


Creating a Hybrid Culture

5 Things Employees Need Now

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Throughout the pandemic people have changed how they shop, where they live, how they learn, and, for many, how they work. Hybrid work is familiar territory for some, but a seismic shift in how work happens for many organizations. Regardless of how your company defines its policies, this blend of on and offline interactions means we have to think about the needs of people as they adopt a new way of working, and how the workplace and technology need to change to help them be successful.

Hybrid work may be challenging initially, but there's never been a greater opportunity for organizations to reset their culture.

The flexibility — and the trust it requires — can be a catalyst for new ways of working and can redefine how the office can help people thrive. In a recent Steelcase webinar, Prototyping the Future of Work, 59% of nearly 1,000 attendees said the biggest benefit of hybrid work is the ability to attract and retain talent. The biggest threat is cultural erosion (54%).

Everyone, everywhere struggled with a feeling of isolation while working from home. Combine that with the sense of whiplash many people feel from the ups and downs of Covid caseloads, return-to-office delays and conditions that seem to change daily, people's wellbeing has suffered.

Organizations that have returned to the office found people need to be reenergized and rebuild their "muscle memory" for being in the workplace. They've also found that reshaping their culture is essential to create new norms for how people will work together going forward.

The workplace can become an infrastructure for fostering a resilient hybrid culture by providing spaces which not only support increasing collaboration between in-person and remote workers, but also help people feel a sense of belonging and connection to their teams and the organization, regardless of location. Steelcase research shows that feeling part of a strong community actually helps people achieve more and boosts productivity, engagement, innovation and retention. Many leading organizations are making changes before team members return to the office so people can see and feel their organization cares and is taking action to meet their needs in a new era of hybrid work.

5 Things People Need For Hybrid Work

Safety

Physical safety continues to be paramount. People need to know their organization is doing everything possible to keep them safe and mitigate the spread of disease. Workers are particularly concerned about air quality and 62% of respondents to a recent McKinsey study said that improved air filtration could decrease the stress they experience from returning on-site.

Psychological safety is increasingly important at a time where work is changing. Employees need to know that it's okay to speak up, share ideas, ask questions and make mistakes during this shift – regardless of where they work and without negative ramifications.

Steelcase Work Tents create a relaxed open collaboration space where people can reconnect in-person and virtually at the Steelcase Global Business Center in Grand Rapids, Mich.

Belonging

In a time where people are working from diverse locations, people need their workplace to help create community and “social glue” that builds cooperation and team cohesion. Strong communities have a sense of shared purpose, as well as shared leadership. With high levels of trust and engagement, communities allow people to learn, adapt and demonstrate resilience in the face of changing circumstances.

Productivity

Hybrid work will require new spaces and technology to help people be effective. People need places for 1-on-1 or small group video calls, either enclosed or with greater acoustic privacy at their desk. Groups need new collaborative spaces that support both in-office and remote participants equally – where everyone can see and be seen, hear and be heard. Spaces should be designed for a better virtual presence with important elements like cameras, acoustics, content and lighting.

Steelcase Flex Personal Spaces give hybrid workers at the Grand Rapids Steelcase Learning and Innovation Center a place to do sustained heads-down focus work or take a video call.

Comfort

Physical comfort is critical for hybrid workers, especially if they are spending a lot of time on video. People's wellbeing has suffered, and they need places and experiences that help them rejuvenate and reset throughout the day. People also need to be comfortable with how work is changing, how to use new kinds of spaces and new technologies to collaborate with hybrid teams.

Control

Living through a crisis and changing ways of working, people crave more certainty. They want to be able to have more choice and control over:

- Where they work within the office
- When they work at the office or home

- How they work, alone and with teammates

Although it will look different for everyone, hybrid work is, perhaps, the biggest opportunity organizations have to reinvent their culture. People and leaders need to adjust expectations about how work happens, adopt new behaviors and rethink the role of the office going forward. But thinking about a hybrid workplace as a community designed to support the needs of the people as they embrace new ways of working and interacting can be a dramatic and positive change that emerges from the pandemic.