communicating inclusively**

These courses are fast, interactive and focused on practical application. They equip participants to both navigate the transition to new workplace patterns and to manage them in the future