

An HR leader's playbook: enabling the hybrid and flexible workforce



Dear Senior Leader,

The pandemic continues to leave its mark on the modern workforce. Many work roles continue to be remote, hybrid, or on a flex schedule. Employees and teams learned to stay productive and happy in their roles, and they appreciated the flexibility of working from home. At the same time, [burnout and isolation became more significant issues than ever before](#). Today, employees are asking for the best of both worlds: hybrid work.

According to the [Microsoft Work Trend Index 2022](#), 87% of employees feel productive at work vs. 12% of leaders having full confidence that their team is productive. This difference of perspective has given rise to the term "productivity paranoia" in which leaders and employees look for clarity in what business outcomes deserve priority. We also continue to see employees wanting more flexibility in where work gets done. 73% of employees and 78% of business decision makers say they need a better reason to go in than just company expectations.

As hybrid work gains popularity, companies are making decisions that will impact the employee and customer experience for years to come. The framework below outlines key decisions to help you navigate changes in your work, workplace, and workforce. Aligning on these decisions early will enable your organization to continuously measure employee engagement.

Based on our experience, a few core people-centric habits can make a big difference in helping organizations understand and respond effectively to employee needs while shepherding organizations through change:

- Frequently gather employee feedback
- Focus on what's most important
- Acknowledge and celebrate wins

I'm pleased to share this toolkit, and I hope you and your team find it informative and helpful.

I'd also love to hear what you think. Please message me if you have questions, would like to learn more, or want to connect with others who are working through these same challenges.



Justin Black

Senior Director, Microsoft Viva Glint

There is no one-size-fits-all playbook to reflect the complexity of modern work. While some industries can create flexible work arrangements, others have workers who are required to show up for roles that can only be done in a physical environment. This can even be true for different functions within a single organization. Add the web of government guidelines and local factors, and it makes for a complex process to support employees that are onsite, remote, hybrid or have flexible work schedules.

It's important to first define hybrid and flexible work environments. Hybrid workplaces include some segments of employees working in the office while others work remotely. This may include an individual who works a specific number of days in the office and the remainder remotely. It may also include segments of the workforce who are entirely remote while others are in the office. Flexible workplaces refer to nontraditional working arrangements, often involving some degree of working remotely. Flexibility may apply to location and/or schedule.



There is one factor that will yield positive returns on all fronts: checking in with employees and involving them in the return to workplace journey. Three organizational habits can help you understand people's needs and respond effectively:



Habit 1

Get feedback and insights



Habit 2

Focus on what's most important



Habit 3

Acknowledge and celebrate wins

Stay connected, understand, and respond to employee needs.

Here are a few high-impact practices you can adopt today.

- Frequently gather employee feedback on critical topics.
- Have regular team and one-on-one conversations to ensure people are feeling safe and supported as they return to work.
- Share progress by acknowledging and celebrating wins.



Habit 1

Get feedback and insights

When should we survey our employees?

Microsoft Viva Glint recommends monthly surveys during times of change. Surveying helps understand the impact of significant changes, such as changes in workplace policies.

Items related to returning to the workplace and hybrid or flexible work can be part of a short, regular survey.

After that, adopt a regular survey cadence to continue to monitor and respond to people's needs while working in the new model. (Viva Glint recommends quarterly surveying during more stable times.) There is a good chance that people will change their minds about where and how they prefer to work after employees have tested new routines for several months. Ongoing pulsing will allow you to remain flexible and adapt to employee needs.

What should we ask?

Deploying a short survey to employees can uncover practical advice. If you're already surveying or just starting, consider asking the questions on the next page to ensure long-term flexible work options are successful over time. (Unless noted otherwise, we suggest you ask each item on a 5pt scale, with 1 being "Strongly Disagree" and 5 being "Strongly Agree.")

Item name	Item
eSat	How happy are you working at your company? ("Not at all happy" to "Completely happy")
Flexibility	I am satisfied with my ability to choose when and where I work.
Wellbeing	My company takes a genuine interest in the employees' well-being.
Belonging	I feel a sense of belonging at my company.
Employee connection	My company is doing a good job helping employees feel connected to one another.
Support-Manager	I can get the support I need from my manager.
Resources	I have the resources I need to do my job well.
Return concern (pre-return)	What is your biggest concern as it relates to returning to the workplace?
Return excitement (pre-return)	What are you looking forward to as it relates to returning to the workplace?
Working location	What is your current work location? (Only ask this if you do not have the ability to track this as a demographic in your HRIS data)
Hybrid success (open-ended)	What do you need most to be successful in a hybrid work environment?

Who should see the results?

Share employee feedback at the organizational and manager levels to ensure actions address what matters most to people by geography, function, personal circumstances, etc. From an enterprise view, corporate teams, such as HR, IT, facilities, and security can use survey results to ensure that appropriate plans are in place to help employees work successfully in a hybrid world. For example, innovative technology or work schedules may be required to help teams that combine in-office and remote employees. We also recommend reviewing results by work-location demographic to track trends over time by workstyle.

Empowering managers and teams to address individual concerns also helps people create a work experience that suits their needs and be most effective. Managers can identify technology to enable teams to collaborate in a hybrid environment or adjust meeting format to be most effective for teams. To make this a reality, release survey results to managers and encourage frequent team and individual conversations.

Employees at highly engaged organizations are 40% more likely to report confidence that their company will act upon employee feedback.¹

¹ 2023 Viva People Science employee experience research





Habit 2

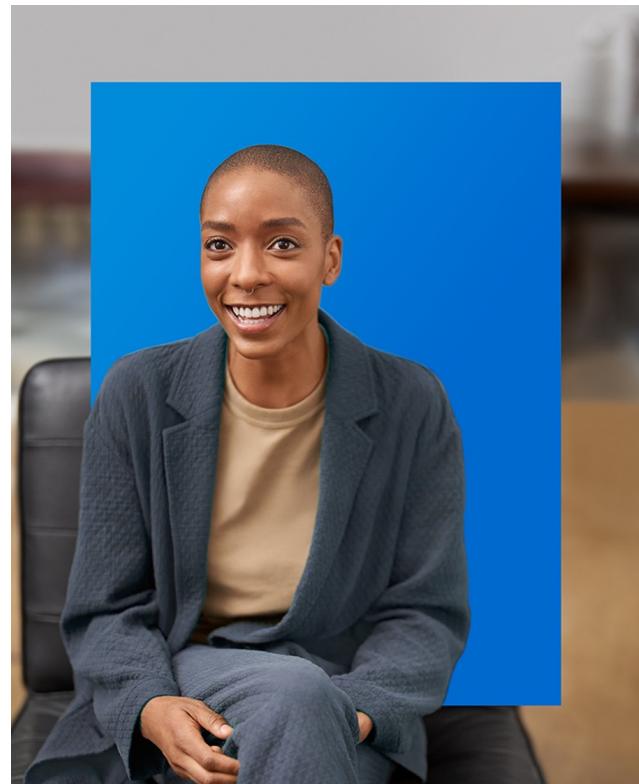
Focus on what's most important

Conversations are the best way to fuel action based on survey insights—they build trust, ensure effective prioritization of work and goals, surface roadblocks and resource needs, and help people commit to ongoing action. Managers and employees should be having regular one-on-one meetings in support of the transition to a new set of workplace norms. One-on-ones provide the opportunity to ensure that individual needs are being addressed and create focus and commitment to what is most important for individual success. Consider adding these questions to regularly scheduled 1:1s.

- Have you seen our [new] hybrid work policy and do you have any questions?
- Given the type of work you are focusing on and your own well-being, what is your ideal work setting (i.e., work from home full time, work from the office full time, flex between home and work)?
- What is on your mind as you think about returning to the workplace? What would help you feel comfortable when you choose to come into the workplace?

After flexible/hybrid working is in progress:

- How are you doing with the adjustments to a flexible/hybrid work environment?
- What's one thing I or the team can do to make things easier for you?
- What other support or resources do you need to help you be successful while working between your home office and the workplace?



Employees at highly engaged organizations are 55% more likely to report confidence that their organization continually improves the way it gets work done.²

In addition to one-on-ones, team conversations are critical to help create focus in a hybrid working environment. Providing flexible work options will mean teams are likely to be distributed and need to establish new team norms for collaboration, communication, and connection. Using survey insights to fuel ongoing team conversations around flexible work will be critical for identifying key actions to take as a team, and regularly checking in with your team will ensure flexible work is a success. Here are some questions to consider posing during your regularly scheduled team meetings:

- Have you all seen our [new] hybrid work policy and do you have any questions for me?
- Given the work we need to accomplish as a team, what new team norms do we need to establish for how we work together? ([Consider reviewing this LinkedIn Learning course for some ideas](#)).



After flexible/hybrid work is in progress:

- How are we doing with the adjustments to a hybrid work environment?
- What's one thing we can do as a team to make things easier for each other while working in this new environment?
- What other support or resources do we need to collaborate, communicate, and/or connect better with each other?

² 2023 Viva People Science employee experience research



Habit 3

Acknowledge and celebrate wins

Employees are eager to understand what the future will look like. It is important to recognize and communicate actions on a regular basis. Look for opportunities to acknowledge and publicly celebrate wins along the way.

Similarly, continue to measure success and identify adjustments that might be needed. As organizations build more flexibility and adaptation into their culture, it is critical to assess how these elements are working for employees and the organization alike. Viva Glint recommends incorporating questions related to these elements into your regular surveys.

Learning Resources

[Microsoft: How to Regain Work-Life Balance in the Age of Hybrid](#)

[Microsoft: To Thrive in Hybrid Work, Build a Culture of Trust and Flexibility](#)

[Microsoft: Hybrid Work: A Guide for Business Leaders](#)

[Microsoft Work Trends Index Special Report: Hybrid Work Is Just Work. Are We Doing It Wrong?](#)

[Josh Bersin: The Big Reset Playbook: Hybrid Work](#)

[SHRM: Reimagining the Office for the Hybrid Age](#)



Get started.

Actions to support hybrid work.

Here are specific actions to support a people-centric approach for hybrid and flexible work. We've broken it down for each level of your organization. Because every organization is different, start where it makes the most sense for you—whether that's starting small and building from your success, or doing them all at once.

Organization

- Communicate frequently and transparently about the strategy for hybrid and flexible work options.
- Acknowledge we're all still learning as we go. Commit to being agile and adapting as workplace policies shift.
- Regularly survey to understand how the shift is impacting employees and how needs are evolving.
- Empower managers to have conversations with their teams about how they can support hybrid and flexible work arrangements. Help managers reset performance expectations with a focus on impact and output vs. time in the office.

Manager

- Know your company's policies and procedures around hybrid and flexible work options.
- Empower each member of your team to make decisions that will best support their productivity and wellbeing. Have regular check-ins to ensure they feel supported.
- Have a conversation about team norms to determine the best ways to promote collaboration, belonging, and productivity in a hybrid work environment.
- In hybrid meetings with both on-site and virtual participants, actively facilitate to ensure everyone has equal opportunity to provide input.

Employee

- Share your perspective with your manager and through surveys about your ideal work setting.
- Surface ideas that can help the organization and your team be more successful with this transition (e.g., collaborate on a team norms document within your working group).
- If things are going smoothly for you, consider checking in with one or two teammates regularly to offer support.



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