Kendall Square
The Future Lives Here

Future of (how we) Work
March 2022 High Level Meeting Takeaways
Topic: Building Effective Hybrid Meetings (Challenges)

What do Kendall companies' return-to-work policies look like as of March 2022?

- Government/Nonprofit sector
    - One participant's organization is shifting to a hybrid model. Employees are required to come into the office one day per week starting April 11. Employees are encouraged to look at their telework agreements and talk with their supervisors on the days they plan to work remotely. They had a vaccine mandate in place, with 99% vaccination rate. They just lifted their indoor mask mandate.
    - A nonprofit indicated they're leaning towards having everyone come in on Tuesdays for staff meetings.
- Life Sciences/Biotechnology sector
    - One company has been back full time since June 2020. They lifted their mask mandate in mid-March, and the decision to do so was made using data about vaccination rate and community transmission data.
    - Another company is offering an open invitation for staff to return, but is being thoughtful based on employees' work responsibilities. Their employees who work in labs are on-site more than staff with an administrative focus.
    - Similarly, another life sciences company is also seeing that their employees who work in labs are on site more frequently. For their remaining staff, the company is encouraging sites to come back at 50%. They just started optional mask wearing for vaccinated workers.
    - One company is requiring their employees to come into the office three days a week. They just dropped their mask mandate.
- Business sector
    - One business is encouraging people to come into the office a couple days a week, but scheduling has been a challenge. Some people come five days a week, while others just one. Senior leaders understand the importance of offering flexibility and use it to encourage people to come in. Overall, the return to work process has been a positive experience for them.
    - One company observed that about 50% of its workforce works remotely and does not want to return (mainly because of childcare). Some employees have moved out of state and have been able to stay on, working remotely.
    - Another company provides lunch on in-person days as a way to alleviate employee stress and entice staff back to the office. They're moving towards masks-optional and are figuring out whether that means they need to have tests on-site (or other health assessments). People are interested in coming back and they show enthusiasm when they're in, but then they "don't come in again for 10 days."

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- ○ One company has been back since October 2020. Employees used to go to the office four days a week but now they are there three days per week. The teams are norming around, and setting, appropriate schedules so the right people are there on the right days. They dropped the mask mandate but require full vaccination and a booster for visitors, staff, and clients. The participant from this company noted research showing that "the individual is more productive than they've ever been, but the enterprise is not," and innovation has slowed with remote work.
- Real Estate sector
  - ○ One company suggested employees come in three times per week (Tuesday-Thursday). They are providing flexibility for those who can do work remotely.
  - ○ Another company is encouraging two days per week. Similar to others in the meeting, the company is seeing some employees come in all five days, while others have yet to come back. They require all people on their premises to be vaccinated, and offer flexible mask wearing. Food restrictions in shared spaces have been fully lifted. They are currently addressing the complicated issue of how to keep individuals who are immunocompromised safe amidst relaxed COVID protocols.
  - ○ Flexibility and communication is very important to another real estate company and their employees. They still require proof of vaccination, but masks are optional. They also struggle with staying true to their core values of creating safe environments for their employees. They've moved from WFH to "AB" scheduling and now have three-day in-person weeks. The flexibility allows people to work through their issues like having young kids in school, so there's no dramatic shift back to a more formal work environment. For the company's facilities people, who had to be on-site, the company added some flexibility to employees' schedules. So far, the participant is not aware of anyone complaining: "it has been a really understanding environment."
  - ○ One company is also providing flexibility by not making people come in on specific days. In the past, this means Mondays and Fridays have been the most popular WFH days. As of March 7, employees are back in the office three days a week, with Mondays required.

What are the perceived challenges with the current situation?
- Participants mentioned that commuting into work has been a challenge for employees who currently work from home. Taking the T can be frustrating during rush hour, and for those who drive to work, parking remains a barrier.

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- For government agencies and smaller companies, another challenge is making hybrid meetings work smoothly because they can't be as nimble with procuring state-of-the-art meeting technology as bigger companies can. One participant shared the challenge of having a speaker that's centrally placed in the meeting room, but having to yell so that those joining virtually can hear.
- Another problem is the need to be innovating together. One company is reorienting how technology fits into the room, spatially, to meet the needs of this new work style. She notes that "the workplace has to be a magnet."
- Culture has been hard to build. One person asked, "how do we establish or continue a certain culture in the new paradigm?"

What are the perceived challenges with running hybrid teams?

- Participants alluded to the difficulty of coordinating schedules and ensuring the right people are in the office at once. One participant shared how she goes into the office and spends the day in remote meetings with others who are not there. She asks, "why come back if others are not there on that same day? How do we center a virtual workforce?"
  - Others responded with advantages of going back to the office, which includes the ability to stay more aligned to an organization's mission, solve problems "in ten minutes as opposed to five days," and build social networks for early career professionals.
- Building a culture of belonging and connection during the pandemic has been difficult for many companies. Helping employees better integrate into the company remains a challenge.
  - As discussed during [February's Future of (how we) Work meeting](), participants suggested different ways to build in-person connections and connections among staff on hybrid teams. Suggestions included creating non-work related reasons for staff to be in the office (e.g. setting up game days at work; organizing Pi Day and building community through food).
- Hybrid meetings continue to be a challenge. One participant noted that such meetings only work when there is a virtual speaker with in-person attendees. Another suggested specific technologies, such as [Owl](), help the company run smoother hybrid meetings.