



2022

LEADING IN HYBRID

EQUIPPING LEADERS FOR THE
NEW RHYTHMS OF WORK



INTRODUCTION

The pandemic has caused the “greatest transformation to work in a century,” according to McCrindle research in their 2021 survey, they found 3 in 5 Australians (62%) preferred a hybrid model as their most favourable arrangement, with a mix of working from home and in the office[1].

This marks a significant change from our pre-pandemic times, with Australian census data suggesting only 5% of workers worked from home. While today, 96% of Australian knowledge-based workers are either working fully remote or hybrid[2] as captured in the PWC survey in February 2022. The PWC report goes on to say, “the longer we have worked this way, the more we have embedded our everyday behaviours and expectations, and the less likely it seems that we’ll ever return to our former full-time office reality.”

THERE’S NO DOUBT ABOUT IT, THE MODERN WORKPLACE HAS CHANGED. THE QUESTION IS... ARE OUR LEADERS EQUIPPED AND PREPARED FOR THESE CHANGES?

Isn’t that a fascinating concept to consider - that full-time work in the office, may be null and void forever for some types of roles?

Hybrid work – the flexible working model where employees work partly in the physical workplace, and partly remotely (at home or from another workspace), is good for employees and good for business. It helps to boost the organisational brand and reputation because it demonstrates a flexible / forward-thinking culture with trust at its heart. It is more cost effective, with less outlay on office space and utility bills, and with reduced commute time and office-related distractions many organisations report an overall improved productivity. This in turn is reportedly creating better work/life balance and wellbeing for employees.

Is it what employees want? When it comes to your people, the resounding response from Australian workers is they prefer the autonomy, flexibility and overall benefits of hybrid work. This option of flexibility has become a cornerstone for organisations who want to be competitive in a tight labour market.

Hybrid Ever-After...?

The conversation, it seems, is no longer to hybrid, or not to hybrid... but rather how to lead and team in a “hybrid-ever-after” working environment.

Australian organisations, and their ability to re-orient (dare we say pivot), to the changing way of working has been patchy with no clear, one-right-way of doing things, and some doing better than others. Our team were curious about how we could help businesses in the midst of these changes with their organisational capabilities, leadership skills and employee engagement efforts.

We’ve had the benefit of working across several different types of businesses, industries, and leaders where we listened to what the challenges were, we saw the experiments underway, and we’ve matched that with global research collated into this report.

Here we bring those broad observations together into common themes, with a framework to lead and team in a hybrid working environment; that will build the confidence and capability for leaders, will improve communication, connection, and culture for employees, and ultimately help businesses be more profitable and productive.

There are no instruction manuals on how to navigate a post pandemic world, the way forward is forged with experimentation, learning from other organisations and industry experts, and by listening to the needs of the people going through it.

Your people. Your leaders. Your teams.

The heartbeat of your organisation.

And we think because of them, it’s worth getting this right.

Written by The Learning Circle Co and Kirryn Zerna



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HYBRID EVER AFTER...?

The conversation is no longer to hybrid, or not to hybrid... but rather how to 'lead and team' in a 'hybrid-ever-after' working environment.

The Context of Work in Australia



NEW TERRITORIES, OLD CHALLENGES

We've become so used to unprecedented times in the last two years of global pandemic response, it's fair to say it's now precedent. In work, and in life, many of us have come to expect the unexpected.

When March 2020 sent most employees into homebased, remote working, organisations deployed incredible resourcefulness to equip people to capably work from home. From technology, to processes, to collaboration, to communication, and both organisations and individuals have increased skill, capability, and their ability to adapt has been remarkable.

Not only was there a new place for work - out of the office - but a new rhythm of work had emerged. A global productivity study conducted by ReclaimAI[3] noted an increase in the workday of 1.4 hours from 7.5 hours to 8.9 hours, and with it an increase in the number of meetings in any given day by 69.7%.

Were the new rhythms preferable for employees? Almost three in five employees agreed their productivity was higher working from home than in the office, according to a UNSW study[4]. In fact, the challenge for most leaders was not whether

they could trust employees to do the work, they had to manage *how* the work was being done; blending work time into home time, or avoiding sick days and pushing through, at the potential cost of long-term health.

At the same time as managing productivity, leaders also needed to focus on the wellbeing of their team to help avoid social isolation and disconnection. They had to do this using only virtual channels, while managing their own wellbeing and mental health. It's been a big couple of years!

With the new territories, old challenges remained. How would leaders lead and inspire their teams (and how to do that remote, in-office, and hybrid)? How would teams effectively communicate and collaborate, and not lose anyone in the process? How would the organisational culture and values attract new talent and engage current employees? To simply resume the traditional leadership and team practices – the way people behaved before the pandemic – would be out of step with the transformed way of working, right now.

Solving these old challenges in new territories, needed a new approach.

Will Pandemic Practices Remain... Or Change?

As pandemic restrictions changed in 2021/2022, the question arose - what work-from-home practices would continue? Would businesses go back to mostly full-time office work, or keep a combination of both, in a hybrid working environment?

This speculation has been the subject for numerous surveys and reviews. To draw conclusions from their findings, employees prefer the option to choose a combination of working from home, and in the office:



74%

WANT TO WORK FROM HOME AT LEAST THREE DAYS A WEEK (PWC 2022) [2]



62%

3 IN 5 AUSTRALIANS PREFERRED A HYBRID MODEL AS THEIR MOST FAVOURABLE ARRANGEMENT (MCCRINDLE 2021)[1]



63%

WANT TO WORK FROM HOME & ONLY 15% WANT TO RETURN TO WORK (BCG SURVEY 2020) [5]



44%

WORKING IN HYBRID, 23% ARE COMMUTING FIVE DAYS A WEEK. 23% ARE WORKING REMOTELY FULL-TIME (THE NEW DAILY 2022) [6]



50%

INTERESTINGLY, 50% FEEL LIKE THEIR ORGANISATION DON'T GENUINELY SUPPORT HYBRID WORKING (PWC 2022)[2]



One Size Doesn't Fit All

It makes sense that different industries and different roles require different approaches to moving beyond the pandemic and making the decision whether it's back to full-time work in the office, or a hybrid solution.

From the firm view of Elon Musk's (Chief Executive Officer of Tesla) email to ALL employees titled "To Be Super Clear" in June, as one end of the spectrum. Employees were called to work a minimum of 40 hours per week.

"Moreover," he explained, "the office must be where your actual colleagues are located, not some remote pseudo office. If you don't show up, we will assume you have resigned." [7]

To the dozens of tech companies like Airbnb, Alphabet, Amazon, Meta and Twitter allowing at least part-time remote work. Their pathway to the 'new normal' was bumpy with about 2/3rds of Google employees unhappy with company policies and many considering alternative employment. [8] Likewise, Apple employees addressed an open letter to company leadership expressing their discontent with a company mandated approach: "We are not asking for everyone to be forced to work from home," the letter remarked.

"We want to decide what kind of work arrangements work best for each one of us..."

"We are asking to decide for ourselves, together with our teams and direct manager, what kind of work arrangement works best for each one of us, be that in an office, work from home, or a hybrid approach." [9]

Back in Australia, almost all businesses we found have a part-time offering of work-from-home, unless their workforce is required to be in the office or on-the-job to do their work.





Examples of Hybrid Work in Action

Foxtel Group

Foxtel Group introduced Fox Flex, their hybrid way of working, in response to lockdown and has since embraced it as a permanent way of working. Foxtel is actively promoting a sustainable work/life balance by keeping meeting-free times in the middle of each day and every Friday afternoon to ensure employees have dedicated breaks, and time for focused work. They are incentivising people to come back into the office for training, large meetings or collaborative work, with the offer to bring their furry friends along, too.

Foxtel leverages its values led culture by communicating the importance of 'authentic' conversations with leaders and their teams about structuring their week to get to the best out of a hybrid approach. They have established Leadership Coaching Circles for leaders to collectively learn and discuss key issues amongst peers and feel supported through the changes.

Woolworths Group

Woolworths has redesigned their work processes, office space and technology to allow collaboration within teams to occur with ease. They have extensively surveyed their employees for their preferences so they could design with business and employee needs in mind, they established new-norm values for hybrid working like "leader-led", "get it done" and "freedom over framework."

Woolworths has developed work policies that allow employees to work from anywhere in the world (where applicable) and redesigned their office spaces to encourage teams to come into the office for collaborative, interactive work. They've embraced the change and are actively working to make it embedded and sustainable.

THE CHALLENGES OF CHANGE

Transitioning from a decades-old rhythm of working in the office to an abrupt change of the pace and place of work, is there any doubt there would be challenges?

The Challenges of Hybrid Work Today



THE CHALLENGES OF CHANGE

Transitioning from a decades-old rhythm of working in the office, to an abrupt change of the pace and place of work – is there any doubt that there would be challenges?

At this stage of the transition (2 years in), many of the essentials are in place to facilitate an effective hybrid working environment. Most organisations have technology solutions, and capabilities to perform necessary functions. Essential policies have been designed that give employees certainty around expectations of their roles, and how they're supported from HR practices.

In fact, the HR function has proved an essential asset, helping leadership teams navigate the regulatory and compliance changes, and then interpret those policies within their business (especially when parts of Victoria and NSW were in lockdown, while other geographical locations were not).

When considering the most pressing challenges for Australian businesses within hybrid work, we've found there were four key themes that emerged.

1

CO-ORDINATION

Tackling the Traditional Team Bias

How to avoid acting, leading, and behaving like all the team is in the office, and making adjustments for the people working remotely.

Have you been in this situation: your team are filing into the boardroom-style meeting room, ready for their team meeting. There are two people dialling in and you can see their faces up on the TV screen at the front of the room. You can see yourself in the view-of-the-room too, only the camera is placed so high you can only see the tops of your heads.

The meeting begins, the team leader is sitting towards the back of the room, so everyone at the table turns to watch that person. What are they doing? Turning their back on the camera and the screen, which means the people tuning in see not only the tops of heads, but also people's backs. It's fast and furious conversation in the room, which the people online catch snatches of, but aren't invited to contribute... before long they're checking their emails and have tuned out of the meeting.

What's happened? The leader and the team have adopted a traditional team bias: they are acting, leading, and behaving like all the team is in the office, and have failed to adjust for the people working remotely.

In a hybrid working environment you need to design engagement and team interaction by thinking about the remote team members first – to consider the time zone, tech tools, team capabilities and behaviours.

This clarity of needs and purpose helps to design engagement with those in, and out of the office.

For example, in a team meeting there are a few simple things teams you can do to ensure all feel included and connected:

- Setting guidelines for how team meetings will be run.
- Asking for contribution from those online, and in the room.
- Changing the camera angle to the height of people's heads/eye level, so it feels like you're looking at people, instead of looking down at them.
- Thinking about where people sit in the room to avoid the "turning the back on the camera/people online" situation.

Miscommunication occurs within teams when this coordination isn't done right. And in the absence of certainty, there is confusion.

People begin to ask: Was I in the meeting? Did we all get briefed? Where is the central point for information? Are we all following the same processes, how do we measure performance, share files, and update on performance?

And how do you manage power dynamics where employees feel stuck because of virtual communications, and the limit to natural allies/acquaintances?



Remote but not forgotten

Team meetings and the rhythms of work are one thing, but what about pay, opportunities and personalised support?

In his Wall Street Journal article in May 2021, journalist Chip Cutter reported on Executives at PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP who voiced worries that “workers who stay remote could wind up as second-class corporate citizens, falling behind in promotions and pay, so the company plans to track rates of advancement for office-based and remote staff in an effort to make sure nobody lags behind.”[10].

42% of supervisors said they sometimes forget about remote workers when assigning tasks, according to the Society for Human Resource Management conducted a survey in 2021

Remote workers may experience an interruption in their career progression, given limitations of visibility with senior leaders and cross-team interactions. The challenge for leaders is how do you facilitate touch points where people can stand out, and keep connecting with other leaders and teams to facilitate their career aspirations and networking?

It also flows through to the allocation of work. 42% of supervisors said they sometimes forget about remote workers when assigning tasks, according to the Society for Human Resource Management conducted a survey in 2021[11]. Team members may be remote, but leaders will need to work to make sure they're not forgotten.

2

CONNECTION

Human Interaction Online, and All the Time

The number one challenge heard across every industry, every business was the loss of social connection.

Meaningful and social connections that happen naturally in the office - small talk in-between meetings, while making a cup of tea in the kitchen, or across desks - play an important role in helping people build rapport, deepen trust, and create emotional connections at work. The absence of these incidental interactions during periods of lockdown was intensely felt by employees and have been difficult to facilitate within a hybrid working environment.

This phenomenon is well summed up by Wall Street Journalist Joanna Stern, “while remote work has many advantages, building trust between employees isn’t one of them. Online, there is no water cooler, no nearby coffee shop for informal brainstorms, no place to grab a drink after work.[12]”

The over-reliance of virtual-only communication erodes rapport and emotional connection. As Adam Grant [13]said, have we forgotten how to talk to each other when “we’re working in a room full of mirrors”, which is hugely exhausting as our brain is on over-drive reading the micro-movements of people for 8 hours a day.

The desire for social connection was poignantly demonstrated in this anecdote from an Australian media company.

Not long after restrictions lifted in early 2022, there was a company awards night with a sit-down dinner, live music, professional MCs, and a night of awards. Usually, the ebb and flow of conversation would die down as the MC would reach the lectern, but the event organisers were alarmed because no-one would stop talking.

It seemed the delight in re-connecting with old colleagues was too great to pay heed to the social etiquette of listening to the speakers, or even acknowledging the winners of the awards. In a bizarre, and certainly unplanned turn of events, the awards ceremony carried on with absolutely no-one paying attention – while the crowd happily chose to talk their colleagues instead!

In his 2022 Trends Report[14] Michael McQueen calls it the ‘significance of small talk’ - those informal and chance encounters with co-workers that spark collaboration and improve our creativity and ability to innovate.



He goes on to cite a study tracking a range of employees over 15 days with specific instructions around small talk, and then testing their responses in the day and night for well-being and prosocial behaviours. The findings were that on the days workers made more small talk than usual, "they experienced more positive emotions, were less burned out and were also more willing to go out of their way to help their colleagues"[15].

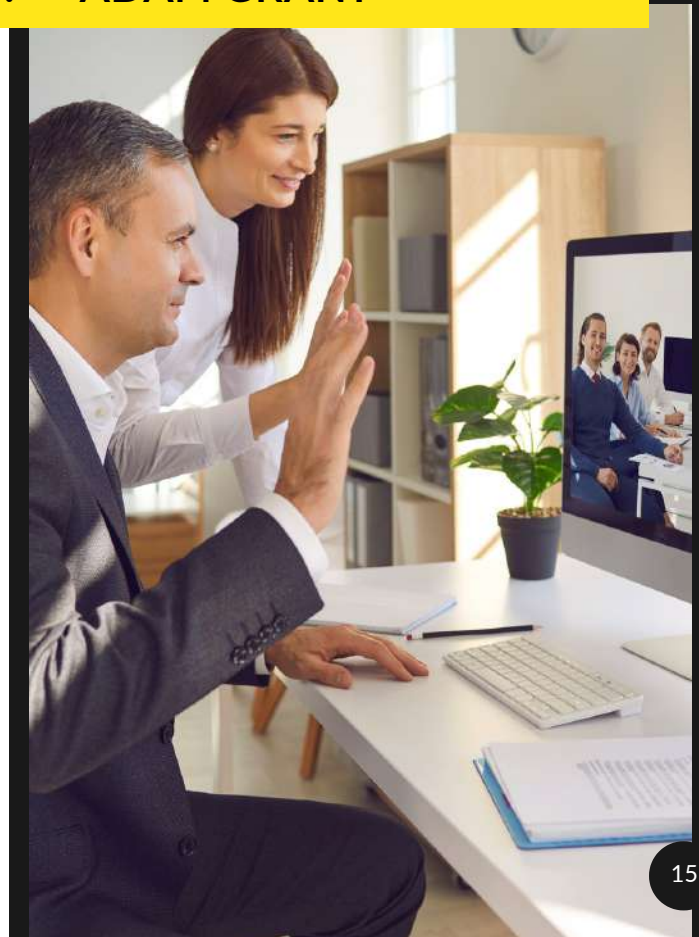
Finding a place for these all-important social connections within hybrid work, has proven difficult. Back-to-back zoom meetings don't allow much time for incidental chat, so intentional efforts need to be made.

It has been especially tough for new team members who have joined during COVID or lockdown periods and haven't yet met the team; with varied success at building rapport with their colleagues, creating team cohesion and building networks across departments when the only tools they have are virtual.

Connections take concerted effort.

It is both the small things, and the big things that make the difference, and we've included suggestions later in the report.

"HAVE WE FORGOTTEN HOW TO TALK TO EACH OTHER WHEN WE'RE WORKING IN A ROOM FULL OF MIRRORS, WHICH IS HUGELY EXHAUSTING AS OUR BRAIN IS ON OVER-DRIVE READING THE MICRO-MOVEMENTS OF PEOPLE FOR 8 HOURS A DAY. " - ADAM GRANT



3

CULTURAL OSMOSIS

Losing Touch with the Cultural Heartbeat of the Company

What happens when you can't observe behaviours because you're not in the office? Does culture exist when the office doesn't?

Away from the physical office, how do employees feel connected to the culture and ethos of a business? Chief People Officer from Salesforce expressed it this way "The No. 1 danger to Salesforce and other companies is that people are going to become disengaged in the culture of the company." [16]

Culture is defined as previously observable behaviours, and the challenge presented by a hybrid, virtual environment is - what happens when you can't observe the behaviours because you're not in the office? Does culture exist when the office doesn't? Is work what you do, or is it a place, or is it both?

What is the company culture and how will it be felt in a hybrid working environment? Many organisations will need to rethink their definition of culture and how they help employees to experience it. What does a redefined culture look like?

Here are some important questions to consider current culture, and how it can be redefined in a hybrid context:

- What values and characteristics are unique to your organisation?
- What individual and team behaviours demonstrate your unique culture, and what does that look like in the different forms of work (virtual, hybrid, physical)? What guidelines will everyone follow (maybe 10 things you should do)?
- How will this be expressed in the employee value proposition?
- What role will the CEO and all levels of leaders play in living out these behaviours, delivering intentional messaging, and being visible across all channels?

The communication and embedding of culture will be essential, especially as employees leave and new ones join.





Why is this important? For businesses, the distinctiveness of an organisational culture can be a vital reason to attract and retain its people, especially in industries where firms compete heavily for talent, such as tech, consulting, or banking.

For employees, it helps them feel connected to their organisation, and inspired towards a greater purpose or vision.

The intentional use of off-sites or leadership retreats to draw people together to allow culture to be caught not taught, may be a helpful strategy to ensure cultural osmosis is felt and socialised for all employees (whether they're interns, entry-level hires, or seasoned executives).

Gartner's head of human resources research, Brian Kropp puts it this way:

“Remote work means fewer lunches, in-person meetings and after-hours drinks with colleagues and the lack of these opportunities result in weaker bonds between team members. This eroding of a sense of connection with colleagues means it is easier to resign from a job. After all, many people stay in roles because of the people they work with and once these social and emotional bonds are weakened, work can become very transactional. And it’s easier to quit because you’re not quitting your friends.[17]”

4

CAPABILITIES

Not all Natural-Born Leaders for Hybrid Work

Not everyone is a natural-born leader or communicator, some have naturally done this better, while others are lacking the skills.



Complexity has increased significantly for leaders who are managing teams in hybrid. They are responsible for the performance, wellbeing, and the environment of their geographically dispersed team in an uncertain and ambiguous operating context. This requires a new and different set of leadership skills, that go beyond the traditional way of leading as we know it; and of course, some leaders are more natural at adapting than others.

Challenges that leaders are experiencing:

- Feeling confident and capable to lead (from their personal mindset, wellbeing, motivation and equipped with the knowledge and skills to lead).
- How to do more with less in different conditions.
- How to trust employees and create a culture of trust (which is vitally important as a driver for accountability, increased productivity, and to create an environment of psychological safety online, and all the time).
- How to manage different needs of team members - poor performers, emotional issues, team conflict, introverts vs extroverts - when they're not physically present? How do leaders observe these issues, give feedback, provide support when they're not 'walking' the floor or in regular proximity.
- Leaders often have varied capability for communication and getting message across. Some nail it, others don't. What skills and tools are needed for baseline success?
- How often should I connect with my team - weekly, fortnightly, monthly for BAU, development, team engagement etc?
- Challenge in recruiting and onboarding staff.
- Adjusting budgets to varied needs.
- How to manage personal boundaries of when work stops and starts; and how to manage the team's boundaries - like taking sick leave.
- How to manage teams coming back into the office when required and how to navigate their adjustment to home/work life logistics, especially those experiencing some grief about losing time for self/family.



Harvard Business School associate professor Ethan Bernstein agrees.

“What makes hybrid work kind of interesting is that it’s the only kind of work we don’t know how to do,” says Bernstein.

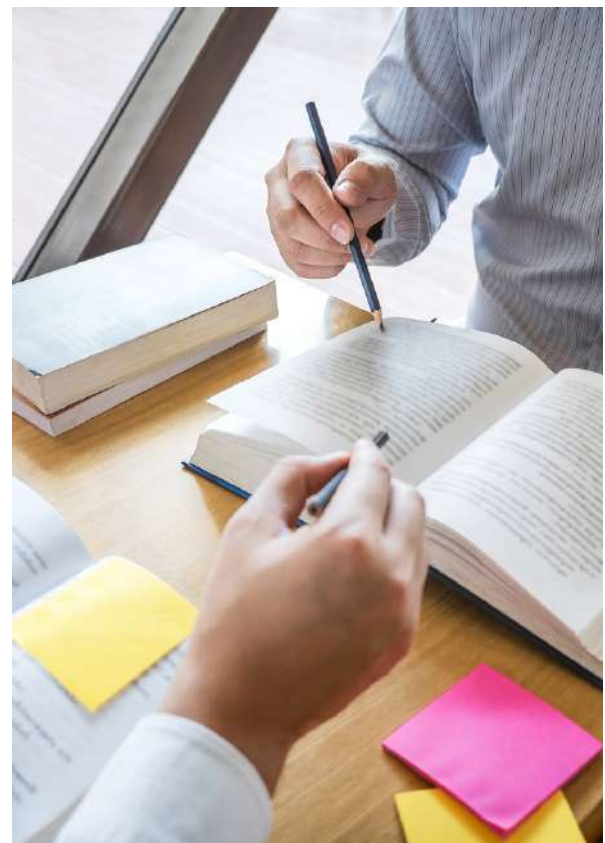
“People mastered working from home. In-person is the way things were. But there are so many ways to get hybrid wrong.”[18]

Leaders need new capabilities to communicate, create systems for doing the work, and consider the personal and professional needs of each person, to create a positive and productive experience for both in-office and remote style of work.

Lacking the tools to lead

Less than one third (31%) of team leaders have received formal training for leading in this new environment, according to the earlier mentioned PWC report[2], and the report found only a third of those people felt equipped them with the tools and capabilities to lead.

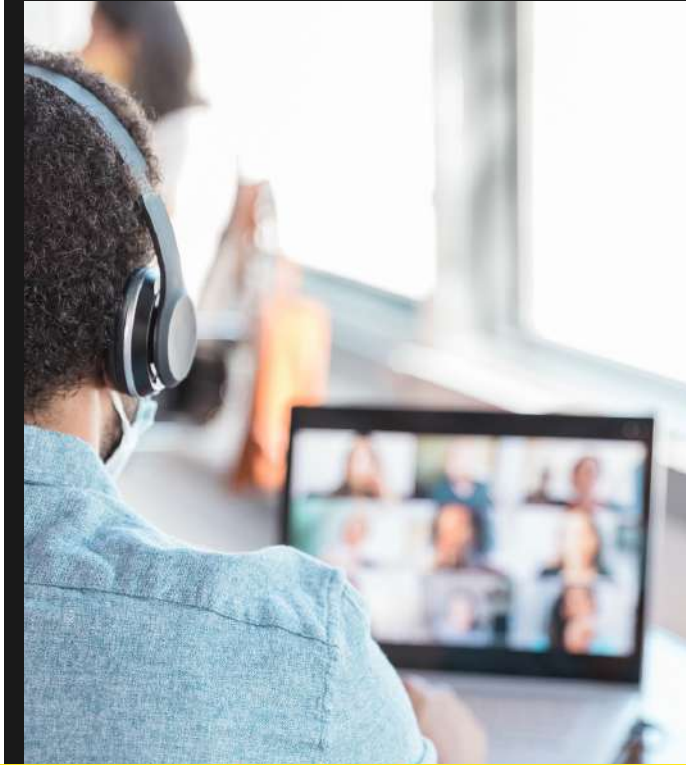
The report concluded the lack of training had “profound implications when it comes to worker performance, productivity, and effectiveness. The lack of investment from many organisations is not just being felt by team leaders but is then trickling down to employees.”



HOW TO LEAD AND TEAM IN HYBRID

In this hybrid-ever-after workplace, there's no reason to think that these potential challenges will be going away, anytime soon. They need to be acknowledged and managed.

Equipping Leaders for New Rhythms of Work



LEAD AND TEAM IN HYBRID

So where do you start to lead and team within hybrid workplaces? Do you focus on the organisational level, the leaders, the teams, or somewhere else?

If you'll indulge us with this metaphor, we're reminded of the electric circuit - perhaps you, or children, played with one at some point. A simple electrical circuit consists of a battery (an energy source), a light bulb (that uses the energy) and conducting wires that connect it all together. When each element is connected properly, the whole system works, as per the diagram in Figure 1.

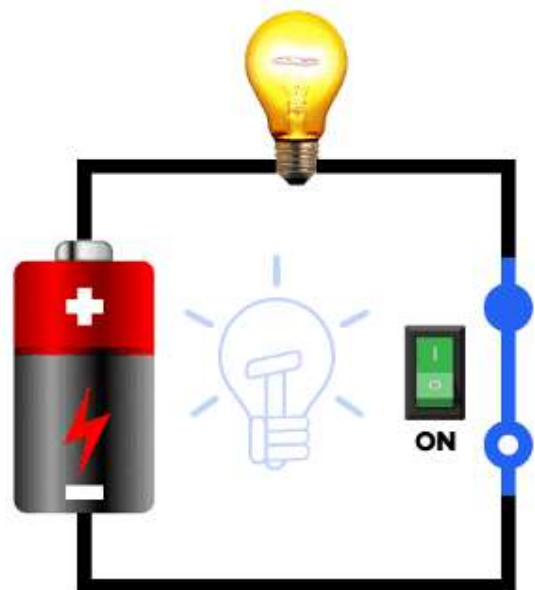


FIGURE 1



Many organisations have had a system, a circuit of leadership, process and communication that has worked effectively for decades, with some iterative improvements over time.

The global pandemic caused a major disruption to the circuit. For many the “lights” went out on their business, for others they worked quickly to get the lights switched back on, and for others there are component parts of their system that still need reviewing.

What is needed for an effective system in a hybrid working environment? We’ve considered the elements we think are essential in creating a productive, sustainable “circuit” and they are:

1. Technology & supporting systems
2. Processes and work flow (HR policies, workflows, measurement and collaboration tools)
3. Skills & Capabilities (managing the new technology, communication, and tools for the job)
4. Culture (the values, behaviours, and ways of working)
5. Social Connection (the emotional and social glue of teams)
6. Effective Leadership (leaders who are able, capable & effective)

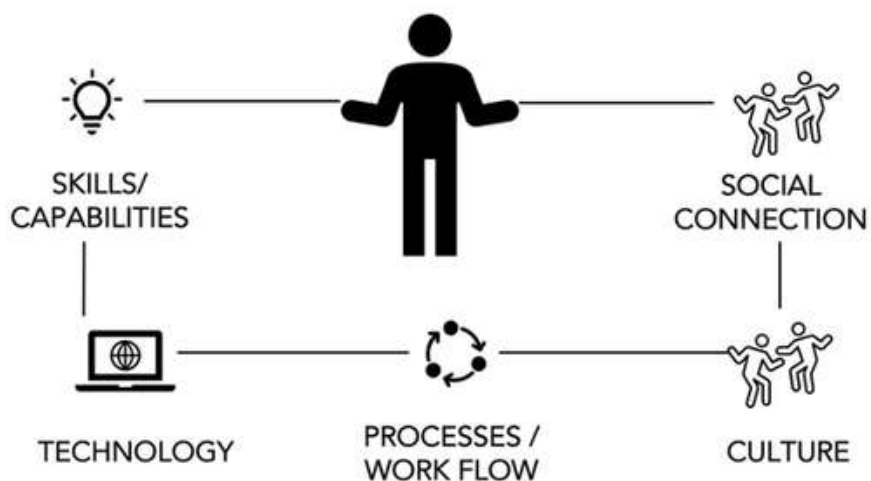


FIGURE 2



If you assess where most Australian businesses are now, in the context of the challenges we discussed, the first three aspects (technology, processes and capabilities) are fairly mature and established across industries, while the more challenging, complex components are leadership, culture and social connection.

One of the most important elements within this system, and where we recommend intentional focus is on the leader.

One of the most important elements within this system, and where we recommend intentional focus is on the leader. Why? They have influence over all aspects from technology and how it supports the team, the processes, the skills/capabilities of your people.

We also believe a good leader plays a vital role in setting culture and creating connections. Let's be real, they can make someone have a great day or an average day, to love their job or hate their job, and influence whether someone chooses to stay, or go.

We've set out four focus areas to help leaders create a flourishing hybrid work environment for themselves, their teams, and the business. Consider this like a tasting plate of ideas, with the depth and the application of these principles found in our programs.

1

RETHINK

The Rhythms of Work

Work looks different today, so leaders need to rethink the working environment, and the collaboration and coordination of teams and cross-team interactions.

Josh Bersin talks about the importance of intentionally and thoughtfully designing rhythms, rituals and routines that allow people to do their best work[19]. Work looks different today, so leaders need to rethink the working environment, and the collaboration and coordination of teams and cross-team interactions. And the important word there is RETHINK. What's working well, what could be tweaked, what needs to stop.

Here are some suggestions where you can Rethink your Rhythms of work.

Know What Your Team Wants

What does your team actually want? What are their unique needs, and how does that work in with what the team needs?

You might explore using the Assess, Request, Confirm and Review framework:

- Assess - this is about understanding how your employee feels about their current ways of working.
- Request – Explore policies and guidelines to change modes
- Assess - What needs to change to ensure work is successful – for example equipment/technology, specific days when it comes to hybrid arrangement, interactions/meetings with leader/team/stakeholders etc
- Review –check in regularly on what's working / not working and take action where needed.

The Daily Diary

A simple, but effective way to create intentional rhythms is to review the daily diary of both your leaders, and their teams.

Here are a few ideas to explore

- Agree a set of principles with your team
 - What does success look like? Make sure you're all on the same page
 - Do you have meeting free days or ensure everyone follows the meeting free times over lunch etc
 - Is there an agreed cut-off for the day? It can be helpful for the leader to send a quick note to the team signalling that it's a time to switch off to encourage everyone else to do the same.
- Book meetings based on outcomes/tasks and for shorter times -15,20,30 mins (like Agile methodology)
- Can you reduce the number of meetings in the diary, or even replace them for another way of collaborating?



Manager Operating Rhythms

The Manager Operating Rhythms are a framework of activities, guidelines, tools, and success measures that help leaders focus on the most important aspects of their job (and features as a vital part of the leadership program for The Learning Circle Co).

Like the 'drumbeat of your team,' it is so vitally important as it helps drive performance and deliver operational effectiveness, and creates a system to ensure career and professional development stays on the agenda.

What rhythms do you need? Here are a few key questions to consider:

- Do you have a planned rhythm with scheduled in meetings, or do you rely on ad hoc catch ups (which potentially don't happen)?
- How are you doing these catch-ups are they online or in person? How do you mix them up?
- When do you get the team together to track WIP and alignment on priorities?
- When do you check in with your employees on a 1:1 base to support them with their BAU work and professional development?
- How frequently do you get the team together to provide team goals, organisational updates, and reward & recognition?

2

REDESIGN

Team Engagement

Leaders need to re-design the places and processes for engaging with the team.

The ways of engaging and connecting with the team has changed with hybrid work, and leaders need to re-design the places and processes for engaging with the team.

Re-Imagine the workplace as a collaborative zone

What role will your physical workplace play? It is more than just a site for productive work, for “70% of Australian workers, work is the place they experience meaningful and regular social connection and community.” This is higher than connection in households (54%) and community (32%), highlighting the importance of the workplace to build meaningful social connections[2].

If you want to entice employees into the office, then leaders need a plan to make the time worthwhile. Shawn Williams, Sabre’s chief people officer put it this way “the workforce of the future isn’t going to come in to go crank a spreadsheet. You’ll crank a spreadsheet at home just fine,” Mr. Williams says. “You’re coming in to be able to collaborate with your team, work on projects, do brainstorming, be a part of our R&D engine[20].”

Many organisations are creating meaningful routines incorporating the physical workplace.

Here are some suggestions:

- Create calendar invites for employees to join the office 2-3 days a week when their team, or teams they work alongside are in the office.
- Schedule business unit or team meetings on those days
- Plan for collaborative-style design/brainstorm activities that invite interaction on those days (but not for the sake of it, only if it’s required)
- Leaders should model the behaviours they want to see. If you want your team to experiment with these rhythms, make sure it’s being modelled by leaders.
- Create opportunities for cross-team connections on the days in the office
- Use tools for productivity and collaboration when outside of the office (e.g. file sharing, performance indicators, project planning, communication, virtual office etc)
- What’s not working?? Make sure you regularly assess the rhythms to see what works, and what isn’t. Call it out, and encourage your team to buy-in to change
- What extra support is required? At all times, checking in to see what support is required for leaders and employees navigating this different environment.



Forming, Storming, Norming, Performing 2.0

A commonly used approach to consider team formation and cohesiveness was the forming, storming, norming framework, developed by Bruce W Tuckman in the 1960's.

It's interesting to reflect on this framework in the context of hybrid work. Where is your team in this process, and what interventions do you need to take?

Forming – This is the initial stage of bringing people together in their teams, and is important to agree a clear structure, goals and directions. People are usually excited at this stage. Consider this for hybrid. This is a chance to gather the team and agree on the principles and practices of what needs to be done, and how it will be managed in a hybrid working environment. This initial kick-off works best when done in person.

Everyone is on the same page, social connection is formed, and achieves the all-important buy-in from the whole team and builds trust with the leader.

Storming – As the team works towards goals, there is inevitable friction points or points of divergence from the goal. The risk in the hybrid work environment, is these friction moments may not be physically visible to the leader (it could be an employee who's going in their own direction, or conflict between team members). The check-ins will be essential here. Leaders must be equipped to have candid, honest conversations and make team tasks and outcomes visible for all. It may be necessary to bring in senior leaders to team meetings to endorse the overall goal, at times.

Teams that grow together, Stay Together.

Norming – During this stage, team members shift their energy to team's goals, find their rhythms and increase productivity. This is when things are humming along, so it's absolute essential to keep checking in with the team, making sure they're supported. Incorporate a blend of in-person and online communication and connection points for social cohesion and rapport.

Performing – Teams that grow together, stay together. It's important to bring the team together regularly to identify challengers or blockers, find time for collaborative idea-generation (where relevant) and to celebrate the successes of what's working well. These scheduled and adhoc team moments build rapport, team cohesiveness and can help avoid burnout.

3

REIMAGINE

Communication & Connection

How can we reimagine communication and connection in hybrid work?

There are big things and small things businesses can do to enhance their communication and connection, below are some tech and non-tech options.

Tuning into Technology

How could technology, and things like the metaverse, bridge the gaps where idle chat by the watercoolers have been lost? Could these tools help remote teams collaborate successfully, and for managers to feel more confident in supporting the autonomy of each person and how they want to work?

Tech companies have been exploring multi-player games and how within these immersive experiences there are opportunities for connection and community for 'gamers' (picture yourself chatting about your weekend while working on your virtual golf swing with another virtual golfer). Along with virtual and augmented reality that's transforming connectivity for services like telehealth they've got tech companies asking, how could these concepts be applied to connecting people through work?

Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella announced in early 2022 that Microsoft was developing Mesh for Teams creating a virtual experience with "presence" that is just like the real-world (to engage with eye contact, facial expressions, and gestures on your virtual avatar the same as your real expressions) to create shared experiences from anywhere – on any device – through mixed reality applications[21].

Of course, Meta (formerly known as Facebook) is also developing a Metaverse workplace solution called Horizon Workrooms using the Oculus VR headset. It allows users to connect with other people using an avatar, with their personal gestures and facial expressions replicated so it feels more life-like. Users can even hear the voice of other virtual attendees from the direction of where that person is standing in the virtual room[22]. The intention of both of these tech solutions is to feel more 'in the room' with each other. And then we can be anywhere, but still together.

While Microsoft and Meta solutions are roaring ahead, you might be thinking what can I use now? There are many collaborative tools already on the market, like Walkabout Workplace that creates a virtual office environment with secure videoconferencing, screen sharing, file sharing, chat with a real-time presence of employees, or collaborative tools well used like Miro or Jamboard for online collaboration with whiteboards, video conferencing and shared workspaces[23].



Small Things Make a Big Difference

There are also non-tech smaller things your leaders and teams can do to re-imagine communication and connection.

Here are some small things that make a big difference:

- Consider the practical and the personal needs of your hybrid teams[24]. From a practical point of view - ask your team how they want to be engaged (for example, a daily huddle, fortnightly 1:1, check-ins using a tool like slack) and design around each team member's personal and professional needs.
- What is the equivalent "walk the floor" activities you can implement online (to improve your leadership visibility and engagement with your team)? Could you jump into team meetings of other teams (for example one-up a level and one-down a level).

- Add 5 minutes onto your 1:1's and have a set of fun/personal questions you can ask to build rapport, make intentional check-in points each month for each person in your team via a range of methods (in person, email, online).
- Encourage multiple touch points with other teams - invite other leaders into your team meetings, encourage team to attend company-wide events (either in person, or online), encourage team members to call / connect with leaders from other teams to increase their exposure and networking.
- Create projects that give time for idle chat, that don't always have to be work-related; the equivalent of going for walk/playing game/team projects.
- Create side-to-side virtual team sessions. Some teams are creating co-working Zoom or Teams 2-3 hour blocks where people can log on to a session with their team, who are all working individually on their own projects, but see/feel the other team members, chat intermittently and just have a sense of presence and connection.
- Create activities to encourage quieter people. Orchestrate an opportunity for them to present or own part of the communication process in team meetings.
- Create a ritual each week where the team exchanges a personal share - for example, start of a meeting with something they're grateful for, share a funny meme or song, or share a personal anecdote or personal project. These things seem superfluous but are essential in building social capital to help teams operate more effectively.

Invest in Communication Skills

Given the reimagined, new environment, leaders and employees may need to invest in skills and capabilities to improve their communication.

Whether it's the functional skills of interpersonal communication - how to have crucial conversations, create a culture of radical candour (open and direct), and lead with empathy and emotional intelligence.

Or how to present with impact to their team & other stakeholders - what is their message (what they say) and what is best method of communication (how to say it/delivery & mode) which can be extended to either in-person or online communication.

Great communication doesn't happen by chance, it happens through planning, learning and practise.

GREAT COMMUNICATION DOESN'T HAPPEN BY CHANCE... IT HAPPENS THROUGH PLANNING, LEARNING AND PRACTISE.



4

REFRESH

Leadership Essentials

Are your leaders equipped and prepared for these changes?



Back to our opening question “There’s no doubt about it, the modern workplace has changed. The question is... are our leaders equipped and prepared for these changes?”

We’ve talked about how to equip leaders from the rhythms of work, redesigning team engagement, reimagining communication and connection, and it is also essential that the leadership fundamentals are refreshed to enable leaders to be empowered and equipped.

These are some of the leadership essentials we think are important:

- Leadership fundamentals – What is your role as a leader? How do you tap into your unique style to influence your team and others? How do you develop emotional intelligence that suits the hybrid working environment?
- Motivating your team – Do you understand your team and what motivates them? What strategies can you employ to enable them to do their work?
- Crucial conversations – How do you deliver feedback, and have crucial conversations with teams, senior leaders and even across departments.
- Psychological safety & Trust - When you trust your people, you empower them to drive and own their own success and with this comes them taking responsibility and accountability. This creates a team climate where people are comfortable being themselves and speaking their minds, which is essential for growth. How do you create this in hybrid?
- Personal Resilience – How to build resilience in your leaders and their teams – the ability to recover quickly from disruption or change - and have the tools to create sustainable habits for wellbeing and a sustainable work/life balance.

IT'S TIME TO LEAD WELL

The businesses that will be truly successful, will be the ones who have invested in their leaders and people.

CONCLUSION

Here we are standing at the threshold of an exciting new time in history. The businesses that will be truly successful, will be the ones who have invested in their leaders and people.

Could we help you? Have you identified with any of the challenges within this report, and thought yes, I need help with that. If so, we'd love to support you - let's set a time to talk through what you need.

What would that look like? For some businesses, we've delivered a keynote session for their leaders, for others a half-day workshop, and for many others we've customised in-depth training programs that have rolled out across their leaders and teams.

**WE'RE PASSIONATE ABOUT HELPING LEADERS
ACHIEVE BUSINESS GOALS AND BUILD HEALTHY TEAMS**

As you can tell, we're passionate about helping leaders to achieve business goals and build healthy teams with people who live happy, fulfilling lives. It's what gets us out of bed each day, and why we love what we do.

So let's do this. It's time to lead well.

ABOUT THE LEARNING CIRCLE CO

Here at The Learning Circle Co we believe that in order to achieve your business outcomes and deliver exceptional customer experiences, we need to shift the day to day behaviours of your people.

Our team of experienced learning and OD consultants, work with your business to design bespoke learning offerings to equip your people with the tools, processes and systems to build the right people capabilities in order to deliver outstanding service and results.

Since 2009, we've partnered with organisations such as Optus, Bank of Queensland, Campbell Arnott's, Allianz Australia, Richard Crookes Constructions, NRMA Motoring and Services, CBRE, Optiver, Diversity Dimensions, Education Services Australia, GrowthBuilt, ANSTO, Actron Air, First Data, Secret Sounds, Little Marketing and MASH Marketing to deliver a range of bespoke offerings across the entire HR spectrum.

Our personalised and engaging approach to learning supports your people to become better at what they do – all through an approach that is rooted in experiential design and delivery.



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Kirryn is a keynote speaker, facilitator and author empowering thousands of leaders and entrepreneurs through live and online presentations. She draws on 20 years of experience in corporate communications, workplace and organisational culture, and marketing (with a speciality in online presences and engagement) working with corporates, government, and small businesses from a range of industries.

A believer in lifelong learning, Kirryn holds a Bachelor of Management, a Masters of Management and is a Graduate of the Australian Institute of Company Directors.

In 2017, Kirryn was awarded the Kerrie Nairn Scholarship by Professional Speakers Australia; and served on their national board for 3 years and was a co-convenor for their national convention in 2021. She is the author of *The Stand Out Effect*: a DIY guide that empowers business leaders and brands to stand out and get noticed online for all the right reasons.



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THANK YOU!

ANY QUESTIONS?

WE'D LOVE TO HELP.

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