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Managing the Transition to a Hybrid Workplace Model

Presentation by:
MHN Training & Development

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Participant Handbook

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Learning Objectives

- Provide guidelines to navigate your teams' transition to a hybrid workplace model
- Offer tips and strategies for successfully managing a hybrid team

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What is a Hybrid Workplace Model?

- A hybrid work environment is where employees may work:
 - Remotely from home
 - Physically on-site
 - Some blending of both remote and on-site work
- Types of hybrid schedules:
 - Cohort
 - Staggered

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Pros & Cons of the Hybrid Model

- What are pros of a hybrid model?
- What are cons of a hybrid model?

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The Pros of a Hybrid Model

- Increased schedule flexibility
- Reduced commute
- Reduced carbon footprint
- Reduced costs for the employer
- Reduced interruptions
- Enhanced opportunities for face-to-face collaboration, informal networking, learning and creativity
- Reduced risk of spreading Covid-19
- *What else?*

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Potential Cons of a Hybrid Model

- Employees may feel disconnected from the business and their colleagues
- There may be an erosion of trust, cohesion, and shared experience
- Employees may feel *excluded* when working remotely
- Processes, communications and collaboration may become problematic, less efficient, and/or less effective
- *What else?*

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Create Guidelines to Navigate Your Team's Transition to A Hybrid Model

In creating guidelines, seek to:

- Understand your organization's hybrid model
- Understand your organization's measures to ensure workplace safety
- Consider individual needs and circumstances
- Work with HR to navigate evolving scenarios and special requests
- Identify lessons learned, and consider team and customer needs

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Understand Your Organization's Hybrid Model

- Determine who is selecting the model/schedule
 - Leadership? You? Your team members?
 - Clarify your managerial role in creating schedules for your team
- Understand what type of hybrid model is being implemented
 - Cohort schedule, staggered shifts/schedules, continued telecommuting?
- Be clear about the timing and duration of the plan
- Review your organization's position regarding employee requests to continue to work remotely
- Anticipate and prepare for situations where employees are unable or unwilling to return to work

Note: Remain flexible and be ready to change course quickly as circumstances continue to evolve

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Understand Your Organization's Measures to Ensure Workplace Safety

- Understand your organization's protocols and procedures for:
 - Health screening procedures (if applicable)
 - Cleaning and disinfecting procedures
 - Use of personal protective equipment (PPE)
 - Physical distancing measures (including any changes to the physical workspace)
 - Customer and/or visitor contact
 - Business travel
 - Communications regarding exposures or infections

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Consider Individual Roles, Circumstances & Needs

When implementing the model with your team, consider:

- The nature of the employees' work and the specific jobs they perform
- Employee tenure or experience level
- Special circumstances, preferences and personalities

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Work with HR to Navigate Evolving Scenarios and Special Requests

- Remember that anti-discrimination protections remain intact during (and after) the pandemic
- Be cautious about treating people differently based on assumptions
 - *For example:*
 - Employees who are pregnant, or who are 65 years of age or older, cannot be excluded from returning to work on-site because of concerns of potentially higher health risks
- Work with HR to handle special requests as you are confronted with new circumstances and scenarios
- Stay informed of additional policy changes

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Identify Lessons Learned: Consider Team & Customer Needs

- Engage your team in a formal process of capturing feedback about their remote work experience
 - Ask for personal and organizational “takeaways” after being away from the work site for an extended period
 - Impact on operational efficiencies and work relationships?
- Discuss what is best and/or necessary for the team, your organization and your customers

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Communicate & Discuss Expectations with Your Team

- Acknowledge how the pandemic has impacted people differently
- Bring forward some of the positive emotions the team is experiencing
- Discuss the hybrid work plan
- Review workplace safety measures by location
- Review any policy and procedure changes
- Discuss changes in expectations regarding job duties, priorities, workflow, communication and collaboration

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Communicate & Discuss Expectations *cont.*

- Reiterate expectations for workplace behavior and conduct toward others
- Emphasize inclusion and equity
- Develop a process with your team for regularly evaluating and sharing feedback on the hybrid schedules
- Communicate what resources are available (HR, EAP, etc.)

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Managing a Hybrid Team

How do you successfully manage a hybrid team?

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Managing a Hybrid Team

- Discourage an 'us vs them' mentality
- Reinforce a culture of trust and shared responsibility
- Revisit goals, vision, and related priorities as needed
- Ensure that employees adhere to policies and procedures
- Check in frequently, offer support and be available

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Managing a Hybrid Team *cont.*

- Put yourself in your employee's shoes; have empathy and reasonable expectations

"It's not unprofessional to be empathetic. It doesn't hurt my bottom line to be patient and understanding with people. Extending a helping hand ensures that they'll want to work with me even after the crisis is over, and they won't desperately look for anywhere else to work because I was unreasonable."

-Nelson Sherwin, manager of Nebraska-based PEO Cos.

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Managing a Hybrid Team *cont.*

- Ensure inclusion and equity in your actions and decisions
- Be aware of your own biases and preferences
- Strengthen engagement and connection

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Ensure Inclusion and Equity

- Ensure rewards and benefits are fair for all
- Understand the benefits of each working situation and ensure fairness
- Measure performance fairly
- Be inclusive with communication
- Recognize how differing access to resources, information and visibility may impact in-office versus remote employees
- Be aware that individuals are not equally skilled at operating within a hybrid environment

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Ensure Inclusion & Equity *cont.*

- Stay informed about what your employees are doing/need, and facilitate their access to resources
- Address imbalances by shifting or redistributing access to resources and/or visibility levels
- Align each team member to different projects, cross-functional teams, and initiatives
- Regularly review policies and procedures to ensure they are fair to both remote and in-office employees
- Use routine performance reviews and evaluations to address imbalances

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Be Aware of Your Own Biases/Preferences

- Be mindful of your own preferences and biases towards your in-office and remote employees
- Provide equitable amounts of attention and assistance to each employee, regardless of work location
- Treat your team members fairly

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Strengthen Engagement and Connection

- Become creative in instilling virtual interactions that allow breaks from work, and encourage casual interactions
 - Start meetings by sharing personal news or conducting exercises which foster mutual trust, care and respect
 - Host informal socials aka virtual watercooler chats
 - Hold “informal Zoom room” at lunchtime so that people can chat freely like they would in the office lunchroom

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Strengthen Engagement and Connection *cont.*

- Bring levity and fun into the workday
 - Host interactive virtual classes, games, contests and events
 - Role-playing games, magic shows, weekly Friday Netflix watch parties, Tik Tok challenges, scavenger hunts, trivia games, vision board workshops, open microphone, comedy shows, a raffle contest with fun prizes, themed costume parties, after-hours gatherings, office-wide fantasy football league, trivia games, optional outdoor team-building events (when safe to gather)
 - What else?
- Invite your team to co-create the cultural experience they want to have

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Strengthen Engagement and Connection *cont.*

Bring Colleagues Together to Solve Shared Challenges

- Set up virtual team spaces, bringing colleagues together to solve shared challenges
 - Are they parents with children at home?
 - Do they have aging relatives in care homes?
 - Are they highly social, now locked in by themselves?
- Increase engagement, inclusivity, and productivity through team chats and collaboration spaces

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Strengthen Engagement and Connection *cont.*

- Motivate employees by connecting their work to what your organization is trying to accomplish
- Identify and implement technology solutions that will work best for employees at home and in the office
- Encourage employee side projects
- Show appreciation
- Create occasions to physically bring your team together (when safe to do so)

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Summary

- Understand your organization's return-to work-plan
- Enforce your organization's safety practices, policies and procedures
- Communicate with your staff thoroughly and often
- Partner with HR to address special requests and circumstances
- Remain flexible as things change
- Be prepared for issues and concerns that may arise through the process

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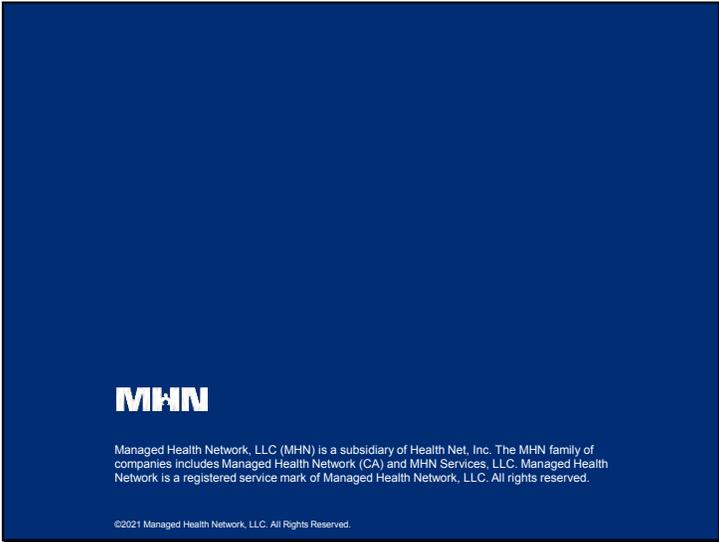
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Resources

- Internal Resources
 - Immediate Supervisor/Manager
 - Human Resources
 - Legal Department
 - EAP Coordinator
 - Anything else?
- External Resources
 - www.oshamanual.com/compliance101/category/covid-19
 - www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/guidance-business-response.html
 - www.eeoc.gov/wysk/what-you-should-know-about-covid-19-and-ada-rehabilitation-act-and-other-eeo-laws

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Handout A: Types of Hybrid Schedules

1. Cohort schedules

What it is: Employees work certain days or weeks on a regular basis. The most common method is to schedule one cohort to come in Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, and a second cohort to work on-site Tuesday and Thursday. Another approach is to schedule half of employees to work the first and third week of the month, and the other half to work the second and fourth days of the month.

Pros:

- **Predictability: High.** Employees and the workplace team know exactly who will be in the office and how many people will be in the office each day so that they can plan ahead.
- **Time investment: Low.** Because the same people work in the office each day or week, this approach takes minimal time and oversight to manage.
- **Equal access to the workplace: High.** Anyone who wants to work on-site has a set number of days they can work in the office, so there is little to no competition for spaces.

Cons:

- **Flexibility: Low.** Although cohorts provide more flexibility than a five-day, all in the office work week, the days they have remote work (or on-worksites) may not always work with their schedule.
- **Collaboration: Low.** Employees have limited opportunities to see or collaborate with people in other groups. This creates inefficiencies for people who work in cross-functional roles that may work on the opposite schedule.

Who it's best for: Companies whose employees need to be in the workplace but don't need to engage with other departments to accomplish their work. Manufacturing companies that cannot operate unless employees are on the factory floor find this method works well. This method can also work well for agencies or professional services firms with independent teams.

2. Staggered schedules

What it is: Employees must come in at a set time to prevent congestion/lines from forming at various locations, such as by elevators or a security stand.

Pros:

- **Predictability: Moderate.** Like cohort schedules, it's clear who will be in the office and how many people will be in the office each day. However, it's not always clear at what times someone will be on-site that day.
- **Time investment: Moderate.** Once you assign someone a time, it takes little oversight to manage. However, your workplace team will need to do upfront work to understand what "shift" works best for each employee.
- **Equal access to the workplace: High.** Anyone who wants to work on-site has a set time they can work in the office; however, there may be competition for more desirable shifts.

Cons:

- **Flexibility: Low.** The time slot you assign to each employee might not always work for them or align with when they're most productive.
- **Collaboration: Moderate.** Employees have some opportunities to collaborate if their shifts overlap, but the window may only be for a few hours.

Who it's best for: Workplaces that need to control how many employees arrive at one time to prevent overcrowding or long lines. If you work in a building with multiple tenants who all use the elevator or stairs, this model prevents a deluge of people from arriving at once.

Custom schedules

More flexible but less predictable than group and staggered schedules are custom schedules. These are schedules that change week to week depending on the employee's or team's need to work together on site. Either managers can set their employees' schedules, or employees can set their schedule—both have their pros and cons.

3. Managers set their team's schedules

What it is: Managers coordinate with project teams to set their schedule each week.

- Pros:
 - **Collaboration: Moderate.** Ensure teammates are on-site at the same time to maximize in-person collaboration
 - **Equal access to the workplace: High.** Ensures that the people who need to be in office to be productive get a spot
- Neutral:
 - **Flexibility: Depends.** If each manager takes the time to customize their employees' schedules, this approach could offer more flexibility than A/B shifts. However, if managers don't take the time to customize schedules or only schedule certain people to work on-site, this option could offer the least flexibility.
- Cons:
 - **Predictability: Low.** Employees won't know what days they'll be on-site until they hear from their manager.
 - **Time investment: High.** Takes the most time and oversight of any method to manage. Managers must approve schedules, and employees must request days to come in.

Who it's best for: Companies whose employees work in shifts and must be on-site with the same people to do their jobs.

4. Employees set their schedule

What it is: Employees set their own schedules without any oversight from their managers or a workplace team.

- Pros:
 - **Flexibility: High.** Employees have full control over what days and times they work from the workplace.
 - **Collaboration: High.** Employees who work with multiple departments can choose to work the same days as the teams they need to collaborate with

- **Predictability: Moderate.** Employees set their schedule and work in the office on their terms, so there aren't any surprises. Employees who want more structure can plan to work on-site every day, every Friday, or whenever they schedule an in-person meeting.
- Neutral:
 - **Time investment: Moderate.** Employees don't have to wait for a manager to approve their schedule. However, it may take employees some time to coordinate with teammates and other departments to see who's working when.
- Cons:
 - **Equal access to the workplace: Moderate.** Because employees don't have a guaranteed spot in the office until they add it to their schedule, there may be competition for available spaces or certain days of the week. For instance, Envoy data shows that the most popular days to work in the office are Tuesday and Wednesday, and the least people want to work on-site on Friday.

Who it's best for: Companies whose employees expect flexibility and can be productive when remote, such as tech or knowledge-worker companies. Employee-set schedules are also the best option for companies whose employees need to collaborate in person across many departments.

Adapted from:

- [The 4 office schedules that will power hybrid work | Envoy](#)

Handout B: Understand Your Organization's Approach to Workplace Safety

This handout is intended to help ensure that you understand your organization's safety measures and guidelines. It includes questions to ask if the information is not presented outright.

Look to HR for guidance on regulations and policies for the following:

- Health screening procedures (as applicable).
 - What health screening procedures are necessary and for whom?
 - How will infectious or potentially infectious individuals be isolated in order to protect colleagues, customers, and visitors?
 - What health screening procedures are optional?
 - Who will administer them?
 - How will the employee's privacy be maintained?
 - What record keeping will be expected?
 - What criteria will be used for determining when people can return to work?
 - What if an employee says that they have a family member at home who has symptoms of COVID-19 or who has been diagnosed with COVID-19?
- Cleaning and disinfecting procedures.
 - What changes are being made to the cleaning and disinfecting procedures for the facilities?
 - Frequent hand washing with soap and water is the best defense for everyone. What hand washing protocol is being implemented for employees?
 - Are there adequate facilities to encourage frequent handwashing?
 - If running water is unavailable do you have hand-sanitizer stations available for the employees?
- Use of personal protective equipment (PPE).
 - What personal protective equipment (PPE) will be required and where?
 - Are gloves or masks being provided? If they are necessary and the organization is not providing them, do the returning employees know if they are required to provide them to work?
 - What happens if someone forgets their PPE at home? Are their spares for them?
- Physical distancing measures (including any changes to the physical workspace)
 - What is the maximum number of people my workplace can safely accommodate? This will likely change as the pandemic starts to fade. Consider how your schedule may change at each point in your reopening.

- Is there enough space for continued social distancing of at least 6 feet between employees during the workday? If not, are you planning to rotate in-person workdays to stagger use of closely spaced work areas?
- If possible, walk through your employee workspaces prior to them returning to the site, taking a hard look at the layout of your workspace and determine if there are changes needed to reduce the risks.
- Reconsider the use and layout of your collaboration spaces, such as conference rooms, which are often packed with furniture. Consider removing chairs from these rooms and organizing remaining chairs as a visual reminder to stay spaced apart.
- How will break rooms, restrooms and other common areas be used safely?
- Understand exposure-response protocol.
 - What should you and your team do if a team member is diagnosed with the infection?
 - What if a team member learns that a roommate or member of their household is diagnosed with COVID-19?
 - Under what circumstances is the organization responsible for communicating exposure/infection to customers/vendors? Who will provide that communication?
- Customer and/or visitor contact
 - How will employees be expected to interact with customers, visitors, and vendors?
 - For example, will there be Plexiglas or other materials physically separating you from on-site visitors to help maintain social distancing? Will customers be required to wear PPE (such as masks) and engage in extra hand sanitizing if they are on site? Are there separate protocols for customers/vendors who do not have PPE with them? Will disposable masks be made available for them while on site?
 - Map out contacts and interactions and determine how to manage these interactions safely.
 - What changes need to be communicated to customers and vendors? Who is responsible for communicating and enforcing those changes?
 - Are there changes being made by customers and vendors on their side, that your team needs to understand? Who is responsible for obtaining that information and communicating it within your team?
- Business Travel

- How will business travel be managed going forward? What guidelines will be issued to those employees that have to travel to do their jobs or visit sites outside the workspace?

Some content adapted from:

- www.shrm.org/ResourcesAndTools/Pages/communicable-diseases.aspx?iesrc=ctr
- www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/guidance-business-response.html

Handout C: Lessons Learned During the Pandemic

From operational and relational perspectives:

1. What worked well?
2. What could have worked better?
3. What are the lessons learned?
4. How can you integrate the lessons into your processes and guidelines, as well as into your work-continuity and pandemic plans?
5. What changes should be continued and/or maintained?
6. What challenges do you anticipate moving into a hybrid model?
7. What else would you suggest that might help the team to be connected, engaged and productive?
8. If relevant, what suggestions do you have for how we might best serve our customers?

And...

9. What lessons learned can be leveraged to best support the team, our organization, and our customers?

Handout D: Communicate and Discuss Expectations with Your Team

- **Acknowledge how the pandemic has impacted people differently**, and request that team members be sensitive to their colleague's wide range of experiences and concerns.

One employee may be depressed after having been isolated, while another may be struggling financially because their partner was laid off. Parents may be worn out from having their children home while working, others from supporting friends or family who have been ill. Some have lost loved ones.

Emphasize the need for patience and kindness.

If applicable, acknowledge how employees who did not work remotely and remained in the workspace may have faced different challenges than those who worked remotely. The purpose is to bring awareness to the fact that this experience has been and may continue to be quite different from person to person.

- **Bring forward some of the positive emotions the team is experiencing.** Welcome your team members back to the office and **call out some of the positive emotions they may be experiencing.** Things like relief in leaving the house or apartment, seeing their colleagues in person, getting a break from their partner, kids, or roommates, etc.

For many people, the time of pandemic has been extremely difficult, and, re-opening your doors is something to be celebrated, as it marks the beginning of a return to normal.

- **Explain and discuss the hybrid work schedule/plan for the organization and the team.** Share the new hybrid schedule/model and the logic behind it. If you incorporated their input, share that. Explain if it is a temporary plan and likely to change, or is it viewed as fixed. Be candid if you don't know the answers to questions.

Define clear working hours. This will help you and your team know who is working when and where.

Explain which calendar tool will be used to manage and view schedules. Where applicable, indicate the importance of sharing work calendars, enabling your team members to know where and when each person is working.

- **Explain workplace safety measures.** If you have multiple locations, explain any differences or nuances by location.

Communicate each step. Include as much detail as possible about the measures the organization is taking to mitigate the risk of people getting sick at work. It is human nature to tend to backfill information voids with unfounded or inaccurate concerns. Be sure to include pre-arrival health check requirements.

- **Review any policy and procedure changes.** Provide a list of all new policies and procedures your employees are expected to know and adhere to upon their return to work.

For example:

- Attendance and shift changes. Will attendance/tardiness/absences be treated the same way or are there different metrics for evaluating these? Will there be differences in shift changes? For example, will time be allotted at the end of the shift (or the beginning of a new shift) for cleaning and disinfecting equipment and/or common areas?
 - Attendance policies relaxed to encourage sick employees to stay home.
 - Flexible scheduling options implemented allowing for compressed workweeks and/or flexible start and stop times.
 - Meal and rest break policies adjusted to staggered times and processes implemented to encourage physical distancing. Will trips to the restroom and breakroom also be monitored to maintain the appropriate number of people in smaller work-site spaces?
 - Telecommuting policies are detailed to reflect the type of work that can be done remotely and the procedures for requesting telework.
 - Be clear on where your organization stands when it comes to responding to employee requests to continue to work from home including long-term arrangements. If you have flexibility, again confirm with HR that your approach is nondiscriminatory, and fairly and consistently applied.
 - Paid-leave policies adjusted to reflect regulatory requirements and actual business needs. Some organizations are allowing employees to use their paid leave for child-care needs.
 - Time-off policies and request procedures are clarified to indicate when time off can be required by the employer should sick employees need to be sent home.
- **Discuss changes with expectations regarding job duties, objectives, priorities, workflow, and communication.** Will responsibilities and tasks change if the schedule, work location, or shifts are being modified? If so, explain the changes. Discuss any changes that need to be made regarding ‘how’ work gets done and ‘by whom’ and ‘when’?

In terms of **prioritizing**, do so with flexibility in mind.

The only certainty right now is that the future is unpredictable. Health guidelines might shift; certain towns and cities may have to go on lockdown. The best way to prepare is to set clear priorities so that everyone on your “team knows what’s most important”.

Hold weekly “huddles”, where you prioritize the most important work that needs to get done that week. Discuss the deliverables that would be “nice to have” if team members have discretionary time. Focusing on the most important work builds flexibility into the system. If, say, a working parent needs leeway because their child’s school shuts down, others can ideally pick up the slack.

If you changed *procedures or processes*, do they impact **workflow**? An example might include, how work is reviewed, stored, handed off, and approved.

Have an explicit discussion about how and when you are going to **communicate**, how meetings will be conducted, and who needs to be in which meetings.

Bring in key points from the lessons learned feedback and affirm the aspects of your organization's culture that you want to be the same.

- **Review expectations around how team members will collaborate, based on schedule and shift changes.** What are the expectations in terms of how team members work together on projects? How will they share ideas, documents, information, and resources, provide updates and track progress?

Will project software and/or collaboration tools be used or used differently? They are used to manage projects, due dates, assign tasks, communicate via messaging, and share documents.

For example, I might review a task listed in the tool that I need to complete a document. I could post my drafted document and ask for your review and feedback. You would see my request in the tool, access it, and post your feedback within the tool as well. We could go back and forth with new versions, and our team members could see our progress. They'd also see when the task is marked as completed.

There are an array of apps and tools designed to help remove distance as a barrier and to help teams to be efficient. Find the *right* tools that meet your team's needs. And have agreement and buy-in on what is to be used for what purpose. Which can be used to create greater transparency and accountability.

- **Reiterate expectations for workplace behavior and conduct toward others.** Reiterate expectations for workplace behavior and conduct toward others. Address the fact that people are experiencing different degrees of concern and fear during these uncertain times. Emphasize the fact that some people may have underlying conditions and/or "medically vulnerable" family members they are trying to shield from external contaminants. Emphasize your expectations that everyone needs to respect physical boundaries and social distancing measures that are being put in place.

Remind everyone that traditional ways of reconnecting with one another after long separations may not be appropriate as we adjust to new ways of interaction as a result of this national health emergency.

Even well-intentioned efforts to greet each other with physical contact, such as handshaking, can exacerbate fear and tension that may already be running high.

- **Emphasize the importance of inclusion and equity, in how meetings are conducted, resources are accessed, information is communicated, etc.** Make it clear that it is of utmost importance that everyone is mindful of this. That they need to consistently ask

themselves if their behaviors and actions are inclusive and fair. Draw from experience with the team during the pandemic, and lessons learned to give examples of what you expect. For example, for someone who is in the office and who just had a hallway conversation could ask themselves, “Do I need to call a meeting to include others in this discussion? Or would it be best if I recap my conversation in an email?”

Note that we have a section devoted to this topic of inclusion and equity. For this ‘kick-off’ meeting, you might leave it at reviewing a few basic ground rules, and then hold a separate meeting for this topic, due to its importance. A ground rule might be:

- Team meetings will continue to be held by video conference, with everyone logging into the meeting individually, even if they are in the office.
- **Develop a process with your team for regularly evaluating and sharing feedback on the hybrid model.** Emphasize that just as things were ‘new’ and different when remote work was instituted and it took some time to figure things out, that this transition will also require a period of adjustment. Communicate your confidence that together you will work through challenges if and when they arise.

Provide a process for your team to provide feedback and to revisit the feedback. Sharing things such as, are they able to be productive? Do they feel that the health and safety measures help them feel safe? Is the process intuitive? What is working well or needs adjustments?

Communicate that it is normal for team members to be experiencing a variety of different feelings about this transitional period because it involves change. They may feel unsettled, anxious, excited, etc.

- **Indicate what resources are available (HR, EAP).** Resources available to employees:
 - Human Resources
 - Employee Assistance Program/mental health resources
 - Other available benefits and resources?

Some content adapted from:

- www.shrm.org/ResourcesAndTools/Pages/communicable-diseases.aspx?iesrc=ctr
- www.govexec.com/management/2020/04/how-managers-can-plan-employees-successful-return-federal-offices/164771/
- [How to Manage A Hybrid Team of Co-Located and Remote Employees \(forbes.com\)](https://www.forbes.com)
- [6 tips for managing a hybrid team | The Predictive Index](#)

Handout E: Ensuring Inclusion & Equity

Effective leadership of a hybrid team, in essence, comes down to practicing fairness and inclusiveness with every member of your staff irrespective of where they are working. The following are some tips:

Ensure rewards and benefits are fair for all

Offering rewards or office-based benefits that remote workers are unable to participate in, such as in-office yoga classes or discounted membership to a gym near the office, can be demotivating. If you do offer rewards that are inaccessible to remote workers, provide alternatives that feel broadly equivalent to those provided in the office. For instance, if you are paying for lunch for your team, send your remote workers a food delivery. If you are providing an in-office mindfulness class, live stream the session for your remote workers. If all employees are spending time in the office, offer activities on different days.

Understand the benefits of each working situation and ensure fairness

Your employees who are working from home may find it easier to maintain a healthy work-life balance than those who spend more or all of their time in the office. Remote workers do not have to contend with a daily commute that takes time out of their day.

You might try to encourage or facilitate the same level of balance for your office-based team members, such as by giving them the schedule flexibility to pick their kids up from school, or to go for a walk or run during working hours. It is also important to role-model healthy working behavior yourself, regardless of where you are based.

Think about how you will measure performance in a fair way

No matter the locations of your team members, concentrate on output based on set objectives, and the quality of the work that they produce and not on how much time they spend at their desks. Ensure that career progression paths are fair and equal for both office-based and remote staff.

Be inclusive with communication

Think through your different communication methods and draw from the ideas generated in your lessons learned discussions with your team. Do your best to make sure that they support everyone, regardless of their location.

Ensure that everyone on the team is given an opportunity to weigh in on relevant subjects/matters. Don't tolerate team members in the office talking about work in a way that even inadvertently excludes remote colleagues. Continue to raise awareness around inclusion: "Let's get Maria on the phone to discuss this."

Agree with your team on norms for communicating. When should people include the entire team? Must recipients acknowledge every message? What are the guidelines for when to use what channel — email, Slack, phone, etc.

Encourage your team to leverage collaboration tools, meeting, and conversational notes, and emails, documenting important conversations, changes, and decisions, to help everyone stay on the same page.

Meetings

Meetings are often unfair to those not physically in the space. If a remote employee is on speaker phone, it can be hard to hear due to side chatter in the room, or people speaking at a distance from the microphone.

- Establish basic ground rules about **meetings**.
- Consider holding them via web-conferencing, with individual logs in, even though some people may be together in the office. There is something about having everyone's face appear in those little boxes that can equalize things.
- Agree that only online whiteboards will be used rather than whiteboards on a wall in a conference room on-site. Consider how you can use better technology to capture the conversation in the room during team meetings.
- Consider recording all meetings so that employees have the freedom to work asynchronously? The person holding the meeting sends out a prepared agenda in advance so that if a colleague has a conflict they can opt-out. If needed, they can read the summary, or watch/listen to the recorded meeting later.

Be aware of how proximity and access to resources, peer support, and information as well as visibility from leadership, affects employees' sense of competency, connectedness, acknowledgement and opportunity

- *Access to resources* can differ depending on whether the employee is located in the office or remotely. Employees in the office may have ready and quick access to technology and infrastructure to support their work. They may have faster and easier access to information, and that information may be more current and broad (including informal water-cooler conversations), which may provide them with an edge.
- Being in the office also provides access to the emotional and task-based social support provided by peers.
- In contrast, employees who work remotely often find their weaker technological setup and infrastructure (slow connections, inability to access certain resources from home, a less sophisticated home office setup) may make it more difficult to demonstrate their competence.
- Not being present for informal interactions can leave remote workers feeling out of the loop and last to know. Being remote may also lead employees to feel more isolated, lacking the relationships and connections that provide social support.
- *Visibility level*, or being seen by those in power, may also be shaped by an employee's location — especially their location relative to *you* (their boss) and senior managers.

Working in the same space as one's boss increases the likelihood that employees' efforts and actions will be recognized. Employees who are seen in the hallways are likely to come to mind when it's time to staff an important new project, and their actions on that project are likely to be acknowledged, resulting in credit for a job well done. Even if the boss is working remotely, when an employee is based in the office it increases the likelihood that their actions will be seen by others and reported to the boss indirectly. When working remotely, no one sees the late nights or early mornings or how hard employees are working to deliver on their obligations. Credit for a collective output may likely be unevenly attributed most to those who are there in the office and more visible.

Be aware that not all individuals are equally skilled at operating within a hybrid environment.

- Hybridity requires employees to be ambidextrous — able to balance between and working locally and remotely — in a way that fully co-located, or fully remote employees cannot.
- Employees who are strong at relationship building, both face-to-face and virtually, have an advantage in hybrid environments, as do those who are willing to ask for, find, and claim the resources they may not have easy access to. Employees with a good network and political awareness are able to recognize advantageous positions and situations. Also, those who establish strong relationships that can transcend the gap between face-to-face and remote working can use informal connections to replace the missing information. Hybrid environments reward employees who think and act adaptably and flexibly, who are able to organize and coordinate across a complex and dynamic environment, and who are able to establish and provide evidence of their own trustworthiness when working in a context of low visibility.
- On the other hand, employees who are less effective at building relationships in either in-person or remote environments may find themselves struggling to work with collaborators who do work that way. Those who are less skilled at coordinating work within such a complex system may find they're constantly out of sync with colleagues and managers.

Tips to Strengthen Inclusion & Equity:

1. While employees need to ensure that they are “visible” to their managers and can access the resources they need for their work, managers similarly need to make sure they stay informed about what their employees are doing and needing and facilitate their access to those resources.

For instance, perhaps an employee is wanting a promotion. If their manager is aware of this, they can coach them to be doing the right things to support their goal.

2. While some level of power imbalance is structurally inevitable in a hybrid team or workgroup, when necessary and possible, managers should intervene to redistribute power through shifting access to resources and/or visibility levels.
3. Where possible, align each team member to different projects, cross-functional teams, and initiatives. This way, everyone on the team is a point-of-contact for topic areas or project work (remote and ‘local’ team members). By doing this, remote employees will be more involved in cross-functional matters as well as more visible across the organization.
4. Regularly review policies and procedures to ensure they don’t provide an unfair advantage based on hybridity — for example, key performance indicators (KPIs) that don’t align with resource accessibility, or evaluations that don’t account for differences in visibility levels.
5. Use routine performance reviews and evaluations to address imbalances. (If you wait until a yearly review is conducted, it’s too late). Reviews present an opportunity for managers and employees to review and discuss imbalances with respect to employees’ access to resources and visibility levels, and how to address them going forward.

Content adapted from:

- [6 tips for managing a hybrid team | The Predictive Index](#)
- [How to Manage A Hybrid Team of Co-Located and Remote Employees \(forbes.com\)](#)
- www.govexec.com/management/2020/04/how-managers-can-plan-employees-successful-return-federal-offices/164771/
- [How to Manage A Hybrid Team of Co-Located and Remote Employees \(forbes.com\)](#)
- [How to manage a hybrid team in the new era of work \(siliconrepublic.com\)](#)
- [Making the Hybrid Workplace Fair \(hbr.org\)](#)

COVID-19 Return to Work - Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) for Managers

The effects of COVID-19 are extensive and have required businesses and organizations to adapt. For many, this included a transition to entirely remote workforces for an extended period of time. Employees have since adjusted to working from home and have structured their day-to-day to a remote work environment. As the pandemic evolves, many organizations are working to facilitate a safe return to office plan. However, work environments will look and function differently, especially when it comes to space utilization, social distancing capabilities, and face coverings. Organizations may consider preparing their people leaders with answers to some common questions in order to support their employees and bring them together effectively, safely, and with sensitivity. Below are a few questions that may come up as the return to office shift begins.

What is the best way to handle resistance from employees being asked to return onsite after working remotely for a significant length of time?

- Create communications that are clear and frequent. Outline what employees can expect when returning to the office and provide visual aids if possible.
- Provide return-to-office guidelines that include your organization's safety precautions such as seating arrangements, building modifications, care kits, office cleaning, use of common areas, social distancing practices, and personal protective equipment expectations.
- Be prepared to outline your organization's remote work policies. It may be beneficial to remind employees of the organizational value in face-to-face interactions and collaboration when working in an in-office environment.
- An all-employee FAQ document can help your organization anticipate and address concerns that may exist for those at higher risk of contracting COVID-19 or those who may be experiencing anxiety when it comes to returning to the office. Have leadership use these questions to foster open conversations so employees feel heard and safe.
- Announcing time frames for your organization's approach to returning to work will give your employees time to review and understand the new office guidelines and make any personal adjustments on their end to prepare.

How do I support employees who are fearful of returning to an office environment?

- Listen to concerns and empathize. Ensure that there are ongoing opportunities for employees to connect with their leaders, teams, and human resource representative to have their concerns heard and their questions answered. For many, return to work may cause as much stress as the initial work from home order. Be mindful that personal adjustments will have to be made and each employee is different. Be sure your people leaders understand the FAQs, return-to-office guidelines, and are able to direct employees to appropriate resources to have their concerns addressed.
- Arrange for training and webinars to provide employees with self-care tools and resources such as how to cope with change, stress, and anxiety, or other relevant topics. Also, host meetings or provide communication pieces to explain coronavirus-related accommodations and physical changes happening through buildings, workstations, common areas, public restrooms, and sanitary stations.

(Continued)

- Highlight any organization resources that may help employees adjust to returning to office such as the employee assistance program that can connect them to counseling services, childcare/elderly-care resources, financial and legal assistance, and managing stress. Consider establishing a dedicated email inbox for return-to-office questions. Sharing this information in team meetings and providing as much time for adjustment as possible will help ease the change.

How do I address employee concerns that the organization does not have a vaccination requirement?

- Refer to the organizations return-to-the-office guidelines and highlight the safety precautions that are being put in place. Listen to employee concerns and ask what they feel could be done to make them feel safe.
- Understand and reinforce the company's position on the COVID-19 vaccine (e.g., while vaccines are highly encouraged, employees have the right to make their own personal health decisions privately).
- Provide a human resource contact who can review any special considerations or work from home exceptions that have been established by the organization.

What do employees need from you to manage change?

- Be certain that you understand what's changing. You can best explain a change if you understand it yourself. When you hear the news first, ask questions if you have any. Be especially clear on how the change benefits the company and how it affects your team. When you explain the change to your team, avoid using jargon and keep your team updated on a regular basis.
- As a manager or supervisor, your attitude sets the tone for your team. While change can be stressful, try to stay positive. Focus on maintaining the morale of your team. Small but meaningful gestures can go a long way. Leave a message of thanks on their voicemail, praise them in a note or tell them face to face how much you appreciate them.
- It is your responsibility as a manager to help employees weather the change in a positive manner. As their manager, you have the most direct contact with your employees and are able to explain how the change will affect them individually. Support and advise your employees through their reactions, while still highlighting the benefit to the company, your customers, and your team.

Need help or more ideas? Call your EAP to find resources near you.
We're here to help!

Call toll-free, 24 hours a day, seven days a week:

TTY users call:

Or visit us at:

Company code:

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