

Jabra GN

A MANAGER'S GUIDE TO HYBRID WORK

How to lead hybrid teams and organizations
with inclusion, trust, and empathy

INTRODUCTION

Hybrid work is the way forward

The verdict is in: employees want hybrid and organizations will reap major benefits by embracing it. But only if they do it right.

In our recent study, the Hybrid Ways of Working 2021 Global Report, we found that employees all over the world overwhelmingly favor some form of hybrid work model moving forward.¹ They reported that having the flexibility to work wherever and whenever would make them more productive (79%) and make their organizations more competitive (81%). 90% of respondents even claimed that shifting to a hybrid work model would maintain or increase the degree to which they believed their employer cared for their well-being. Put simply, the benefits of adopting a hybrid model are numerous and mutual for both employees and organizations.

Hybrid hesitation will hurt organizations

The consequences of not embracing hybrid are even larger than the benefits of doing so. For example, 48% of knowledge workers globally have already considered changing jobs for an employer that has hybrid work options. This number rises to 63% for Millennials, a major segment of the upwardly mobile workforce. In addition to that, 59% of knowledge workers report that they would not work for a company that required them to come into a physical office five days a week. This shift in employee sentiment regarding work and employer expectations poses a formidable front in the war on talent.

The leadership-employee divide

While the majority of leaders also favor hybrid working, there is a disconnect in the way they see this playing out in the near future – a disconnect largely linked to the amount of decision-making power a given employee has within an organization. In fact, our study showed that employees were 11% more likely than C-Suite to say that their organizations were not at all prepared for the shift to hybrid. Conversely, only 53% of employees think that their organization is prepared for hybrid, compared to 74% of C-Suite leaders. Shrinking this gap in expectations poses one of the first challenges for leaders to overcome to secure a successful transition to hybrid.

With hybrid working now representing a fundamental change in the way we work, managers and leaders need to more carefully define and communicate what that means for their organization and, more importantly, for the people who work hard every day to contribute to its success. We provide in this guide a foundational set of considerations for managers and business leaders to implement in their teams and organizations as they attempt to carve out a hybrid model that makes sense.

¹ All data in this white paper that is not otherwise cited should be attributed to the Hybrid Ways of Working 2021 Global Report.

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The challenge leaders have with hybrid working is to truly accept the new reality and let go of preconceived principles of leading people or managing organizations. Because of the truly fundamental changes in the way we lead teams – now virtual, global, and oftentimes fully distributed – the skills that we need to lead in the new normal are something you have to learn in an entirely new way.

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Holger Reisinger,
SVP, Jabra

GROWING FROM REMOTE WORK

Growing from remote work: Three core truths

To build resilient and inclusive hybrid organizations, leaders must grow from the challenges of the past year.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, major changes were flying at leaders from all angles, impacting them just as acutely as those they lead. Naturally, they responded by implementing reactive remote working strategies to ensure business continuity and minimize disturbances. But as we move away from legislatively mandated remote working to strategically implemented hybrid working, it can help to identify what we've actually learned from this remote work experience. Summing up the findings from our research and other key studies, here is a set of core truths about remote working, which will remain relevant as leaders tighten the bolts on their hybrid work strategy.

Truth #1: Knowledge workers can be just as productive remotely, but are more so for some tasks than others

When workers were forced to work from home in an almost overnight transition, leaders worried about the potential impacts on productivity. But research has shown that knowledge workers have actually been more productive at home during the pandemic.² The change in work environment essentially allowed workers to focus on the individual work that really mattered, spend more time interacting with clients and business partners, and get drawn into fewer large meetings.

Our data shows that employees equally prefer to work from home and the office when it comes to individual tasks such as concentration, creative thinking, and administrative work. However, when it comes to more collaborative, socially oriented tasks such as training new team members and presenting material, they prefer the office space. Encourage your employees to consider how their tasks align with the spaces to which they have access and support them with the right tools to be productive in those spaces.

² Research: Knowledge Workers Are More Productive At Home



GROWING FROM REMOTE WORK

Truth #2: Physical presence cannot and should not be used to evaluate an employee's performance or value to the organization

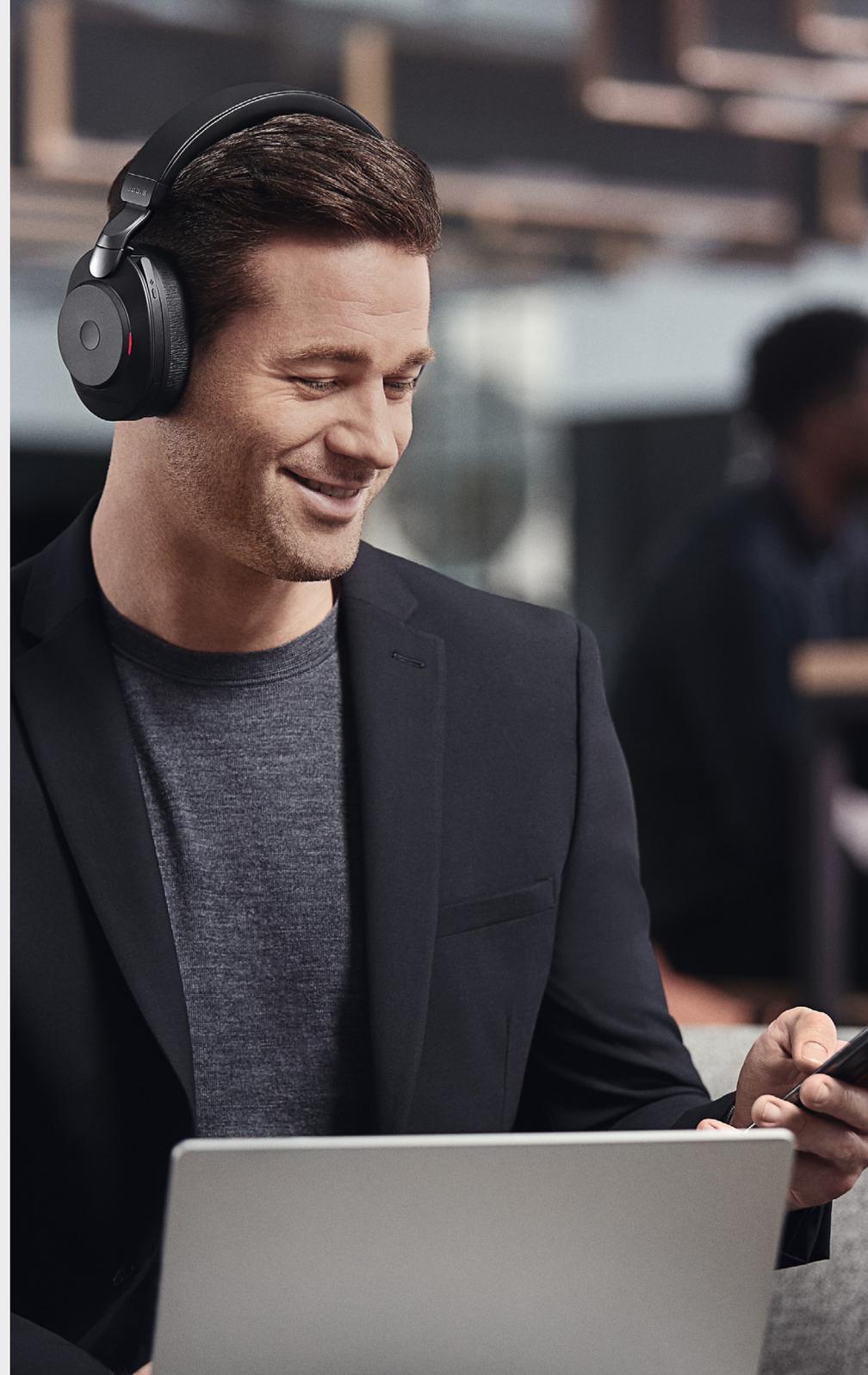
Studies have shown that in-office employees are more likely to receive a promotion than remote employees.³ This is because when employees are in the office, it's easy for managers to observe their engagement in work and culture – engagement which often informs, whether intentionally or unintentionally, an employee's performance evaluation. But the remote work experiment of the pandemic has forced us to rethink these types of biases. As employees now see a hybrid future where they'll work in multiple locations, 69% say they would rather managers focus on their output – that is, the actual work they deliver – over time spent in the office. Moving forward, it's critical that leaders decouple performance from presence to ensure fair opportunities for all employees, based solely on their performance and work outputs. They must find strategies to ensure fair evaluation and recognition, regardless of location.

Truth #3: Technology is central to the experience

During the pandemic, technology has enabled us to remain safe and productive from wherever we are. But at a more fundamental level, it has also given us the opportunity to revisit how we regard our work life and the possibilities of how work could be arranged in the longer term. With the rise of platforms like Microsoft Teams or Zoom and emerging channels of both synchronous and asynchronous work, we now have many more options for how we can execute tasks and optimize our time.

As 80% of knowledge workers say that they would rather work for a company that invests in technology to better connect the workplace in a hybrid working future, managers have the added responsibility to explore the different tools available and how they can give the best work experience possible to their employees. Without a robust and easy-to-use tech ecosystem in place, true flexibility will be difficult to achieve, and productivity will be sub-optimal.

³ Why in-person workers are more likely to get promoted



COMMUNICATING HYBRID

Communicating and executing your hybrid plan

Hybrid work requires a more inclusive, trust-based approach to leadership and communication.

3 in 4 knowledge workers say that they have concerns about a hybrid working future, largely centered around leadership and unclear communication practices. As with any large organizational transition, the way leaders communicate these changes and set expectations for their rollout will have a major impact on their company's success in the years to come.

However, recent data from McKinsey shows that performance on this front has been lacking: though nine in ten executives envision some form of hybrid working for their organization going forward, only one in ten have actually begun to communicate and pilot a new arrangement.⁴ McKinsey's data also shows that companies that have performed well during the pandemic have done so largely because of clear and strategic communications practices.⁵

Consult employees about their needs for a hybrid future

For most organizations, the remainder of 2021 and much of 2022 will likely be a period of trial and error, inching closer to the optimal hybrid setup with every lesson learned. A crucial first step – one which demonstrates your commitment to solving the issue – is to explain to employees that striking the right balance will require experimentation and will take time.

Data shows that employee inclusion in the planning processes of future work arrangements increases both their productivity and well-being.⁶ And since 85% of employees say they think that companies should consult with employees and key personnel before implementing any hybrid working strategy, this should come as no surprise. So, as you tweak your plan, be sure that any changes you make reflect their sentiments and lived experiences. To do this, you can provide a medium (such as a survey or Q&A session) for employees to offer feedback on what works and what doesn't – and why – alongside your periodic status updates.

⁴ What executives are saying about the future of hybrid work

⁵ Four essentials for hybrid work

⁶ What employees are saying about the future of remote work

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Because the transition to hybrid is organizational change at a mass scale, we need to make it comfortable for people to join the conversation at their own pace. As of now, when many people think about hybrid, it isn't just standard knowledge that they can work from anywhere and that they'll need a new set of tools. We need to combine inclusive communication and innovative technology to thrive in a hybrid future.

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Aurangzeb Khan,
SVP, Jabra

COMMUNICATING HYBRID

Don't be overly restrictive

Flexibility and autonomy are king. Of the 5,036 knowledge workers we surveyed globally, 59% reported that having the ability to work from wherever they want is more important to them than salary and other benefits. Similarly, 77% said they would prefer to work for a company that gives them the flexibility to work from anywhere rather than a fancy corporate headquarters.

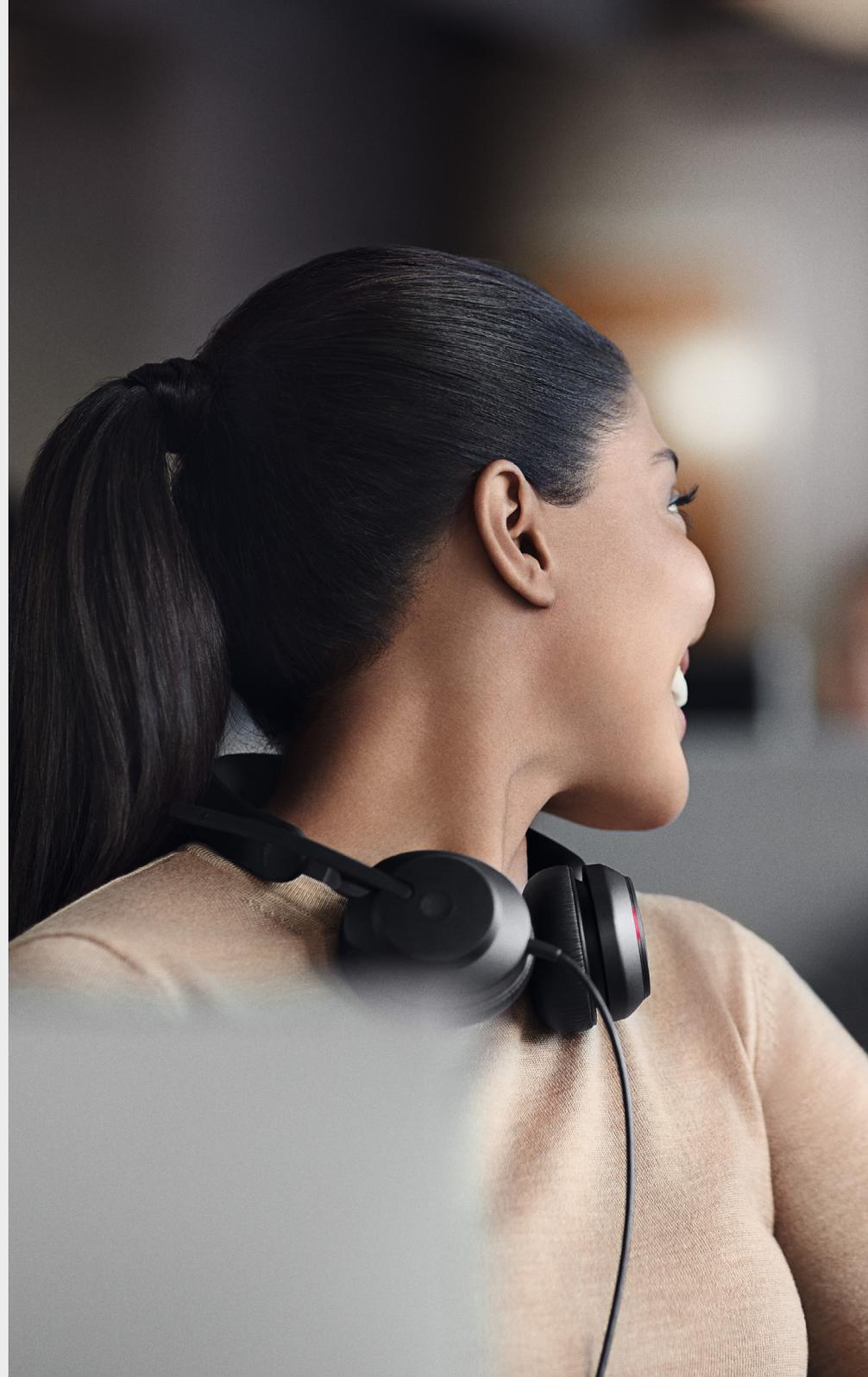
Our data also shows that workers' top concerns about the return to the office are all the result of unclear and inconsistent communication of hybrid working guidelines by leadership. These concerns are not necessarily alleviated by establishing whether to work at home or in the office, but by clarifying how the decision to do either of those things will affect their work life and career trajectory. They do not want to be told when to go into the office or how many times per week, but rather why they should think about going into the office and how they can be ensured equal opportunities should they choose to work from home. In other words, they want to be able to work from wherever they want while being able to trust that they will receive fair recognition for their work.

Establish principles, not policies

Our research shows that employees want maximum flexibility and autonomy. But to have true flexibility in a hybrid working setup, they cannot be restricted by granular policies on when to work or where to be. Because of this, policies mandating a return to the office might not necessarily be the optimal approach.

As an alternative to a policy-based strategy, leaders should consider communicating key principles, which will guide their company or their team's approach to hybrid. A principles-based alternative to policies in a hybrid working strategy sets a standard for how managers expect their team to operate – a mutually-agreed standard which is optimal and encouraged but not enforced by rigid policies on where and when they need to work. In lieu of enforcement, what must then be abundantly present in these organizations is trust – trust that employees will get their job done well when it needs to be done.

Luckily, hybrid work itself can be the part of the solution to both the question of productivity and trust. In addition to the 79% of workers who believe that a hybrid work model will allow them to ultimately be more productive, our data suggests that it will also be a benefit to trust in teams. When asked how a hybrid work environment would affect multiple aspects of workplace relationships, 89% of knowledge workers indicated that it would either increase or maintain their sense of trust in their team. To sustain these levels of trust and boost your employees' satisfaction with their hybrid setup, consider the principles of your organization and how they may be used to guide your approach to hybrid.



CASE STUDY

How to live out your hybrid principles

We've been working flexibly for more than a decade. Here is a highlight of the best practices from our remote leaders around the world.

One of the key principles that drives our approach to hybrid work is that employees should work where and when they need to in order to do it best. We don't require them to be anywhere at any time. Instead, we acknowledge and understand that work is not the only thing going on in their lives and that they are the master of their own schedule, and so we give them the flexibility to maximize it in whichever way fits them. Through all our years of remote and flexible working, we have found that teams always find ways to collaborate and organize their schedule without any form of intervention from general management.

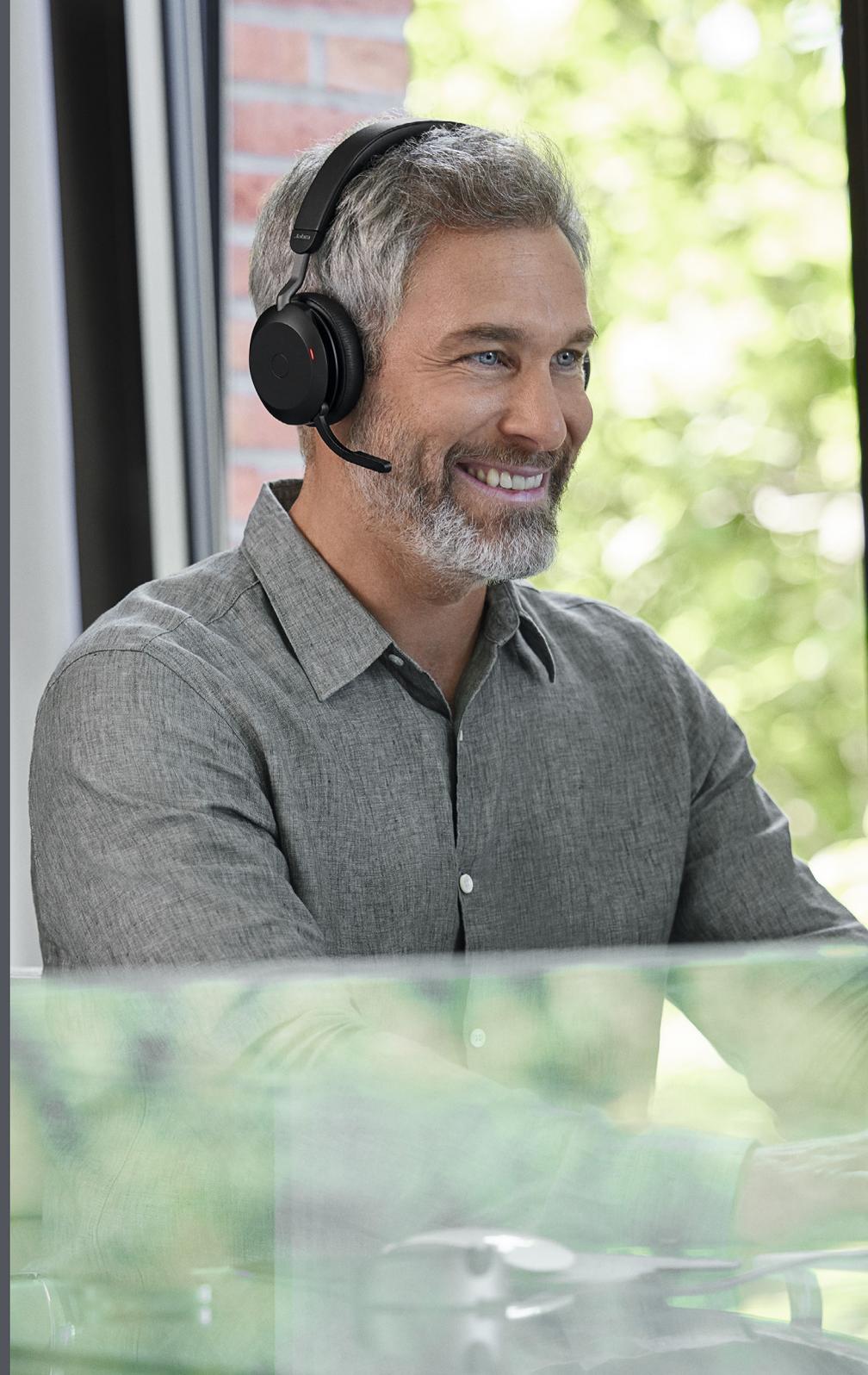
Of course, we still have offices and we still want teams to meet in person. To encourage this, we make clear the purpose of the office as a collaborative, social space and suggest that teams try their best to come together for activities that are collaborative and social in nature. Similarly, we encourage them to work remotely whenever they need to. And to live up to our principle of self-managed flexibility, we give all employees the tools, technologies, and support necessary both in and out of the office to thrive in their optimal arrangement, so that no one is ever left out because of where and when they choose to work.

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When leaders are very strict on saying what people should not do, employees get more concerned and have a higher need for reassurance, which stalls productivity. Having too many strict rules makes things complicated and frustrates people. People can really deal very well with autonomy, and they appreciate the flexibility.

Holger Reisinger,
SVP, Jabra

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ENGAGEMENT

Sparking and sustaining employee engagement in hybrid work

Creating a culture that will withstand the test of distance and time.

Back in 2015, a Gallup report on the State of the American Manager concluded that managers account for at least 70% of the variance in an employee's engagement.⁷ The study also found that only 30% of U.S. workers were engaged in their work. Together, these statistics sparked a crisis of engagement and a wider discussion about how to reignite a sense of purpose and motivation in the workplace. But now, we have the opportunity to make radical changes in the way we work. So, how can managers create an environment and culture in which all employees feel they have a voice and strive to contribute their best?

Time, space, task: the dimensions of hybrid work

Prior to the pandemic, most employees were working from nine to five from the same office building. In hybrid work, however, this will clearly change. Managers must now not only think about how to engage employees whose work tasks differ, but also whose workplaces and work schedules differ. So, when thinking about engagement in hybrid work, managers must be constantly evaluating how any decision they make will impact employees' engagement across these different dimensions.



⁷ State of the American Manager

ENGAGEMENT

Consider hybrid dimensions in employee development plans

From a business perspective, there are many reasons to invest in employee development, such as dealing with skills shortages and promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion.⁸ But realistic development plans are also one of the primary ways to keep employees engaged; if they can visualize a clear path to achieving their goals, they're more likely to want to work hard to achieve them.

When creating development plans, managers should encourage employees to consider how these dimensions will play into their goals. If an employee wishes to move into a management position, consider helping them develop the soft skills necessary to effectively manage teams distributed across spaces and time zones, such as trust-building and empathy.⁹ Offering avenues for employees to develop these skills can help to facilitate a natural culture of engagement in a dynamic hybrid organization.

Live the hybrid dimensions

It is important for employees to see their leaders living the various dimensions of hybrid work. We know from research that employees want to be able to work flexibly in different spaces at different times. But if they see their leaders in the office every day from nine to five, they might feel pressured to show face more often than is optimal for them; leaders, after all, are supposed to set an example of acceptable workplace behavior. To ensure that your employees are fully engaged in their work and that they're comfortable optimizing their own work schedule, they need to see their leadership practicing what they preach. Though it may increase the responsibility of managers, working the same way your team wishes to work will help all feel that they have equal access to security, stability, and opportunity.

⁸ SHRM, Developing Employees

⁹ Three soft skills leaders need for hybrid work environments

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Rather than mandating a return to the office, we need to enable people to work from anywhere, and then positively show that it's okay to come into an office space however often or not they want to.

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Holger Reisinger,
SVP, Jabra

CONCLUSION

Shifting your mindset for the future of work

Hybrid requires not just a shift in where and when we work, but a shift in mindset.

Hybrid work is not what we've known since March 2020. Yes, we've been working in different places at different times, onboarding employees remotely, and reconsidering our remote tech needs. But to a large extent, we've been doing so under the impression that, one day, things will return to normal and we'll return to the office.

But that isn't the case.

We need to disassociate hybrid from remote working and push back against the prevailing assumption that working from home is simply a tolerable reactive maneuver. Instead, we must acknowledge that we have uncovered a better way to work flexibly. We need to adopt a mindset that sees hybrid as a major opportunity to grow and thrive and for individuals to get the most out of their lives both at work and outside of it. Because as we've seen, the benefits of embracing hybrid far outweigh any negatives, both for people and for organizations.

The challenges of transitioning to hybrid are a chance to rethink the productivity and success of your team in the long run. As a first big step, ask yourself what worked and what didn't while we were working from home and use those lessons to understand how the organization regards employees in relation to the office space, organizational culture, and the work-life balance needed to avoid burnout and thrive in a given role.

Consult those employees on the exact same questions to figure out what they need from you in order to remain satisfied and productive in a hybrid future. Use their experiences and input to establish a set of shared principles within the organization, principles which will drive your approach to how, where, and when to work. And finally, lead by example to ensure that everyone is secure in their situation and is optimistic about their future within the organization.

We have a once-in-a-generation opportunity to change the way humans relate to work. Leaders and managers are going to play a decisive role in whether we succeed in doing that by making work more productive, more flexible, and ultimately more human for everyone.





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jabra.com
