

WHITEPAPER

Adjusting to Hybrid Work: How Do We Get It Right?



The future of work is hybrid. And that future is here.

Dubbed ‘the next great disruption,’ hybrid work is increasingly becoming mainstream as more organizations transition into a mix of home and office work. BlueJeans has witnessed this in many of its enterprise customers over the past two years, as well as in the rising uptake of online collaboration tools.

Surveys tell a similar story. A recent one reveals that 97% of participating business leaders in eight countries are comfortable with adopting a hybrid work model.¹ And in a remarkable shift, 83% believe at least a quarter of their workforce will continue to work in a hybrid model after the pandemic, up from only 30% of executives surveyed a year ago.

But given how complex and consequential this shift can be, BlueJeans wanted to better understand sentiments around this new way of working. What do workers and executives think of their hybrid setup? What are their biggest struggles in this work arrangement?

To find out, we surveyed 5,200 participants across industries. The global survey results feature responses from roughly 2,100 individual contributors, 1,750 front-line managers, and 1,300 senior executives. The findings indicated mixed feelings as employees continue to navigate the changing realities of work and what it means for them.

What’s clear is that respondents mostly believe their organizations have successfully embraced hybrid work, enabling them to remain productive despite the challenges of the pandemic. But there are some concerns to address, including calendars packed with meetings that get in the way of delivering quality work. Many are looking for some of the fun aspects of being in an office, as well as for more meaningful discussions and opportunities to be creative.

1. ‘[Hybrid Work Global Survey 2021](#)’. Riverbed Technology and Aternity, 2021. Accessed 23 November 2021.

What We've Found Out

1. TOO MANY MEETINGS CAN BE A RECIPE FOR DISSATISFACTION

How workers spend their time influences their level of satisfaction with hybrid work. As scheduled meetings eat up their time, around 79% of surveyed workers feel that their quality of work would be better if they had fewer meetings. Sentiments around time allocation are more intense among managers and executives. More than 68% of senior managers admit to feeling anxious about their jam-packed calendars, while 82% of senior executives believe they could do better work with fewer meetings. As meeting volumes climb, a little over 68% of these executives admit to spending time in the evenings and weekends to catch up on work.

2. ENGAGING EVERYONE IS TOUGH BUT CRITICAL

Keeping everyone engaged in a hybrid work environment is a constant challenge for many companies, with 66% of survey participants believing that their meetings fail to engage everybody. For more than 78% of respondents expressed that their meetings typically default to whatever project is due next instead of focusing on longer-term and more strategic subject matters. It doesn't come as a surprise then that around 67% of senior managers are frustrated with having so few strategic conversations. Many respondents also feel that their creativity has been stifled since going remote, something that's more common among senior managers (63%) than individual contributors (50%).

3. IT'S OFTEN EASY TO FEEL DISCONNECTED

With the disappearance of water cooler talks, break room hangouts, and other opportunities for informal chats in the office, about 82% of respondents admit to having less frequent casual conversations with colleagues. The repercussions of this can be severe. Over 43% of respondents say their teams have failed in team- or culture-building. And roughly the same proportion of participants believe that they struggle to build meaningful relationships with their colleagues. On the other hand, more than three-quarters (76%) agree that they are highly successful in carrying out individual projects.

4. OFF-THE-CUFF CONVERSATIONS ARE VERY MUCH MISSED

It's hardly surprising then that when asked what they most missed about being in the office, the vast majority of respondents said 'having spontaneous conversations with colleagues.' Also, far from surprising is the finding that about 36% of workers have less fun now with their co-workers — with 62% even thinking about switching jobs.

5. EMPLOYEES WANT TECHNOLOGY THAT LETS THEM WORK WHILE HAVING FUN

Getting the equilibrium right in the world of hybrid work takes behavioral change. But technology is also part of the solution. And for 37% of respondents, their top choice for a technology that could improve collaboration is a virtual office that enables them to do a better job and have informal conversations at the same time. Notably, respondents chose this technology 4.5 times more than a unified calling and meetings application.



Finding the Right Balance

Hybrid work is still new for most organizations and workers, and possibly no company has it all worked out. But one thing that businesses must get right early is communication. Leaders can create clarity around expectations and goals by maintaining open lines of communication.

Without the constant flow of information typical in an office, digital tools have provided avenues for leaders and teams to continue communicating and collaborating. “In some ways, the pandemic has forced everybody to use technologies to continue working despite disruption,” says Antonio Eguizabal, Head of IT Operations Global Services at beverage company Pernod Ricard.

Using communication tools to make up for a lack of in-person interactions has been especially vital for businesses that rely on collaboration to create products or services. These companies include audiovisual technology maker Dolby Laboratories,

and high-performance insulation and building envelope solutions manufacturer Kingspan Group.

“We have always been very collaborative,” says Curt Hodge, Dolby’s Senior Director of IT Global Infrastructure. “We’re a company full of senior engineers, scientists, and researchers who come up with great ideas. But they don’t do this in a bubble.”

“When people can see and collaborate with each other in video meetings, it can spur superior levels of engagement and performance — both between teams and with clients and vendors,” says John Gaskell, Director of IT at Kingspan Insulated Panels.

Having collaboration tools has let teams across Dolby’s more than 30 offices easily collaborate and develop cutting-edge sound, voice, and imaging technologies. Likewise, Pernod Ricard’s 19,000 employees have been able to join meetings with great ease and increase productivity, while Kingspan has maintained its collaborative culture across its teams and geographies.

Avoiding “meeting fatigue”

While it's important to optimize communication and foster a culture of collaboration, organizations must be careful not to overwhelm employees. As our survey shows, meeting fatigue can be detrimental to quality of work and satisfaction, especially among executives. A little more than 64% of them feel that they have less time during the day to get work done. In comparison, slightly less than 50% of individual workers feel this way. But meeting fatigue is felt across all levels, with around 64% of respondents saying that they feel burned out.

Getting the right balance in communication is key. While this is easier said than done, helping employees enforce work–life boundaries by setting expectations for deliverables and creating clarity about working hours can help.

According to Harvard Business School Professor Tsedal Neeley, it's important for managers to ask questions as simple as, “How's it going? How are you doing? How can I help?”² Leaders must also be disciplined in their communication with team members.³

“You don't want to confuse people by saying, ‘We care about your wellbeing’ but then send emails at all hours of the night and weekend without making clear, ‘Please, don't respond until Monday morning.’ That's confusing. That's mixed signals,” says Neeley, an author and long-time researcher of remote work.

Having More Strategic and Inclusive Discussions

Along with unhappiness with meeting culture, leaders would have to address the frustration with the lack of conversations about strategic issues that around 67% of senior managers report having. With more than

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78% saying their meetings typically revolve around projects that are due next, there's room to infuse some variety into discussions.

One approach is to give time and permission to talk about anything. This would not only let participants express themselves, but also make them feel included.

Corporate trainer Paul Axtell encourages leaders to empower their teams by reminding them that they can:

- ask questions anytime
- invite colleagues into the discussion if they haven't spoken
- ask to spend more time on a topic
- ask others to say more about their position on an issue
- voice concerns that haven't been completely addressed.⁴

2. [‘Want to make a success of hybrid working? 3 things to focus on.’](#) World Economic Forum, October 2021. Accessed 24 November 2021.

3. [‘Author Talks: Tsedal Neely on why remote work is here to stay—and how to get it right.’](#) McKinsey, April 2021. Accessed 24 November 2021.

4. [‘Make Your Meetings a Safe Space for Honest Conversation.’](#) Harvard Business Review, April 2019. Accessed 23 November 2021.



Applying this to virtual meetings can motivate team members to speak their minds and encourage deeper conversations.

Keeping Everyone Engaged

It's easy to tune out of a virtual meeting if it's not interesting enough. The challenge is to get everyone to be present and to fully engage throughout. That seems to be a tall order when considering that two-thirds of survey respondents believe their meetings fail to engage all participants.

But there are now many ways to be creative when holding meetings, and that includes providing new experiences such as by having visual and even gamification elements. Meeting icebreakers and giving space for small talk also help everyone relax before getting down to business. But companies must make sure everyone has the tools they need to engage, collaborate, and participate in activities.

Biotechnology company Amicus Therapeutics engages its remote employees around the world with “Lunch & Learn” sessions. It uses interactive video conferencing features such as Q&A and “raise hands” to get employees to actively participate during these learning events.

“We were a little nervous about going virtual, but it's been seamless,” says Amanda Sowinski, Amicus Therapeutics' Senior Manager, Patient & Professional Advocacy. “It has been easier to plan, and we often get even more questions than we used to in person when we passed around a microphone.”

According to professional trainers Justin Hale and Joseph Grenny, leaders must be thoughtful in how they engage during virtual meetings.⁵ To create opportunities for attendees to fully take part, they suggest:

5. [How to Get People to Actually Participate in Virtual Meetings](#). Harvard Business Review, March 2020. Accessed 24 November 2021.

- helping participants experience the issue that needs to be addressed by sharing anecdotes or statistics in the first minute of the meeting
- emphasizing their shared responsibility to address the issue
- identifying a task that participants can quickly tackle in small groups
- using as little data or as few slides as possible
- not going longer than five to 10 minutes without involving participants in an activity.

Bringing Some of the Old Fun Back

Working remotely has meant the loss of the fun aspects of the office. These include chance encounters and informal chats with colleagues, which can inspire collaboration and creativity. This loss of spontaneity and a lack of opportunity to build relationships has put a lot of pressure on organizations to find ways to create human connections. They have to test and adjust workplace practices, policies, and technologies to see what works and what doesn't.

It's not always an easy journey, and one that might involve overhauling the company culture. But there's a whole new field of virtual office technologies that can help to simulate in-person experiences and spark conversations and collaboration.

These technologies can be the answer to 37% of respondents' wish to be able to work more effectively while having casual chats with colleagues. The right technology can give the 82% who now have fewer conversations more opportunities to have those chit chats that make work more interesting.

This is what data center provider Digital Realty has done. To keep interactions going and help newcomers build personal relationships, it has taken advantage of an array of collaboration tools. The company has an open mic concept where employees can join a video conference and talk openly about a given topic. Happy hours, costume day, and other fun activities also keep things light for everyone.

“And we've gone out of our way to make sure that when someone new comes in, we take the time to introduce them on a call and share some fun facts about the individual,” says Ed Driver, Digital Realty Chief Information Officer. “We try to make sure we do that in all the meetings that we have, so that people feel like they are part of the culture and fit in.”

This is a good time to consider a technology solution that brings fun and creativity back to work and helps fashion an effective hybrid model. At the same time, let's not overlook the need to have healthy volumes of meetings and more meaningful discussions to create a cohesive culture and help everyone thrive in the new world of work.

ABOUT THE REPORT

We surveyed more than 5,200 individuals in partnership with experience management solutions company Momentive to understand how the transition to hybrid work has disrupted pre-pandemic norms. The findings served as a basis for our analysis in this report.

The survey results feature responses from roughly 2,100 individual contributors, 1,750 frontline managers, and 1,300 senior executives from across the world.

About BlueJeans

The first cloud service to connect desktops, mobile devices, and room systems in one video meeting, BlueJeans makes meetings fast to join and simple to use, so people can work productively where and how they want. It is the meeting solution teams trust to do their best work.

BlueJeans Meetings

Collaborate effectively with video, audio, and web conferencing from anywhere. Instantly join, host, or manage meetings from a conference room, your desk, or a mobile device.

BlueJeans Rooms

Transform any room into an easy-to-use video conference space. Increase workforce collaboration with rooms that require little to no end-user training and provide effortless IT management.

BlueJeans Events

Host and livestream interactive events, town halls, and webinars for large audiences around the world. Engage up to 150,000 attendees with immersive video, Q&A, polling, and moderator controls.

Discover how BlueJeans modernizes meetings and makes your teams more productive.

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