

# Cracking the Code

## Hybrid Working



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White Paper by Unqbe

# Hybrid working : the new paradigm



**I**n our future of work conversations, we find hybrid working to be the top of mind agenda for leaders across industries. With the situation coming back to what we define as new normal, the key questions are around what, who and how of remote working, with new ways of working and employment models.

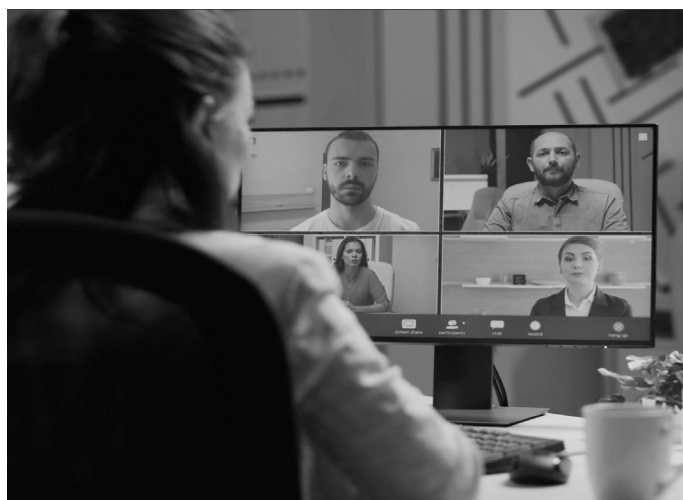
Hybrid working is not a new concept, firms across the globe have been practising them on a need basis. The home office has been common in consulting/ advisory services and quite a few progressive firms have long-existing policies on work from home. In most of the firms, there has been leadership preference for office work, giving more control and visibility to the work done. The cynicism and lack of confidence around performance and productivity for remote working resulted in barriers to organizations practising work from home.

Most organizations had to opt for remote working in the last one year because of COVID induced circumstances, the productivity experiences have been mixed. While the waning productivity in the first few months was recovered by more confidence in work from home in both employees and managers, the culture and team working remain an area to be addressed.

IT and IT-enabled industries productivity, innovation, client acquisition through remote working are comparable to pre-COVID-19 working from an office situation, highlighting the need to review the erstwhile practices. In

organizations where complete remote working has been a success, there are questions around what could be the value proposition for employees to return to the office. The employees have mix experiences of working remotely which makes it challenging to consider 100% remote working.

Over the years, employees have been asking for more flexibility, which is also core to inclusion mandates. With the digital workforce and millennials, the ask for flexibility and personalization is increasing. The existing concepts of weekly working hours, fixed offices to work from, long term jobs and careers are getting challenged. Convincing employees to start work from offices when they have been productive working remotely is being perceived to be a herculean task. Organizations might have to go back to the drawing board for creating a new employee value proposition.





As part of our future work-study, we spoke to more than 100 leaders across 42 organizations across industries to understand their experiences, challenges and best practices. Our survey and polls covered more than 1000 people from diverse background, providing us with rich insights into expectations and experiences.

We understand remote work raises a vast array of issues and challenges for employees and employers. Companies are pondering how best to deliver coaching remotely and how to configure workspaces to enhance employee safety, among a host of other thorny questions raised by COVID-19. For their part, employees are struggling to find the best homework balance and equip themselves for working and collaborating remotely. The extended work hours, virtual meetings fatigue, merging office and home spaces have impacted the wellbeing.

There is no one size fits all approach that can be applied to hybrid working, it differs with industry, functions, jobs, activities, places, regulations, organizational policies. Even after working in remote for 11 months, there is a question about whether the remote jobs can be 100% remote, or the design should have everyone visiting the office premise at some interval.

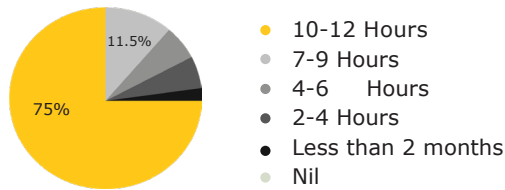
For the services organizations, there are dependencies on client requirements, if the clients have started operating from their offices there are the same expectations for partners. The impact of digitalization is more visible in changing nature of jobs and possibilities of manpower optimization, flexibility in employment is getting experimented in some places.

Creating phygital workplaces, still at the nascent phase of evolution is a focus area for IT companies who have experienced good productivity and innovation in remote working and finding culture and engagement to be an area to focus on.



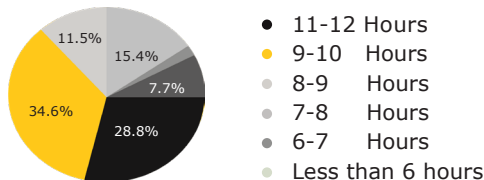


In past 12 months, how long you worked from remote location (home/ remote/ office/ cafe/ tourist spot)



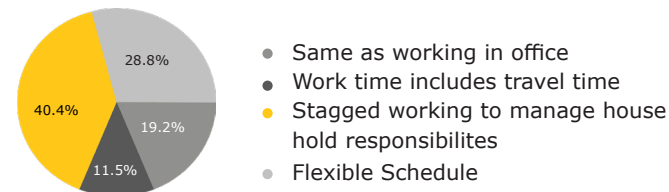
In past 12 months 75% of the respondents have worked, 10-12 month remote and another 11.5% have worked 7-9 months in remote.

What has been your average working hours in past 12 months



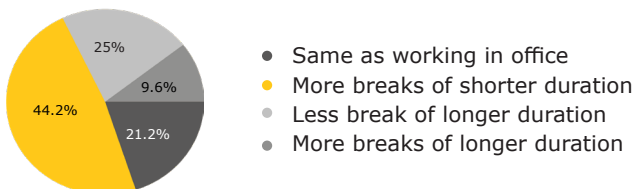
The average working hours for 29% respondents is 11-12 hours, 34.6% respondents is 9-10 hours, 11.5% is 8-9 hours and 25% working less than 8 hours.

What has been your daily work schedule (remote)



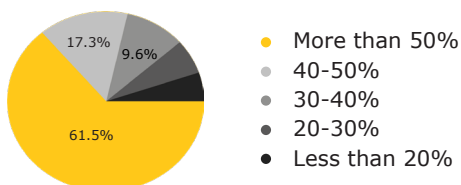
Only 19.2% respondents that work schedule is same as office while working remote. Staggered working, flexible schedule and work including travel time has been commonly practiced.

What has been the schedule of taking breaks



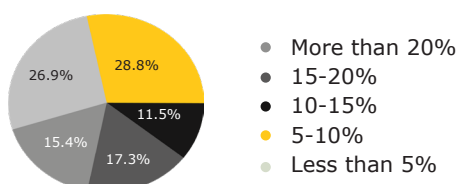
21.2% of respondents maintained the same break schedule as working in office while working remote. The break schedules have been flexible to manage the work

What percentage time is spend in meetings and interactions



More than 78.8% respondent spent more than 40% time in meetings and interactions out of which 61.5% spent more than 50% time in meetings

What percentage time is spend in skills and capability development



44.2% respondents spent more than 10% time on skill development

■ Not all jobs can be worked remote, jobs with activities requiring physical presence are less conducive for remote work.

■ Some sectors are more conducive for remote work, these are the sectors where most of the activities have been digitized or can be supported by technology.

■ All places are not conducive for work from home, the size of the home, number of members staying together, infrastructure, all impact the experience. Travel and commute time is the biggest deterrent to work from the office, as there is a strong realization of the time and effort lost on commute.

■ Everyone is not happy doing remote working, depending on the person's social connectivity needs the comfort and productivity of working from remote differs. We also find that there is a preference of working from an office in youngsters with higher affiliation, association and other social relationship needs

■ While remote working presents golden opportunities of huge saving on Infrastructure cost there are hidden costs of building infrastructure for remote work that has started surfacing. The cost of working from remote or home offices need to be taken into consideration if one opts for the same for the long term. There is also significant investment required in the team working and collaboration tools that make the team and matrix working seamless.

■ Most of the organizational policies and processes have been designed for office-based work. The government acts and regulations have factors of location and number of hours built-in, which needs to review. Even organizational talent and reward practices have location and place of operations, along with travel guidelines in considerations.

■ With the push for digital, some activities have been digitized or shifted remote but the customer experience has been impacted.

■ In absence of team members visibility of doing the job, one has to get into management by output which requires a different level of trust and alignment with all team members. There is a perceived need to align the managers on the ways of managing productivity and employee experience.



## Not all jobs can be worked through remote

The potential for remote work depends on the mix of activities undertaken in each occupation and on their physical, spatial, and interpersonal context. This first assessment is of the theoretical extent to which an activity can be done remotely. This depends on whether a worker needs to be physically present on-site to do a task, interact with others, or use location-specific machinery or equipment.

Many physical or manual activities, as well as those that require the use of fixed equipment, cannot be done remotely. These include providing care, operating machinery, using lab equipment, and processing customer transactions in stores.

Environments that mandate secure areas using secure servers will also need a physical presence in the location. Investments in cloud technologies have seen exponential growth to address this need. In contrast, activities such as information gathering and processing, communicating with others, teaching and counselling, and coding data can theoretically be done remotely.

## Some sectors are more conducive for remote

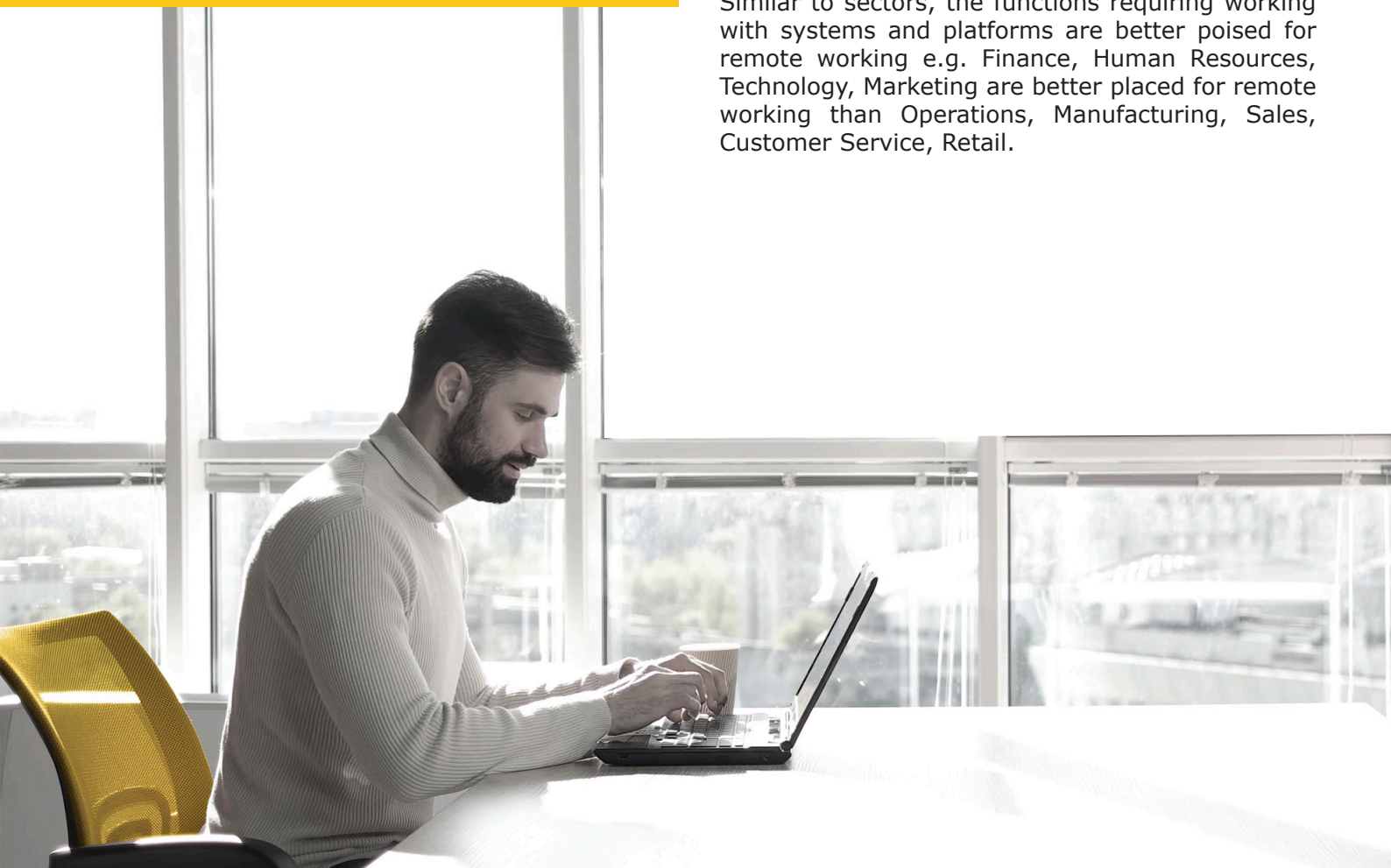
Hybrid working opportunities are dependent on the requirement of physical work, supervision, interaction or service. The sectors where in-person presence is low are better placed for remote working.

Sectors that are highly regulated will have limited opportunities for remote given security, privacy and confidentiality E.g. Banking, legal, Insurance, Financial. Finance and insurance have the highest potential, with three-quarters of time spent on activities that can be done remotely without a loss of productivity.

Management, business services, and information technology have the next highest potential, all with more than half of employee time spent on activities that could effectively be done remotely.

These sectors are characterized by a high share of workers with college degrees or higher. Agriculture, accommodation and food services, construction, transportation, warehousing, manufacturing and mining have lower opportunities for remote work. While the jobs in teaching, counselling, coaching, medical supervision can be done remotely the impact and overall experience suffers.

Similar to sectors, the functions requiring working with systems and platforms are better poised for remote working e.g. Finance, Human Resources, Technology, Marketing are better placed for remote working than Operations, Manufacturing, Sales, Customer Service, Retail.



## All places are not conducive for remote working

Our survey on hybrid working reveals, one of the biggest factors in favour of working from home is the saving of commute timing. Quite naturally cities with higher commute time will have people more comfortable with remote working (both for safety and productivity perspective) e.g. Mumbai. There is a clear need for a dedicated workspace and a good working environment for productivity. Cities with the higher cost of rentals and lower square feet residence area per person

will be less conducive for remote work (not enough space for optimal work environment) e.g., Mumbai/ Bangalore/Delhi and all metro. One needs to balance between commute time and the availability of space to work. The respondents who mentioned improved productivity during work from home also mentioned the availability of a dedicated workroom or space. We heard from employees sharing a room with multiple family members or friends, the disturbance of multiple people working or studying in the same room.



Cities with more migrant population or people on rental arrangement experienced people moving to their hometowns with a preference of remote work e.g. All metro

- Cities with a higher cost of living will reach a stage where working from home cost will become significant.
- Countries with more digital work can have more activities that can be done remote compared to countries with more physical and manual work.







## Everyone is not happy doing remote working

The need for affiliation, inclusion and power differs across the cross-section of people influencing the social needs. People with high extroversion, affiliation need social spaces for expression acknowledgement and recognition. Remote working provides limited opportunity for the same. Stress and mental health-related issues have become more rampant in remote working spaces. Almost everyone that we interviewed stated that they are looking forward to face-to-face interaction with their colleagues and people who got the opportunity to start going to the office were quite happy about it. Staff who feel the office working space, surrounding, facilities are far superior to their home office. They don't want to get into cooking their food and every other chore associated with it. Staff who share a small apartment with family or friends complain of overcrowding at home not having space and environment to work.

Our survey reveals that while 80 percent of people worked an equal or a greater number of average hours working from home with work timing including the commute time, 41% mentioned that they used staggered timing to accommodate the housework and other responsibilities. A flexible work schedule facilitated work from home for many and remains one of the perks of remote working 44% of respondents also mentioned taking small-

er frequent breaks helped them balance personal priorities and office work. Synchronous working for long hours requiring planning of breaks together is challenging.

## Infrastructure cost saving because of remote working, may not be real

Remote working has opened conversations around possible savings on buildings and office spaces. Remote working so far has been transition phase, but once formalized organizations will have to look into

- Cost of home offices
- Cost of space, electricity, broadband, intrusion to family
- Cost of Phygital experiences and technology infrastructure for the same
- Cost of cyber and data security (tech investments)
- Cost of a new set of benefits to be extended for employee well being

# Policies and processes are aligned to old ways of working from the office

**E**mployment rules and policies are highly regularized. The taxation norms are highly complicated and depend on the base country and location. The whole ex-pat travel where people had to come back to home location is under scrutiny

Employment policies based on the cost of living, CLA, HRA, attendance, time in office, travel, benefits and subsidies need a relook. Payouts related to travel need to be relooked. With the talent conversations shifting focus from input parameters to output and delivery parameters current talent processes need to be checked whether they suffice for measurement on output (productivity and skills).

In changed environment organizations are going back to the blackboard on the conversations around Who is talent and What skills we require. The skilling and reskilling in the remote setting require empowerment and accountability to shift from management to individuals

## Activities can be done remote but what about experiences?

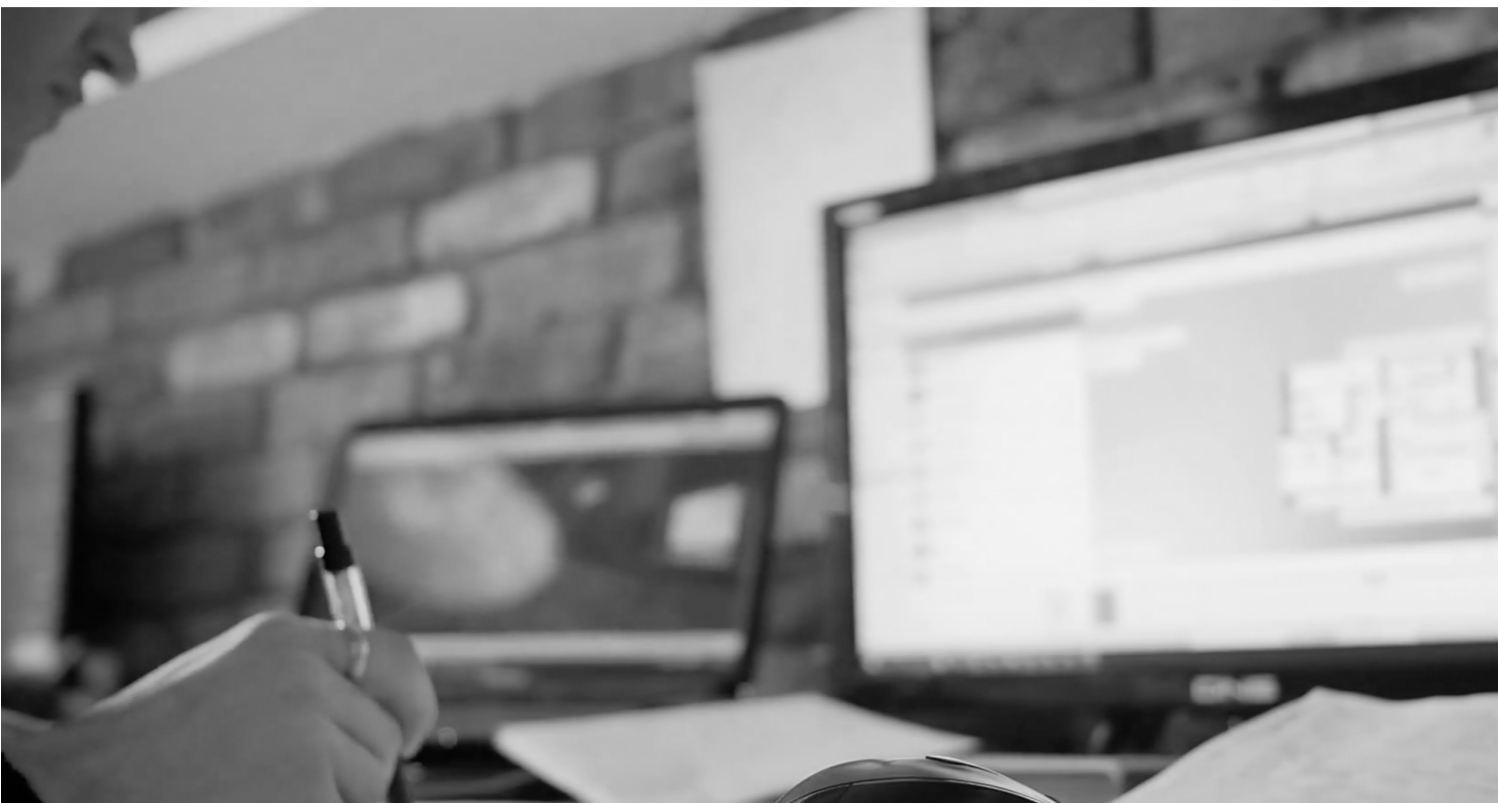
Although some tasks can be done remotely in a crisis, they are much more effectively done in person. These activities include coaching, counseling, and providing advice and feedback; building customer and colleague relationships; negotiating and making critical decisions; teaching and training; and work that benefits from collaboration, such as innovation, problem solving, and creativity. For instance, while teaching has moved to remote work during the pandemic, parents and teachers alike say that quality has suffered.



Similarly, courtrooms have functioned remotely but are unlikely to remain online going forward out of concern for legal rights and equity—some defendants lack adequate. Health care with tele and video consultation has its own set of drawbacks and serious gaps. Customer services moving digital with IVRs have not given the best of results on customer experience, Large banks continue to open branches for their customers to walk in. Even when there is significant effort to create pull sales with digital enablement and marketing, the field sales force contributes lion's share of the revenue for large FMCG/ Banks/ Telecom.

Most organisations have revised the onboarding processes and have done digital onboarding. While for the campus joiner and junior staff the experience has been standardized and, in many places, superior to physical joining, for the middle and senior management cultural alignment and emotional engagement is in question. Some organisations have reported higher attrition in these levels for new joiners.





## Not all managers can manage hybrid teams well

Managing by output metrics and being able to live with the final outcome does not come easy. Managers have been practicing monitoring the work as it is being done and the inability to do so creates concerns and apprehensions.

Employees tend to have apprehensions around fairness and transparency if some team members are working from the office and others remote. Inclusion and engagement of remote staff need a completely different mindset, respecting the space they are operating from, family members around and their needs (children and elderly)

Building skills for remote working how do we ensure that everyone is aware of not only individual commitments but also team deliverables. Trust, respect and psychological safety become crucial for the functioning of the team.

## Matrix and collaboration

- Digital Collaboration on project management, problem-solving, product development, technical development witnessed incredible success. Team collaboration tools have been the center of innovation and new business models have started emerging around the same.

- Managing Matrix reporting of leaders and teams with joint OKRs has been challenging. Alignment for decisions and resolutions of conflict that requires strong relationships and alignments are difficult.

- Jobs requiring managing external network and collaboration without any exclusive partnerships are seemingly more challenging in absence of relationships build on in-person interactions.





## The reflections from the respondents

Favourite part of working remote:

- No travel, commute time is saved.
- Flexibility to plan your day.
- Lesser distractions and higher efficiency.
- Staggered work schedule.
- Time with family.
- Time for household chores.
- Time for personal wellness and care.

Highlight of the day

- A focused time for completion of tasks.
- Lunch break with family.
- Time for exercise and wellness.
- Talking to a screen for 10 hrs
- Nagging by family.
- Juggling with life balance.
- Work hours are long. Eating a meal in front of the screen.

One thing you could get that would make your work easier or better.

- Time zone sensitivity
- More accessibility of colleagues and bosses.
- Complete downtime once I indicate that I am done for the day.
- No Covid!
- Broadband infrastructure.
- A segregated office at home.
- Regularizing the timing.

The most important thing your organisations did to help you be successful working remotely

- Equipment allowance.
- Reimbursement of infrastructure.
- No late hours Sent External Monitor, phone, camera, keyboard and mouse.
- Train managers on how to deal with employees working from home.
- Transparent Communication WFH fund (around USD 800), Covid leaves, access to mental health professionals, IT processes enablement to work from home.
- Trusted me and trust to adjust my schedule when required.
- We embraced the principles of a distributed and asynchronous work environment.

What helps you feel connected to others and counteract the potential loneliness of working remotely

- Living with family takes away the loneliness.
- Social media and platforms
- Regular virtual connects and rituals - bringing structure to them.
- Virtual catch up with friends at work over calls made easy.
- The feeling that everyone is safe. And, I had a weekly Friday fun evening with snacks, drinks and dinner from the comforts of home. Plus, a quarterly team budget to order food for all.
- Virtual coffee sessions organised by HR with interesting presentations etc.



# Recommendations Emerging Focus Areas for Leadership of working from office

## Balancing on the pivots

Leadership is not more about black and white decisions, or to the point, it is all about establishing fine balance across multiple factors. We experienced 3 pivots that need balancing as we design for the hybrid working i.e. Time and Place, Productivity and Privacy, and Efficiency and Experience.

### Time and Place Pivot

Time and place play key role in work design for hybrid working. Manager needs to work with the teams to arrive at work distribution and planning to ensure performance.

**Place:**

- Design the office for teamwork and collaboration
- Make working from home for energy and innovation

**Time:**

- Let asynchronous time boost focus
- Enable Synchronous time to be the basis of co-ordination

### Productivity and Privacy Pivot

While productivity monitoring has been in practice for years last year in COVID driven remote working productivity driving measures have become increasingly common. Tracking of time spent on various activities, apps, conversations productivity insights and control, which is perceived to be important in the remote working scenario. Employees have been raising concerns on privacy and wellbeing across the globe and even getting federal governments to look into the matter.

We must have inclusive dialogues to agree on the measures that are not intrusive. Designing the right output metrics and providing due empowerment can be one of the ways to balance.

### Efficiency and Experience Pivot

Optimization of time and money is part of business objectives, sometimes losing the focus on activities that build emotional connections. For success, one has to look at optimization in places that do not directly impact customer experience. One has to understand customer expectations and educate customers for new experiences before making the transition.





# Developing managers for hybrid working

Hybrid working requires a higher level of mutual understanding and trust. It is important to invest in building managerial capabilities for success and resilience in the long term

## Performance and Productivity

- Alignment on purpose and goals
- Clarity on output metrics
- Clarity on dependencies from others and expectations from us
- Resources, skills and support needed and availability
- Planning for synchronous and asynchronous work
- Planning for collaborative office spaces and remote working

## Engagement and Experience

- Be Agile : Know your team, Learning Agility
- Be Bold : Stretch Goals, Transparency, Decision Making and risktaking
- Be a Coach : Practice care and concern, help the team be their best, Personalise care through deeper listening
- Be Digital -DNA: Use technology to connect, sense the pulse, ideate, co-curate, personalize experiences
- Employee Experience Enhancement through Inclusion
- Flexibility : Design for flexibility
- Growth Mindset
- Happiness at the workplace







## Culture change for hybrid working

**Culture Change** is about changing the structures and processes inside the company so that your organization can build the capacity to be agile in responding to the changing business needs yet continue to be resilient. Working models that will be successful in long run has to be co-created with employees ensuring inclusion of all voices

**Leadership Support** - Leaders have to be good listeners, they will have to invest time in ensuring they know the pulse of employees and have an inclusion of diverse voices. Leaders have to focus on co-curating the employee experience based on the data on employee expectations and aspirations. Teams have to be given an opportunity to design hybrid working models that are mutually beneficial for both employees and the organisation. There is an investment needed in the digital enablement of feedback, ideas, inputs collection and analysis.

**Organizational Design** - to build flexibility and personalisation, we need to be able to leverage the knowledge and capabilities of the broader organisation. While skill-building, learning agility, staying relevant becomes critical for employees, providing platforms and opportunities for the same becomes core to design. With the borderless secure work environments, we will need to plan for time for team engagement and skill-building. It cannot be on the periphery to be done as and when the time permits. It has to be planned as part of the job

**Innovation Practice** - What gets focused and measured, gets done. To bring in innovation as part of the culture it is not enough to put in place the right innovation tools, methods, processes and

skills. Leaders need to communicate the importance of innovation and put it as part of the core job, with the right measurements. Leaders need to trust that evidence and trust the direction that it leads the teams in.





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#### About the author:

Papiya is passionate about developing leaders and transforming organizations for the new world of work. She helps organisations-built agility and resilience while sustaining the energy and performance transitioning through tough times.

She is known to be a good combination of conscious keeper and consensus builder which helps her not only challenge habitual patterns of thinking and ways of working but also lead the change effectively.

She has global leadership experience of working with CEOs and executive teams across industries in change management, culture building, talent management and leadership development for 22 years.

She is an experienced executive coach who brings leadership and strategy together in a challenging and collaborative way built on her business acumen and a deeper understanding of individual and organization behaviour