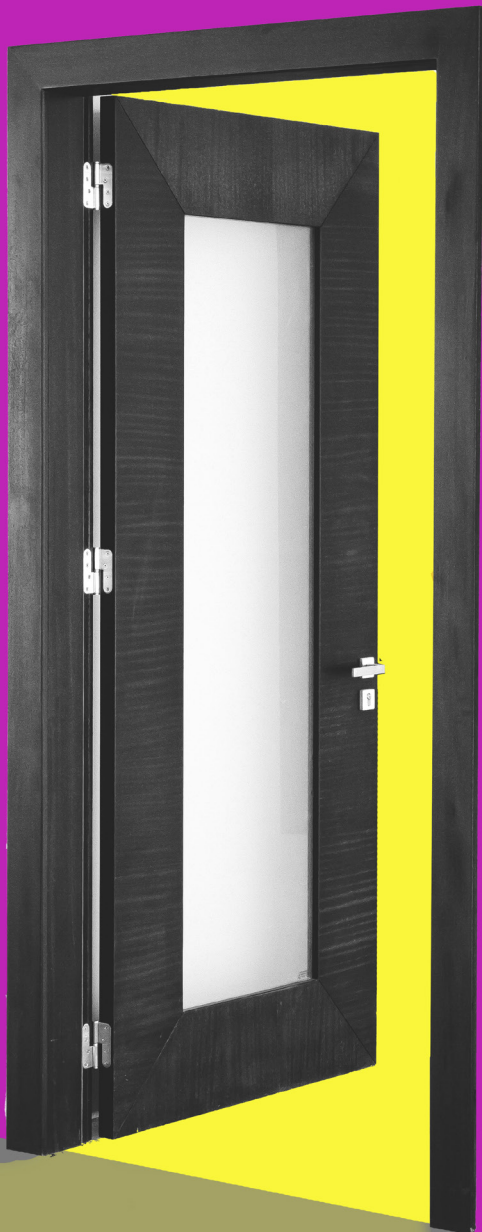


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FROM THE LEADERSHIP ARCHIVE

The Manager's Guide to Planning the Return to Work

A set of guidelines to help leaders with a first-time-ever people management challenge—the post-COVID workplace.

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[OFFICE OF THE FUTURE]

Redesigning the Post-Pandemic Workplace

Work as we know it is forever changed by COVID-19. Now is the time for managers to envision the office that employees will return to.

BY GERALD C. KANE, RICH NANDA, ANH PHILLIPS, AND JONATHAN COPULSKY

The world has experienced widespread disruption over the past year as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. With the successful development and distribution of a COVID-19 vaccine, the timeline for when the so-called next normal will arrive is clearer. Leaders should begin to take steps to consider what the workplace will look like when it arrives.

There is no going back to the prepandemic workplace. Organizations and individuals have had no choice but to discover new ways of working. Many have reported successfully implementing years' worth of digital transformation plans over the course of a few months. For example, mortgage loan company Freddie Mac implemented remote building inspection, and many health care providers pivoted rapidly to telemedicine. Even companies that needed to maintain a significant colocated workplace used digital innovations to improve employee and customer engagement and safety. For example, Hitachi adapted sensors to monitor social distancing in factories, and many restaurants quickly adopted virtual ordering and delivery services. Managers should begin asking themselves how they can build on such innovations to further transform their businesses instead of planning a return to ways of working that were becoming outdated and obsolete even before the pandemic.

The pandemic is not the only disruption we have experienced in the past year. It has also been a time of political divisiveness, social unrest driven by racial inequality, and ongoing digital disruption, to name but a few. In our forthcoming book, *The Transformation Myth: Leading Your Organization Through Uncertain Times*, we argue that the end of the pandemic will almost certainly not mean an end to disruption. Over the next few months, leaders would be well served by taking the opportunity to learn how to apply the innovations and advances implemented in recent months and developing an approach for ongoing workplace reinvention that is more resilient to all types of disruption.

Maximize the Benefits of Both Remote and Colocated Work

The anticipated gradual return to colocated work in the coming months provides opportunities to experiment with hybrid ways of working. Returning to the office strategically, by focusing first on the activities best performed in person and, in the process, evaluating the effectiveness of both remote and colocated work, gives managers the ability to critically consider the ways in which a hybrid workplace might be more effective.

The pandemic taught us that remote work can be highly effective — to a degree. Employees are often more productive when they don't have to spend time on a daily commute. Meetings may be more frequent but tend to be shorter. Virtual work also allows people to collaborate across geographic, physical, and organizational boundaries



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in novel ways. But our recent research has shown us that the past few months of widespread remote working have also had some significant drawbacks. Our interviews with over 50 executives between April and November 2020 about their experience of leading their organizations through the pandemic uncovered challenges in the following areas:

- **INNOVATION.** Although remote collaboration among colleagues who regularly engaged with one another worked well, serendipitous connections with others dropped off precipitously. Research has shown that these weak ties are often critically important to innovation and knowledge sharing in organizations.

- **STARTING NEW PROJECTS.** Remote work had little impact on workers' ability to finish big group projects that were already underway. Relying on virtual collaboration to initiate new projects, however, was an order of magnitude more difficult in terms of challenges and

stressors. This finding underscores the value of remote work but raises questions about relying on it exclusively for a long-term workplace strategy.

• **CULTURE.** Several people we interviewed said that establishing and maintaining organizational culture is difficult, if not impossible, in a virtual setting. Many of the cues to organizational culture that the physical workplace provides, such as the design of the office and how people dress, disappear with virtual work. The lack of a strong sense of culture is a particularly acute problem with respect to onboarding new hires.

• **MENTORING AND COACHING.** Employees, particularly younger ones, received less mentoring and coaching during the shift to remote work than they did before the pandemic. If people don't get the feedback they need to develop into more mature employees and leaders, this deficiency could negatively affect career development over time.

Leaders should spend the next few months planning how to combine the best aspects of remote and colocated work. Ben Waber, president of the workplace analytics company Humanyze, shared with us early data from Asia that suggests that a little collocation can go a long way toward reducing the limitations of remote work. Employees who returned to the office only one or two days per week increased the number of serendipitous connections by about 25%, Waber said. Yet we also expect that decisions about balancing remote and colocated work will affect, and be affected by, a broader set of factors, such as school reopenings and public transportation load, which have also been affected by the pandemic.

Leaders should consider the following as they envision the reinvented workplace:

Enabling flexibility in usage. The pandemic has underscored the importance of organizational nimbleness, and organizations can design physical workplaces to support it. Office furniture manufacturer Steelcase is

now developing product lines designed for on-the-fly adaptation, according to Sara Armbruster, the company's vice president of strategy, research, and digital transformation. Different office configurations could be employed depending on whether a group is brainstorming, hosting a workshop, or conducting a daily stand-up meeting.

However, managers will need to be mindful of employee preferences as they rethink how a space is configured. Janet Pogue McLaurin of architecture and design company Gensler told us that 61% of U.S. employees still want a dedicated desk in the workplace, even if it means they need to come to the office more often. This number may change as the pandemic wanes, but managers might consider ways to create a sense of employee ownership of personal space amid this flexibility or to establish a temporary sense of ownership through a booking or reservation system.

It also may be that office space configurations change seasonally, perhaps with decreased workplace density during winter months to promote employee health. For example, the health insurer Humana took advantage of mild weather in Louisville, Kentucky, and created pop-up outdoor offices in partnership with local parks to provide safer workspaces during COVID-19. The company brought in tents, socially distanced work areas, Wi-Fi, restrooms, and food trucks to allow small numbers of employees to work together in safer ways. The company may explore whether these outdoor pop-up workplaces have additional benefits and retain them as a part of its workplace strategy for the future.

Continuing to evolve virtual work. Organizations should continue to experiment with virtual work amid the gradual return to the workplace. First, most people have been working virtually for less than a year. While that amount of time seems substantial, it is unlikely that employers have discovered the full range of opportunities that virtual work provides during that

period. For example, many companies are just beginning to explore the possible benefits of more advanced asynchronous collaboration tools, and they are only scratching the surface on the myriad ways to leverage the data generated by digital collaboration to improve workplace performance.

Second, the nature of virtual work will change when organizations can combine it with colocated work. Rather than needing to perform all work remotely, organizations can begin to explore more deeply the processes and practices that can evolve virtual work to optimize organizational benefits. For example, the pandemic uncovered important deficiencies with how companies previously used digital tools. Several interviewees who were long-term remote workers reported feeling more included once everyone else on a team was also remote. Meetings in which some participants are physically present together while others are remote may be worse than either exclusively colocated or purely virtual meetings. Managers who continue to run hybrid meetings should experiment with new ways to promote inclusion of remote participants.

Digitally supporting colocated work. If people have the option to work from home, it seems likely that they will use this time to engage either in individual focused work or in remote meetings. When employees decide to make the effort to come into the office, it will be to engage in the types of tasks that require in-person interactions. Digital tools can help maximize in-person interactions by identifying who will be in the office at the same time. These apps could begin to incorporate more advanced recommendation features, suggesting new connections using organizational network analysis among those also at the office. This increased digitalization and analytics can also help improve organizational knowledge flows.

While digital tools create opportunities to work in new ways, organizations should also

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look further into the future and consider how these tools might be applied to support changes in employee behavior as work is automated. Managers also must continue to rethink how they manage performance as more employees adopt a hybrid model with both remote and colocated work.

Discovering Workplace, Workforce, and Work

Rethinking the workplace also opens up new opportunities for rethinking the workforce and, ultimately, work itself. When your organization is not limited to a colocated workplace, the idea of whom you can include in the *workforce* expands. For example, many Silicon Valley companies have indicated that they are able to hire more-diverse employees when their potential talent pool is not limited to those who want to live in the San Francisco Bay Area. It also creates opportunities for rethinking work itself by creating new ways to integrate automation and analytics to digitally transform many aspects of work.

The workplace, workforce, and work of the future will be fundamentally different as a result of the pandemic. The gradual emergence from this disruption provides an unprecedented opportunity to explore and experiment. Leaders must learn to continually reinvent the future of work, and now is the time to begin discovering how to bring that future about.

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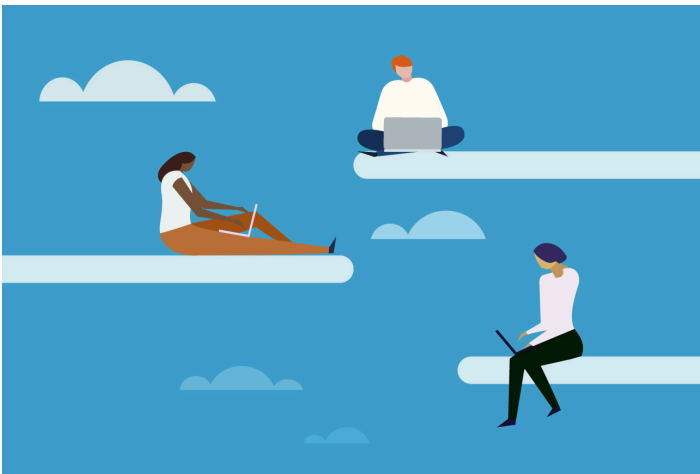
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Four Principles to Ensure Hybrid Work Is Productive Work

Lynda Gratton

Organizations have become more flexible about where and when employees work. Now they need to be more intentional about their choices and trade-offs.



Leaders and the teams they manage are experimenting with new ways of working — both in the short term during COVID-19 and longer term for a post-pandemic world. The axes of work are pivoting simultaneously in terms of both *place* and *time*, with leaders designing hybrid ways of collaborating that have few precedents. It's tough and, not surprisingly, causing confusion. How much flexibility around where and when people do their jobs is best? What strategies are most effective? Some CEOs envision that work will happen “anywhere” going forward, while others are asking employees to return to central office spaces. Some are accommodating flexible time commitments, while others are requiring their staffs to be available 9 to 5.

To find the right way forward, leaders must understand the axes of hybrid work — the upsides and downsides of where and when people work — and align them so that they feed the energy, focus, coordination, and cooperation needed to be productive.

In this article, I'll lay out what I'm seeing in the evolution of hybrid workplaces and describe four emerging principles: Use office space to amplify cooperation, make working from home a source of energy, take advantage of asynchronous time to boost focus, and use synchronized time for tasks that require coordination.

The Axes of Hybrid Work: Place and Time

The *place* of work for many people has historically been the office. Separate from personal space and outfitted with all the furniture and technology necessary for people to do their jobs efficiently, the office has been a place of congregation, where people gather for one primary goal — to work.

During COVID-19, this has changed dramatically. For many people, work is now located in their personal spaces — their homes — while others are working in coffee shops, local

hubs such as smaller satellite offices or flexible shared office space, or various combinations of remote locations.

But place is not the only axis that is pivoting.

There is now much flexibility around *time* — the periods when people are actively engaged in work. Time is being reassigned as schedules are extending into what was “private” time, with people fitting work into personal schedules that might include caring for family and friends, taking time out to keep healthy and fit, and even doing professional upskilling. At play is *chronological time* (based on a specific schedule, such as 9 to 5); *synchronous vs. asynchronous time* (the extent to which colleagues’ schedules coincide); and *control of time* (the degree of autonomy that can be exercised about work hours).

The Goal Is Productivity

To ensure that a hybrid work arrangement works, leaders have to build a context of place and time that accentuates rather than depletes productivity. As they do this, they need to consider the elements of productivity that are particularly sensitive to these features.

The essentials of productive work begin with *energy*. In most jobs, people are more productive when they experience positive vitality and well-being, and their productivity is depleted when they are exhausted or stressed and their working habits become unhealthy. The next essential for many jobs where real concentration is necessary is *focus*. When the context — that is, the place and time of work — allows people to focus, they can be highly productive. Their focus suffers when their context is distracting and their attention is scattered.

Beyond these independent aspects of work are those tasks that require teamwork. Some tasks demand significant *coordination* with others. When people can fluidly align with one another, they are able to be goal-oriented and efficient; when this alignment breaks down, teams become divided and disjointed. And then there are jobs and tasks that require teams to *cooperate* and actively share ideas in ways that enable them to ideate and innovate. When the contexts of place and time create barriers to cooperation, productivity can suffer. People can become resistant, and

infighting can break out.

Choices about place and time present trade-offs. For example, with regard to place, working in an office aids cooperation because colleagues are better able to develop trusting face-to-face relationships, but it can also deplete energy if it involves a long commute and hours sitting at a desk. With regard to time, working constrained, inflexible hours aids coordination since colleagues’ time can be easily synchronized. But it depletes focus because it fails to respond to individual rhythms of concentration.

What these trade-offs mean is that while aspects of hybrid work have the potential to bolster productivity, they need to be designed with a level of *intentionality* about place and time that is not practiced in traditional work systems, where both aspects are constrained. This intentionality means understanding the crucial productivity drivers necessary for clusters of jobs (such as the ability to focus) and the context of work that best accentuates these drivers while being aware of the trade-offs. Addressing these design choices in ways that enable productivity to flourish will be crucial to facing the economic challenges stemming from COVID-19.

New Principles of Place and Time

I’ve been studying a range of companies to see how this intentionality is being played out. These are companies I was following even before the pandemic began. In a recent [webinar](#) for the companies in my research consortium that I hosted with HSM colleague Anna Gurun, we talked about the hybrid/productivity model. I asked the companies one question: How are you going to successfully navigate the next year of your company?

What I heard is hopeful: Across the world, some organizations are rapidly building practices and processes that enable them to use hybrid work to accentuate the elements of productivity (energy, focus, coordination, and cooperation). Others are honing procedures that have been their signature management practices for years. Taken together, we see the emergence of new principles for a productive workplace. They are designing short-term fixes to the challenges that COVID-19 has created while looking

into the future to be sure that they build practices that are sustainable.

Place Principle: Design the Office for Cooperation

Being in the office is essentially a social activity. In my April column on [how to help employees work from home with kids](#), I cited Stanford professor Nicholas Bloom's celebrated study of call center workers who were given the option to work from home. After six months, over half wanted to return to the office, even with long commutes. They yearned for the sociability and face-to-face cooperation of being in a shared space with colleagues.

As companies begin to coax or expect employees to return to offices, it will be important to make the most of the experience. That will mean creating a place where cooperation and interaction can thrive right now while COVID-19 is still a concern — and in the longer term as hybrid work becomes the norm.

Making an office a place of cooperation depends a great deal on [how a space is designed](#). This idea was uppermost for the global design group Arup and its design leader Joseph Correnza in building its Melbourne office. While the design decisions were made pre-pandemic, they were sufficiently flexible and “hackable” to be reconfigured for current circumstances while not losing the long-term aim of creating a highly collaborative, dynamic space allowing informal movement.

“We need these encounters with each other, and the quality of the space is crucial to how we listen and how we learn,” said Jenni Emery, Arup's global people and culture leader. “We had to be really intentional and considered.” The number of closed offices was limited and [much of the space was opened up](#). Sight lines across the entire building allow people to easily catch a glimpse of one another and see that they are part of something bigger. Emery says this has created all-important moments of serendipitous encounters. Cork flooring helps reduce the ambient noise and let human voices be heard.

I asked Correnza how a company without the mighty resources of Arup could approach this cooperative principle. He had three ideas: Reduce small personal spaces and give them back to cooperative space (when such seating arrangements are safe again); encourage teams to meet in the open, outside of meeting rooms, so others can feel the buzz; and move groups of people every quarter to new seating so that they meet new people.

Place Principle: Make Working From Home a Source of Energy

One of the overwhelmingly positive results of working from home during the pandemic is that people are able to reassign their former commuting time to activities that boost their physical energy (through exercise and recreation) and their emotional energy (by spending time with family and friends). Many home workers are also boosting their energy by walking in parks, eating healthy home-cooked food, and establishing closer links to neighbors.

That said, those with young children have found it tough to manage the boundaries between being a worker and a parent. If home working is to continue to be a source of energy in the longer term, it requires a level of intentionality in the expectations of both employees and employers.

For the telecom company BT, COVID-19 has created an opportunity to hone and accelerate its long-established home working principles. BT was, in 1992, an early adopter of large-scale, experimental work-from-home trials when call center operators showed that, even using rudimentary technology, there was a positive impact on their energy, well-being, and productivity. Since then, BT has steadily introduced new technologies to support the significant proportion of its workforce who were remote workers even before the pandemic sent more people home.

When Nicola J. Millard, a principal innovation partner at BT, studied the most-veteran home workers, she found that their [home office setups played a key role](#) in their success. While each remote worker had fashioned a unique space,

what made a real difference was having a separate room, a large computer screen, and a good chair. Rituals also were important, including dressing in work clothes and following a “getting ready” routine as if they were leaving the house.

Many of these veterans also maximized their energy by using technology to ensure that they maintained boundaries between “on” time, when they were available to respond and collaborate with others, and “off” time, when they could engage in energy-boosting activities. They took proper lunch breaks and made sure they symbolically left the workplace at the end of the day. They also negotiated with family and colleagues so these boundaries would hold up.

Culture and management style is essential, Millard explained. “We have used our communication platforms to build lots of virtual team check-ins so people don’t feel isolated, and we engineer virtual encounters like ‘virtual coffee’ so people have a chance to chat with people they don’t know so well.” Most important, BT home workers have been able to succeed in this model. “We’ve really learned that focusing on outcomes rather than being present in the office is crucial,” said Millard. That has meant developing processes for virtual performance management that include regular team check-ins, one-on-one conversations, and monthly reports to management.

Time Principle: Let Asynchronous Time Boost Focus

There are some jobs for which focus is a primary productivity driver. Crafting a schedule that allows employees to disconnect for a solid five hours to concentrate, and at a time that fits their natural energy rhythms, can be hugely beneficial, whether they do this in a corporate or a personal space. For these people, asynchronous schedules are ideal.

The Washington-based consulting practice Artemis Connection was built around giving its people the tools to work on complex tasks that require deep concentration, creativity, and focus. CEO Christy Johnson explained to me

that to be focused and productive, everyone is able to define and control their time in terms of when — and how much — they work.

What lies behind the capacity is a well-honed project management system. Each piece of work is divided into its component tasks and analyzed based on the likely amount of time needed to achieve them. They are then bundled up into 15- to 20-hour blocks. These blocks are then considered within the group and assigned to individual employees. “For example, we are scoping a client project to write an intelligence brief,” said Johnson. “We think it’s going to be roughly 60 hours of work a week, in three 20-hour blocks. We look at the permutations — for example, one person doing two blocks and another doing one.”

Employees can decide that their maximum focus time is 20 hours a week, while others can take on more. An up-front agreement of time and tasks “ensures that work won’t expand to fill the time,” said Johnson. It also means that people can work at their own rhythms. “For example, my best work is when I intensely focus for 90 minutes and then take a break,” said Johnson.

For many Artemis employees who have come out of the big consulting firms, owning their time is a real source of liberation.

Time Principle: Enable Synchronized Time to Be the Basis of Coordination

While some tasks are best fulfilled when people can focus and work on their own, others require coordinating in real time on projects with in-the-moment dialogue and feedback.

Typically, synchronized time occurs naturally because people are in the same place at the same time. But technological advances have enabled the design of synchronized time that is place-agnostic and where it is possible to create opportunities for fruitful, real-time virtual interactions. That was the insight of Selina Millstam, who heads up talent management and culture change at the

Swedish communications technology company Ericsson. Her goal was to have a companywide conversation that would encourage people to share and coordinate their beliefs about which values and behaviors would be crucial to the long-term success of the business. The moderated conversation took place over 72 hours, with more than 95,000 employees across 180 countries invited to participate.

Employees were asked to set aside time to join the online dialogue. Facilitators from locations across the world kept the jam from being a chaotic free-for-all. For example, when people joined in the first hours, they were encouraged to jump onto conversational threads about each of the focus areas being driven by the culture change initiative. The shared time allowed people in different time zones to connect. For instance, a software developer in India talked at length to a customer relations person in Germany, creating an important thread to which others contributed. “There was something raw and authentic about listening to people speak and contemplate in the moment,” said Millstam.

Each participant was encouraged to reengage with the exchange in an asynchronous way as well over the three days — creating, in the end, more than 20,000 conversational threads.

Looking Forward

Every organization will have to brainstorm how to heighten energy, focus, coordination, and cooperation to make hybrid work productive work. I suggest that leaders keep four recommendations in mind in the coming weeks and months:

Don’t move too fast. Individual preferences will take time to become clear. It took six months of home working for the Bloom study participants to decide they wanted to return to the office. And in the early stages of the BT experiments, the productivity of home workers fell sharply before rising. Be wary of making early decisions that will have long-term effects — leave your options open.

Keep the trade-offs in mind. In designing new ways of working, be prepared for the downsides of each model. Working from home will boost energy, but it will also deplete cooperation. Managing these trade-offs takes

creativity — such as the way the BT team established satellite offices for people living in similar communities to come together occasionally.

Resolve to experiment. There is a great deal we do not yet know. It is crucial to be prepared to take risks. The team at Ericsson overcame the challenges of virtual coordination by using a state-of-the-art online participative and facilitated platform. It took courage to do so — but along the way, team members learned how to encourage chance meetings across the organization.

Nurture the leadership skills that managing preferences will require. The variety of combinations of time and place that are possible will require highly competent and motivated leaders committed to making this work. It will require a degree of intentionality that has not been necessary in traditional working practices. For leaders, that means **being empathic and listening to individual needs** while also being creative in developing solutions.

About The Author

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The Future of Team Leadership Is Multimodal

Robert Hooijberg and Michael Watkins

COVID-19 is accelerating a shift to hybrid work models, which requires a fundamental change in the skills team leaders need to succeed.



The pandemic has accelerated a pre-COVID-19 shift in how individuals and teams do intellectual work. Companies have learned that routine tasks involving transactions and coordination can be done purely virtually, while work requiring true team collaboration (collective learning, innovation, building a shared culture) is still best done face to face. We envision that the post-pandemic future of teamwork will be a purposeful hybrid combination of virtual coordination and in-person collaboration.

Effective leadership in this new hybrid world requires different skills that go beyond traditional team leadership. Specifically, organizations will need leaders who can operate well across two distinct modes. For much of the time, they will operate in *virtual coordination mode*. This means establishing goals, monitoring progress, driving information sharing, and sustaining connections among colleagues working remotely. When their teams periodically come

together to engage in true collaboration, leaders will need to operate in *face-to-face collaboration mode*, fostering deep learning, innovation, acculturation, and dedication.

The nature and mix of team tasks will dictate the modes in which those teams operate. Tasks that involve working interdependently but without much integration — reporting, performing administrative tasks, making simple decisions, sharing information, drafting documents, and performing financial analyses — will mostly be done virtually. Likewise, our research and experience have shown that most one-on-one interactions, including some coaching, between leaders and their reports can be accomplished effectively through virtual means.

However, essential tasks that require team members to integrate their knowledge, create safe spaces for dialogue on difficult issues, and form emotional connections cannot be done productively while working virtually. For example, team efforts to achieve breakthrough innovation, solve complex problems, build culture, and manage conflicts are still performed much more effectively in person, given the current limitations of technology. (See “The Future of Work Survey” for more about the research.)

These complex tasks are challenging to perform virtually because they involve four dimensions of impact that are better served through in-person interactions:

- **Collaboration**, which is not just about content collaboration and coordination but also building a shared

understanding, relationships, and trust.

- **Innovation**, which requires brainstorming, knowledge integration, and shared learning, for which trust and time together in a nonstressful environment are essential.
- **Acculturation**, which requires extended periods of face-to-face connection to develop mutual understanding, reinforce norms, and build a shared identity.
- **Dedication**, which comes from having a shared sense of purpose, feeling like part of a community, and having opportunities to grow professionally.

The implications for the future of leadership are profound. The multimodal workplace is changing the types of skills required to lead teams virtually and in person successfully. In particular, there are four roles that leaders will need to play as they adapt to managing a hybrid workforce. Their relative importance will depend on the extent of team coordination and integration.

Conductor. A mostly virtual team leadership role, the Conductor ensures that plans, decisions, information, and accomplishments are shared to coordinate and motivate team members. The role is akin to that of an orchestra director, who ensures that musicians play well individually and in harmony. In the Conductor role, leaders manage goal setting, simple planning, decision-making, work coordination, and progress tracking while sustaining connection, trust, and engagement with team members.

For success in this role, leaders must strike the right balance between demonstrating genuine care and engagement and micromanaging, which saps morale. The pandemic has highlighted how exhausting endless video calls are, requiring Conductors to be highly efficient and engaging in their orchestration of virtual team time.

Catalyst. When meeting in person, the Catalyst stimulates collaboration, spurs creativity and innovation, creates a shared culture, and fosters dedication. To accomplish this, these leaders must build trust and create an environment of psychological safety. Doing so allows them to facilitate in-depth dialogue and encourage creative conflict — but

not harmful personality clashes — when sharing ideas. We use the term *catalyst* to indicate that the focus here is on enabling others to shine and facilitating collaboration processes.

Coach. When working one-on-one with their reports virtually or in person, leaders need to play the role of Coach. This means focusing on helping their people achieve peak performance while building trust and focusing on their well-being and professional development. Playing this role effectively requires a high degree of emotional intelligence and the ability to establish a balance between showing empathy and encouraging people to push beyond their boundaries. When done well, coaching can enhance connections, as well as engagement and productivity.

Champion. Whereas the Conductor, Catalyst, and Coach roles involve managing individuals and teams who report directly to a particular leader, the Champion role requires leaders to advocate externally *for* their teams. It requires leaders to secure team resources, tap into essential information sources, communicate accomplishments, and build trust with peers and other key stakeholders both in person and virtually. The Champion role, therefore, requires skills in negotiating, influencing without formal authority, and building alliances.

A central theme linking all four roles is the need for leaders to build and sustain connections and trust. Many companies did not embrace remote work before the pandemic because they lacked trust in their employees to be productive at home. At the same time, there were concerns about managers' ability to monitor performance. However, building and sustaining trust is essential to multimodal leadership, especially when the team is operating virtually.

Fostering trust shows up in each of the 4-C roles in distinct ways. In the Conductor role, leaders encourage trust by sharing achievements so that everyone knows their colleagues are contributing to the team's success. In the virtual world, we are often suspicious that peers are slacking off, and emotions can run high in a crisis. Another way to strengthen trust is to personally check in with your team members to see how they are coping, how their work is progressing, and what help they might need. This is one of the central themes of emotional intelligence, and it can also

strengthen team spirit. Checking in at the individual level is also an essential element of the Coach role.

These trust-building methods work well online, but when teams come together in person, leaders will want to channel the Catalyst role, where trust plays an essential role in spurring innovation and creativity. After all, people need to feel safe to experiment and share moonshot ideas without fear of being judged. Therefore, the Catalyst role requires leaders to create healthy, safe bonds with teams by playing more of an enabling rather than a directive role. This requires managers to balance confidence with an appropriate degree of humility and social awareness.

For example, when we work with teams of leaders at IMD, we often have executives share some of the highs and lows in their lives, creating connection and trust through the experience of shared vulnerability. It brings people closer together and opens up the possibility for greater collaboration. But we have found that sharing personal issues is not something all participants would feel comfortable doing on a Zoom call. Creating a trusting environment is critical to the roles of both Coach and Catalyst, along with emotional intelligence that can be honed through working on one's self-awareness, self-care, social awareness, and relationship management.

The higher up in an organization you rise, the more critical the Champion role becomes. The matrix organizational structures of many companies require leaders to rely on organizational influence rather than authority to obtain the necessary resources for teams and contribute in a

meaningful way to the company's overall goals. In the Champion role, we build trust with our peers by showing interest in their aspirations and by putting organizational goals ahead of our own team's objectives.

Leaders need to recognize that they might need help themselves to provide support to their teams as they play these four roles. Most leaders are already proficient in the Conductor role because it requires many traditional management and leadership skills, such as monitoring, delegating, decision-making, and motivating. In contrast, the Catalyst and Coach roles need different sets of skills and attitudes. Here we think especially of facilitation skills, emotional intelligence, and humility.

To be successful in this new era, team leaders must learn to adapt the four roles of multimodal leadership: Conductor, Catalyst, Coach, and Champion. These four roles provide a framework for leadership effectiveness in the post-pandemic world of work.

About The Authors

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The Future of Work Survey

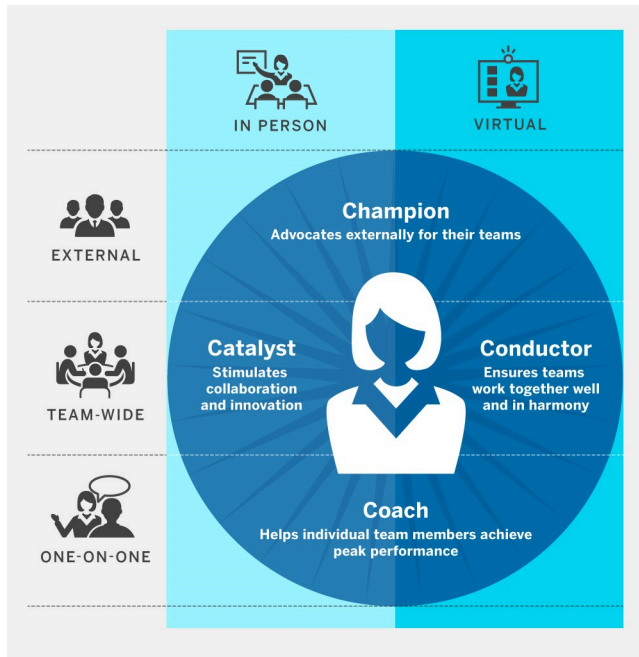
We surveyed 40 executives globally in November 2020 and found that three-quarters of them were working virtually for at least 60% of the time and two-thirds more than 80% of the time. They expected to continue working at least 50% virtually beyond the pandemic, suggesting that COVID-19 has driven a permanent shift in how we work.

When asked what work can be done effectively virtually, 45% of respondents mentioned transactional team activities such as reporting, giving updates, performing administrative tasks, and making simple decisions; 25% pointed to participating in one-to-one meetings and having similar types of interactions, such as interviews and one-on-one coaching.

In a related question about which work cannot be done effectively by virtual means, 40% mentioned integrative work in teams, including innovating, making strategic decisions, or solving complex problems. Additionally, 15% pointed to building relationships and networking, while 13% identified negotiating and having difficult conversations.

Multimodal Leadership Roles

The amount of time team leaders work with their teams in the virtual Conductor role as opposed to in-person Catalyst will depend on the extent to which the team's work requires the integration of members' knowledge and perspectives. The greater the interdependence, the more time the leader will have to act as Catalyst. The extent to which leaders will do coaching in person likely will depend on proximity.



How to Prevent the Return to Offices From Being an Emotional Roller Coaster

Liz Fosslien and Mollie West-Duffy

Leaders can take steps now to make employees feel supported and safe before they resume in-person work.



As more and more people get vaccinated against COVID-19, leaders and employees are starting to look ahead to a potential return to offices. Many organizations are considering a hybrid work model, in which teams come into the office a few days a week or a few key days a month. For employees who have felt isolated and siloed during the pandemic, the return to the workplace will be exciting. For those who have taken to remote work or have lingering health concerns, it will be anxiety-inducing. For many, it will be both. Simply put, the return to offices will be emotional.

As a leader, your role is to give your people as much certainty about the future as possible. And while no one really knows what the world will look like six months from now, there are a few steps you can take today to make your people

feel supported and safe ahead of an eventual return to the workplace.

Be transparent. Don't wait to communicate what you're thinking, even if there's limited information to share. For example, go ahead and say, "We're definitely going to be working from home through July and are considering shifting to a hybrid work model after that." Uncertainty breeds anxiety, and saying something is far better than remaining completely silent. Even if you can't offer a specific answer yet, your teams will feel comforted knowing that you're not actively ignoring the issue.

As questions come up, answer them as honestly as you can. And once you do have a plan, make sure you fill managers in on all the details so they can communicate expectations clearly and confidently to their teams. Remember: The goal of transparency is to earn trust and reduce unnecessary stress.

Surface concerns early on. To support your people, start by getting a better understanding of where they are. Surfacing preferences and concerns early on can help you pull rather than push your teams back to the office. (After the past year, it will be nearly impossible to use the excuse that your organization is just not set up for remote work and that people need to be back in the office.)

You might send out a survey with questions like these:

- How many days a week would you like to work in the office?
- What will make the return to the office easier for you?
- Are there any extenuating circumstances you're willing to share that might make a return to the office especially hard or scary for you?
- What types of work would you prefer to do from the office — for example, large staff meetings, new team meetings, brainstorming sessions, etc.?
- What types of work would you prefer to do from home?

Be sure to share the survey results. If you want employees to be in the office five days a week again, and the survey shows that employees want to be in the office two days a week, it's a bad move to simply ignore that information. Instead, use it as a jumping-off point for honest conversations and productive compromise. Loop employee resource groups into those discussions to make sure any plans you put in place take the needs of all of your employees into consideration.

Discuss expectations. As *where* you work becomes less important, *when* you work will take center stage. As part of your hybrid work plan, come up with a list of communication norms that will support productivity and prevent burnout.

When you're working from home, it's too easy to just ... keep working, all the time. In 2020, [Microsoft found](#) that the number of messages its employees sent after standard work hours doubled, and that people who did not work much on Saturday and Sunday pre-COVID-19 saw their weekend work triple. It's no wonder that 71% of knowledge workers have [experienced burnout](#) over the past year.

Example norms might include the following:

- All meetings will have a video link to ensure that remote team members can join.

- For large all-hands meetings where some people will be in the office and some remote, everyone will still call in individually from their computers so those who are remote don't feel left out.
- Everyone, whether they're in the office or not, will be expected to be online (within reason) during a subset of normal work hours (for example, 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. PST) to have some overlap with all coworkers.
- Everyone will share what they are working on for the week in a group email or Slack thread.
- Leaders will call in to meetings from home at least one day a week to normalize remote work.

Involve your people. A fresh start is a chance to reimagine what the workplace looks like, so make this planning process a creative endeavor. Try splitting employees into small focus groups to generate ideas for how to make the most of your office space and eventual in-person time. Bringing your people into the conversation can help surface better ways of working, break down silos that have formed over the past year, and make everyone more excited about the possibilities of getting together in an office again.

Highlight what your teams will gain with in-person time. In a survey conducted in late 2020, [PwC found](#) that over half of employees prefer working from home three days a week or more. Chances are high that not all of your people will be excited to come back to the office, especially if you're asking them to come in more than a couple of days a week.

Instead of demanding that your teams get ready to be back in the workplace, focus on highlighting the benefits of getting together in person. If there were specific pre-COVID-19 culture events or celebrations that people enjoyed, share a plan for how you'll restart them when everyone is together again. It's likely that your people have also experienced some frustrations around digital communication or felt isolated at times. Remind them that getting together in person addresses both of those issues. According to PwC's survey results, almost 90% of employees said that team collaboration and building relationships were much easier in person.

Present the change as an experiment. Humans resist change. Even though many people are looking forward to returning to the office, there will still be anxiety around the change — especially given that the details of the transition won't be perfect at first. To ease people's anxiety, frame the return to offices as an iterative process: Tell them that your organization will try Version 1 of a hybrid work setup at first and then iterate based on employee feedback. This will help people feel that it doesn't have to be perfect in the beginning.

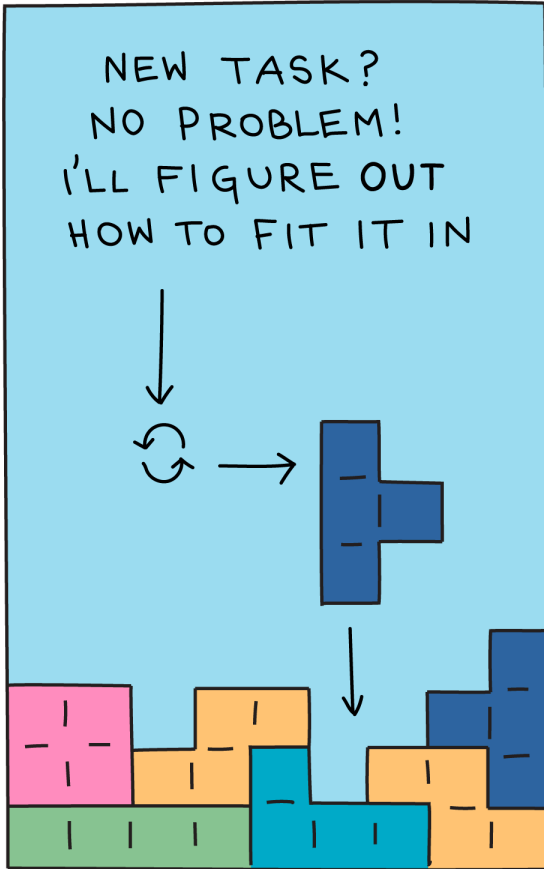
Though the return to offices might still be far off for your organization, it's likely that most of your people are starting to think about it. By taking the steps above now, you can help employees feel more certain about the future, excited

to reconnect with their colleagues, and supported by their leadership team.

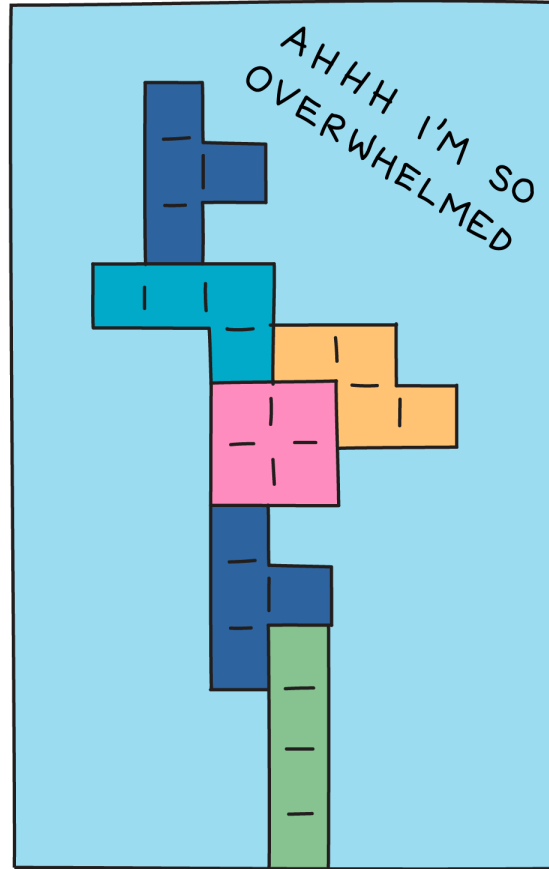
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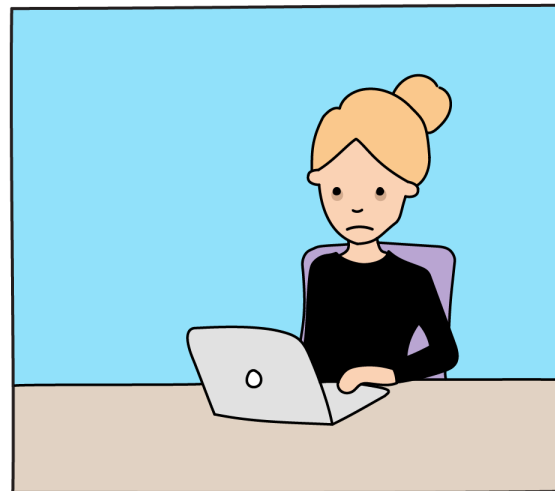
WORK



**WORK,
WHEN
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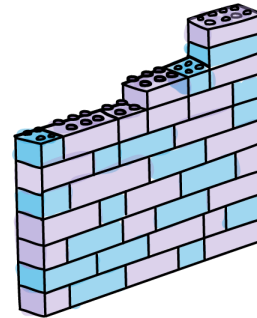


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WE THINK OF FAILURE AND
SUCCESS AS OPPOSITES



WHEN IN REALITY FAILURE
IS PART OF SUCCESS



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Experiments and Data for Post-COVID-19 Work Arrangements

Thomas H. Davenport and Thomas C. Redman

Instead of guesswork to decide when to return to in-person work, companies can use experiments and data-backed decision-making.



Almost all leaders and employees are wondering what work and business will be like after the pandemic ends. Now that approved COVID-19 vaccines are being rolled out across the globe, we can see some light at the end of the long, dark tunnel in which we've all been working and living. But what will the attributes of the business environment post-pandemic be, and how will we decide on them? Work from home or go back to the office? Embrace Zoom for sales calls or head back to airports and business travel? In our view, the pandemic and post-pandemic business environments present great opportunities to question long-held assumptions and answer those questions using experiments and data.

Work arrangements and their impacts on productivity, job

satisfaction, fairness, collaboration, and social responsibility should be a primary focus area. Companies may need to revisit longstanding systemic issues, such as inclusion: While some organizations have made strides in this area in recent years, the pandemic has had a disproportionate effect on certain groups in the workforce (such as women and parents), which means that organizations now need to assess losses and work to recover and build on pre-pandemic progress.

This is a good time to turn to testing to guide decisions, using all sorts of experiments around factors that have been influenced by the pandemic. The experiments don't have to be terribly burdensome in these taxing times; some may occur naturally, and many companies now have analytics groups in HR and elsewhere that can gather and analyze needed data. Some companies have gathered enough relevant data over the past year to make fact-based decisions about post-pandemic work arrangements. Others have insufficient data now but can begin conducting experiments to create data that fills in the gaps.

Types of Decisions Where Experiments and Data Can Help

One of the biggest questions for many companies is whether to require employees to return to a five-day workweek in the office. We've seen evidence that working from home has had benefits such as less wasted commuting time, less carbon in the atmosphere, and perhaps even greater productivity. According to a [Stanford study](#), there is a huge range in how many days a week employees would *like* to be in the office post-COVID-19 — the median response is two days, but 25% of respondents said five days, and 20% said never. Some companies have already staked out radical positions, like New York-based Skillshare, which has [closed down all of its physical offices](#). Others, like Netflix, are run by a CEO who [calls remote work “a pure negative”](#) with no benefits. Neither of these extreme policies seems to be based on extensive data or analysis, and they involve sweeping positions regarding all workers in all jobs, and across all family and living situations.

There's no need to make blanket policies with limited evidence. Facebook, for example, has been testing (since before the pandemic) whether being colocated with a manager is crucial to high performance ratings and promotions. Its people analytics group, led by Alexis Fink, examined this in part by looking at outcomes for individual contributors who were geographically separated from their teams and managers. Fink told us that overall, they have not found an impact. At the start of the pandemic, Facebook conducted a variety of internal studies looking at outcomes for teams, and the results suggest that working remotely is neutral to favorable in terms of getting work done and getting it done well. With all this data and analysis, Facebook announced in May 2020 that it would take a measured approach to [scaling its remote work strategy](#).

In 2020, life sciences company Merck found consistent patterns in both employee sentiments and productivity when it asked 80% of its workforce to protect their health by working from home and the remaining 20% to go into the office with extra onsite health safety measures in place.

Jeremy Shapiro, the company's head of workforce analytics and one of several executives designing new work policies based on the data, said that employee engagement measures remained strong during a difficult time. He credited a combination of leadership and team support as critical to that success and said that hybrid office/home/third-space work settings are likely to be adopted in the future. He noted that Merck's workforce is heterogeneous and that no single policy will be appropriate for all employees.

We suspect that many organizations will come to the same conclusion as Merck, with considerable variation in what constitutes an ideal solution from job category to job category, from team to team, and even from individual to individual. What's best for sales may be very different from what's best for marketing.

In an extensive early-2000s [study of knowledge workforce policies](#), segmenting workers and giving them some choice about work environments emerged as the two most important factors in work arrangement design. As Matt Phelan, cofounder of The Happiness Index, an employee engagement platform, observed, “Some people prefer to work from home, some people prefer to work from an office, [and] some people prefer a blended approach. One hundred percent of people want the flexibility to choose.” Several of the workforce analytics leaders we spoke to for this article emphasized these factors as well but planned to conduct further testing and data analysis. Facebook, for example, is committed to both segmentation and choice but also plans to study the impact of remote work on onboarding and collaborative innovation.

As the pandemic eases, companies lacking pre-pandemic data could create experiments around these options. They could have some groups work in the office every day, some work entirely at home, and some work a mixed schedule. Some outcome measures (dependent variables in the analysis) could be measured for each group, including productivity, work satisfaction, networking frequency, and even hours worked as evidenced by computer activity. The results of these experiments could become the basis for broader workforce policies. They could be communicated and defended as data-based, which would perhaps make them less subject to resistance.

Location-based variables will also need to be tested, because we can't assume that attitudes and accommodations taken up during the pandemic will carry into the future. This kind of testing will be important for salespeople, who haven't been able to pitch potential customers in person since the start of the pandemic, as well as for other professionals, such as attorneys, consultants, and personal trainers. Similarly, business conferences and product exhibitions that have gone virtual will need to figure out whether their customers have grown accustomed to less time-intensive Zoom teleconferences or if there is pent-up demand for a return to in-person gatherings. They should be testing a broad range of approaches, ideally with different price points, to determine what attracts the most paying customers.

Finally, the list of great topics for experimentation and data analysis can include questions involving work hours (for instance, fewer days at longer hours), supervision approaches, and employees' roles in determining their schedules. "We certainly think that the question of how many days to work in the office is ripe for research," Jennifer Kurkoski, director of people analytics at Google, told us. "But there is a much bigger opportunity." What would it take, she wondered, "to shift from bounding work by hours to bounding it by outcomes? For us, there is a recognition that there is much more that we don't know, and we're beginning to address questions that haven't been open for debate before."

In [thinking about where to experiment](#), all senior managers should be asking themselves, "As we move past the pandemic, where can we have more understanding about how to run our business in the future?"

What It Takes to Experiment

Some organizations will have expertise in the emerging but fast-growing field of people or workforce analytics. Such groups typically have skills in research methods, social science, and policy implementation. They can greatly facilitate the efforts of management teams in conducting experiments and data analysis for post-pandemic workforce strategies.

For other companies, the "test and learn" approach can be

executed in the same fashion by which companies test alternative websites, marketing approaches, or capital spending plans. Off-the-shelf software can keep track of test and control groups and help interpret results.

There are, however, factors to keep in mind when designing tests. Employees who know that their work is being monitored and measured might work harder — a phenomenon known as the [Hawthorne effect](#), named for studies done at the Western Electric Hawthorne Works plant in the 1920s. Some factors that influence outcomes might be difficult to control, such as a requirement for social distancing among workers assigned to an office. But these confounding issues can usually be managed.

Companies can increase their chances of running these social experiments successfully if they follow some proven steps to their design:

Clarify the elements of the experiment. Articulate the questions of interest, the populations and subpopulations of interest, the dependent variables (for instance, productivity or employee satisfaction), and the independent variables (such as the number of days per week in the office). Clearly state what all the key terms mean.

Document findings. Record the process for collecting and storing the data.

Cast a wide net in the analyses. Once you start looking at the data, you may well learn things you weren't informed enough to ask when designing the experiment.

Start early and start small. There is so much to learn. And there are so many things that can go wrong!

Ideally, COVID-19-related experiments will become part of a [broader approach to experimentation](#) to test every important decision that is lacking available data. A culture of experimentation is a major component of data-driven management, and learning from tests should become a key component of the "new normal" business environment.

The COVID-19 pandemic presents a unique opportunity for trying out new ways of working. Companies can either ignore the opportunity and ride a great wave into the unknown, or they can try to develop a deeper understanding

and chart a better course. Those who take the latter approach will benefit from happier and more productive workforces, greater efficiencies, and an increased ability to respond to major changes in their environments. Work arrangements adopted after the pandemic are likely to persist for decades, so it's worth the trouble to get them right.

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