Future of (How We) Work Task Force
Meeting #17:Closing the Divide in Hybrid Work - August 17, 2021
Notes

Summary of Session
We've all been carefully monitoring the spread of the Delta COVID-19 variant across the U.S. in the last couple of months, and that alone, has highlighted the need for us to remain flexible. The session's focus was addressing a few critical questions many organizations face as they prepare for a return to the office. How can we build consensus among the workforce around WFH expectations? How can we create inclusivity and connectivity in a hybrid work environment?

Speaker Highlights
- Chris Garabedian, Founder and Chief Executive Officer at Xontogeny
- Sam Taylor, Director, HR Site Head at Amgen
- Oliver Thiel, Executive Director for Drug Substance Technologies, Pivotal and Commercial Synthetics at Amgen

Chris Garabedian, Xontogeny
- Competing fears about workforce productivity dropping as a result of "too much" flexibility vs the drive to have an in-person culture in the workplace and the ability to build relationships in face-to-face settings
- Remote-based work can be an acceptable part of company culture
  - Allows for stronger employer retention
  - Allows for employee recruitment from more areas, leading to more diverse pools
- Virtual office democratizes the workforce by disrupting traditional hierarchical norms and allows for wider base of contribution in meetings
- Communication unrestricted by location and stricter scheduling demands leads to more relationship-building opportunities
- Return to in-person meetings might be a mindset-shock to people who have adjusted to virtual work
- Smaller companies in the biotech community that are not ready to move to Kendall Square can still be connected with Kendall Square via remote work
  - Kendall Square continues to have the talent pool and innovation ecosystem to advance big ideas, which can originate from anywhere across the country

Sam Taylor and Oliver Thiel, Amgen
- Diversity, Inclusion, & Belonging at Amgen Cambridge
  - Amgen Today

- - Values-based and science-based company that prizes team work, communication, ethics, and collaboration
    - Massachusetts is an "innovation center" that helps support manufacturing capacity
  - Strategic Focus Areas for building a diverse organization
    - People, Culture, Community, and Sustainability
      - Creating a community where people feel like they can "bring them whole selves to work"
  - Amgen's Diversity, Inclusion, & Belonging Priorities
    - Global - increasing the representation of women in executive director roles and higher
    - US Priorities - increase representation and development of Black and Hispanic employees in STEM-based and executive director roles
  - "Diversity is part of our DNA"
    - Diversity will lead us to have better science
  - Amgen's Employee Resource Groups
    - Groups that allow employees to gather based around shared identity- ie. race, ethnicity, LGBT
  - Amgen's support for staff during the pandemic
    - More funding and support for mental health and well-being
    - More childcare support
    - Functional policies allowing people to "unplug", ie. by not scheduling any meetings on Fridays
  - Moving towards "Flexspace"
    - Employees not being required to be on-site when doing work that isn't restricted by location/equipment
  - Benefits from Work-From-Home to be Maintained Post-{andemic
    - Improved employee engagement
    - Meeting virtually
    - Working asynchronous
    - Maintaining home-life balance
  - Intentional Presence at Amgen's Campus
    - Access to equipment and technology on site
    - Conversations where speed and ability deliver business outcomes
    - Building a strong basis for new relationships
    - For activities that strengthen relationships

Discussion:

Audience: How are you formalizing policies and setting expectations for large-base employee populations?

Sam: Continue to move forward without waiting to have all the answers. Thinking about employees in "buckets" rather than as a monolith. Some employees are remote, some tele-commute, and some need to be in the office to do certain work. Focusing more on context rather than numbers of days that someone is in the office- the why vs. when. Rather than being prescriptive, have guiding principles that can be applied to situations mindfully.

Audience: How has this impacted space management at Amgen?

Sam: Hoteling was already in place before COVID, and has continued to exist within the space since.

Audience: How do you navigate business needs for scientists? Business productivity is dependent on job function, so the guidance for managers may be harder to provide or define.

Oliver: Empathy across two factions of offices (lab staff vs administrative staff) has helped create a culture that helped maintain relationships between lab-based staff required to be on-site for some portion of their role and their managers. If managers are in the office, it should be for meaningful reasons rather than to meet unnecessary expectations or quotas.

Audience: How do we maintain the level of connectivity between staff in hybrid meetings? Having some staff on-site and some staff on virtual makes it feel like there are two different meetings going on?

Sam: When planning events for staff, there's been discussion about having it be accessible for both on-site employees and remote workers. Making the two parts of the event interact with each other is something that's been considered.

Oliver: Online social events aren't directly translatable into in-person events and vice-versa. Virtual happy hour got tiring after a while, but events that were designed to be online, like a virtual scavenger hunt, have been more successful. Audience will also impact how people interact online.

Audience: Running into the larger community became something that needed to be planned and intentional. "Stacking" activities that are designed to create these interactions have been successful.

Audience: Has there been resistance around allowing for remote work? [Our] experience was one of concern rather than resistance among managers. Having a range of expectations led to more conversations, and then discovery around workplace experiences and the hours that people were putting in.

Chris: We offered employees the opportunity to return to the office, and while there was some excitement at first, there was not a continued demand for return to the office. Encouraging people to take advantage of flexible work helps build trust in the workplace. The flexibility of the workplace has widened the range of people who have been able to join the office.

Audience: The last year-and-a-half utilized virtual work because we were all in crisis mode. As companies reopen offices and virtual meetings become an option rather than a necessity, there might be a mindset shift. How are we thinking about the benefits are we putting in place and offering as this becomes sustainable and permanent?

Audience: How sustainable are hybrid meetings? Hybrid meetings in our experience are more difficult to manage than either fully virtual or fully in-person meetings.

Audience: We've also struggled to find a good solution to make hybrid meetings more comfortable. There are competing demands between wanting face-to-face relationship building opportunities and employees who want to continue working from home. Company culture has less ability to change or grow while everyone is working remotely. Caution is the best approach when thinking about how and when to return to the office.

Audience: Have you tried Meet Bar or Owl? What technology is available for meetings?

Audience: We've used many types of hybrid meeting technologies and haven't found one that works for our office.

Audience: We now have everyone sign into meetings virtually when joining in the office and mute themselves at the start of the meeting. We recommend that everyone signs in, keep their camera on for the first part of the meeting, and use that to hold each other accountable to avoid multitasking during the meeting.

Chris: One thing people missed the most was the sidebar conversations that take place at the end of the meeting.

Audience: We create breakout rooms at the end of every meeting for people to jump into for those sidebar discussions. It's not as natural if it takes place over a hybrid meeting, but it's been the best alternative.

Chris: We've found that allowing people to turn their cameras off during the meeting and continue to multitask if they're not playing an essential role in the meeting is helpful for people's productivity.

Audience: Do you think employee ages have an impact on who wants to return to the office?

Audience: When we did a survey last year, and found younger employees in their 20's have a stronger desire to be in the office. Employees in their 30's, 40's and 50's wanted to continue hybrid policies more than younger employees.

Audience: Young people with roommates don't always have environments that allow them to work effectively from home.

Chris: Qualitatively, we've found that younger people want to be more social in their workplace. Older employees are more established and might not feel the need to build social relationships in the same way as younger employees.

Audience: Many people continue to be in a heightened state of anxiety. The needs and wants people have under stress are not always consistent with when they're relaxed, so people's preferences may change in the future.

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