

Future of (how we) Work Task Force Meeting

November 2021 High Level Meeting Takeaways

Topic: Solutions to Performance and Talent Management in Hybrid Work Settings

November's meeting was a continuation of last month's topic on performance and talent management in hybrid work settings. In October, [participants shared challenges](#), but the meeting raised more questions than solutions. Given this, the November Future of (how we) Work meeting focused on responding to the challenges identified and answering participant questions.

Dilemma: Should my company mandate that employees return?

One participant shared that many of their employees don't want to come back to the office, while others are excited to be working in person. Hybrid work is going to be the norm for their organization in the short- and medium-term. However, the participant noted the challenge of maintaining team integrity amidst the flexibility. They worried that the team's sense of connection to each other will be lost if they never work in person again.

Proposed solutions

- **Provide appropriate incentives to invite employees back to the office.** Incentives that effectively could get people back in person could include subsidizing parking or transit and food/snacks. Without proper subsidization of parking or transit costs, employees are feeling that they're being penalized when they decide to come in to work in person. Employees are most worried about the lost time, and expenses associated with commuting.
- **Take cues from your team.** Taking the temperature of the team you're on and gauging the culture of the team is the most helpful starting point. How are you communicating? How are you working together? When we're forced to be remote, we've realized there are a lot of benefits to it. Even if the interactions aren't as organic and the feeling is that the culture isn't as strong, we're still meeting milestones. Before looking at solutions, recognize if there is indeed a problem that needs solving.
- **Engage your team in a discussion about tradeoffs.** Going into work is better than being virtual because there are more chances to interact with colleagues and benefit from moments of spontaneous collaboration. When you're working online, things are more rigid. However, you gain back some of the dynamic flexibility in your personal life. Do people want to make that tradeoff?
- **Engage your team in collaborative decision making.** Talk as a team to figure out what's reasonable. What's expected of the team? Is the team conscious of common goals and how are they working towards them? Are you trying to design something for yourself or for your team? What do we want to do as a team and how can we collectively arrive at a work model that meets the needs of the team?

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Dilemma: How can I best evaluate my new employee's performance at work when we're working remotely and it's difficult to accurately assess their contributions/accomplishments?

One participant's challenge is evaluating the performance of employees who started during the pandemic in a remote work environment. It's hard for the participant to assess newer employees' work outcomes if they are working remotely. The participant shared that this then seems to result in it being more difficult to recognize and appreciate contributions and accomplishments. It is also more difficult for managers to provide appropriate feedback.

Proposed solutions

- **Clearly define success and communicate it.** Be clear about what success looks like based on employees' roles. As a manager, providing some objective data points from a performance standpoint to new employees is helpful.
- **Initiate 360° feedback.** Getting diverse feedback from different stakeholders that the new employee works with is helpful in getting a sense of the person's accomplishments and work outcomes.
- **Ask for new employees' feedback.** 360° feedback is key, but must include asking new employees for their feedback about their experiences at work as well. An opportunity to ask new employees for feedback could be at the 90-day mark (in addition to during their annual review). During the 90-day meeting, in addition to conducting the 360° feedback, you can ask for new employee's feedback about how the work is going and check to see if they are missing information that they need in order to be set up for success in their role. This serves two purposes: 1) you can then work to find alignment with what the new employee said and the feedback from other contributors, comparing the two so you have a better assessment of the employee's contributions, and 2) getting both types of data (360° feedback and new employee feedback) also help to ensure that you're not holding the new employee accountable to something the company failed to teach them.

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Dilemma: How can I improve my work culture in service of retaining employees and increasing their satisfaction at work?

One participant is struggling to retain employees and keep those that remain satisfied.

Employees are working remotely and the participant thinks the retention problem is largely due to the fact that employees don't feel like they have a voice and don't feel like they belong. The participant is worried about their team and asked how they could create a sense of belonging without the team being together in person.

Proposed solutions

- **Be generous with employee appreciation and create strictures to ensure that all managers do this regularly and consistently (and authentically).** Management showing appreciation for their employees goes a long way. Managers must all do this, building appreciation practices into their 1-1s and other meeting spaces. This only works if the appreciation is authentically felt and authentically delivered.
- **Schedule informal and formal opportunities to connect.** Treat meetings as a time to personally connect and check-in with each other: book some extra time before or after meetings for people to chat, catch up, and build community. Additionally, formally scheduling informal time is important, while perhaps counterintuitive.

This recommendation particularly pertains to people managers. It's so important to prioritize regular one-on-one's with your staff (e.g. a 30 minute talk every week). It provides critical time and space to connect and check in. This is also a space where, once trust is established, both supervisor and supervisee can share what they need. We are all busy, but viewing that time as sacred, productive, and worth protecting is critical.