



## **The future of hybrid work – more questions than answers**

by Christopher Rischard

According to a recent survey by a leading research institute on the future of hybrid work, 9 out of 10 companies and organizations worldwide will combine remote and on-site working, while the ramifications and impact of such a change remaining uncertain and unclear for most. In fact, nearly 70% of organizations have no detailed plans or communication in place to handle such a dramatic shift.

All eyes are also on tech giants who are unsure how to respond to employee demands for permanent flexible working arrangements. With different responses, GAFAM leadership offer contrasting views on the subject and with evolving policies.

Clearly, the conundrum posed by a return to any sort of post-COVID normality in the workplace raises many more questions than it offers solutions.

While some jobs obviously must be performed on-site, many others don't anymore thanks to modern technology. For those jobs, office or other on-site presence is not a requirement to perform that particular function. Yet being present some of the time is still necessary for most workers to ramp up on a particular job or project, to connect with their teams and to benefit from in-person contact with their professional communities.

During the global pandemic that changed our lives in 2020, many workers found that, despite the challenges of balancing work and life within the confines of their homes, they discovered benefits to work-life blending as well.

Some of the most obvious benefits include elimination of commute times and stress, reduced time spent in empty conversations, fewer interruptions by time-wasting colleagues, more productive multi-tasking during low-value meetings, greater flexibility in working patterns and moments, improved mastery of time-management and productivity techniques,

optimized wake-work-sleep patterns, better work-life blending especially for those with families, improved work-home multitasking to handle chores, less time wasted transitioning between work/fitness/wellness/personal/family-related tasks and activities.

These benefits resulted for many workers in a better quality of life at home and overall improved morale, wellbeing and happiness.

As a result, the days of getting up earlier, commuting sometimes for over an hour, sitting at a cramped desk, sitting through useless meetings, being interrupted by needy colleagues, and having to play office politics, ... those days now seem unjustified and downright insane to a growing chorus of office workers.

But key benefits of in-person interaction (connection, belonging, mentoring, leading by example, camaraderie, relationship-building, serendipitous exchanges, ...) must somehow be preserved as society and companies transition to work's future state.

How can those benefits be preserved in a more fluid situation of work-life harmony? What are the moments where in-person interaction is absolutely necessary and how to ensure coordination between industry, company, department, team and individual agendas and needs?

How to cope with the fairness or unfairness of offering more flexible arrangements for some jobs and functions but not for others?

How to embrace the coming of age of non-linear careers where workers are increasingly taking non-conventional paths in study and work, more frequently making jobs and career transitions, more often returning to previous careers following long breaks, looking for more agile working arrangements, etc?

What tools to deploy to address these trends, from innovative career-management platforms, to agile scheduling apps to personal wellness channels to team-building portals, ...?

Although, following intensive vaccination campaigns, returning to work is on the horizon for many workers across the globe, it is clear that this pandemic didn't only accelerate our use and dependency of digital tools, but it has intensified the urgency of coming to terms with a true revolution in how work (and life) is perceived and experienced.

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