How the Future Works

Redesigning a future that is flexible, inclusive, and connected.

Sheela Subramanian

Author, *How the Future Works*

Co-Founder, Future Forum

Bloomberg
US Edition

Worker Burnout Is Even Worse Than at the Peak of the Pandemic

Economic unrest, layoff fears and more stringent return-to-office policies are unsettling white-collar employees globally.

The New York Times

Elon Musk, Management Guru?

Why the Twitter owner's ruthless, unsparing style has made him a hero to many bosses in Silicon Valley.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

The Bosses Are Back in Charge

CEOs are reasserting their authority now that workers are starting to worry about job security amid rising layoffs; 'this whole concept of working from anywhere went too far'

The New York Times

The Office's Last Stand

It's either the end of the era of flexibility around where work takes place — or the beginning of outright rebellion.

FORTUNE
FINANCE · ECONOMY

What inflation? American shoppers boost retail spending to fastest pace in nearly 2 years.

The New York Times

Pace of U.S. Hiring Surges Unexpectedly

TIME
BUSINESS · CAREERS

As People Return to Offices, It's Back to Misery for America's Working Moms

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

The War to Define What Work Looks Like

Pay. Productivity. Commuting. Rarely have bosses and workers been so at odds over so much.

Bloomberg
US Edition

Work Shift | Modern Management

The Middle Managers Are Not Alright

Mid-tier bosses face pressure from both sides as employees return to the office, leading to the highest risk of burnout of any job level.

Bloomberg
US Edition

No Longer Tied to Offices, Workers Are Still Bound by the Clock

While the pandemic shifted where work gets done, we're still following Henry Ford's advice about when it should get done.

WIRED

The Workforce Is Failing Women. Business Leaders Can Stop It

FINANCIAL REVIEW

Get back to the office, or get forgotten

The generation of 35-50 year olds is fast becoming the forgotten generation. They seem to have convinced themselves that their careers still have potential while working from home.

Is it time to "return" to pre-2020 or redesign?

Leaders face new challenges caused by shifting workplace expectations and economic uncertainty
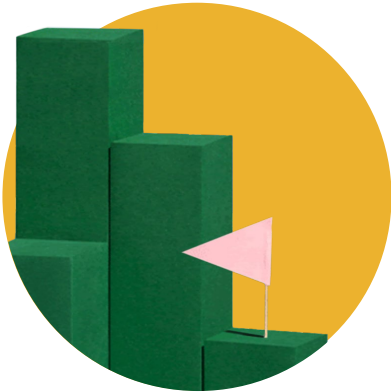
Executives questioning
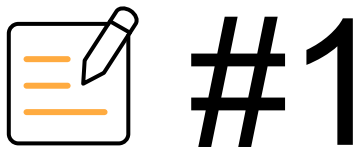productivity, culture and
connection

Employees are
burned out

Flexibility is
a solution

Talent drives competitive advantage

#1

Top concern in CEO surveys

FORTUNE

Executives fear hiring and recruiting challenges will continue for the next decade

BY **AMBER BURTON** AND **PAOLO CONFINO**
January 5, 2023 at 4:54 AM PST

The battle for talent isn't going away in the new year. In fact, failing to attract and retain top talent could have lingering effects for up to a decade, according to consulting firm Protiviti's annual survey of over 1,300 C-suite executives.

Executives identified finding and keeping talent in a tightening labor market as the **biggest organizational risk in 2023** among 38 different risk categories. Even more alarming, **they anticipate it will be the top operational risk for 2032—ten years from now.**

Flexibility highly influences employee satisfaction

75%

open to new jobs if unsatisfied with flexibility

Flexibility is

2nd
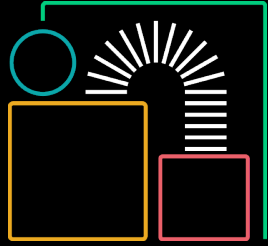
only to compensation in driving satisfaction

Productivity, culture, and connection

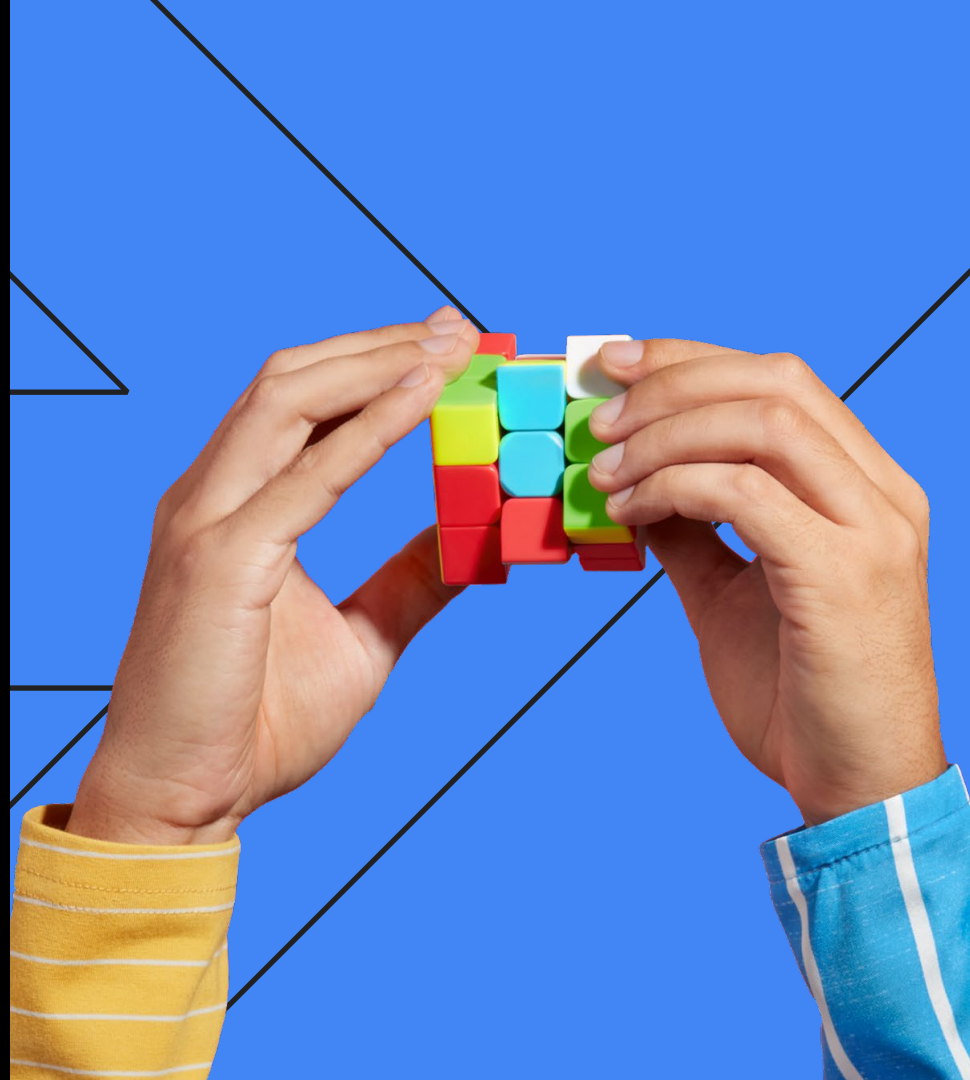# RETURN

—

VS

—

REDESIGN

Flexible

Inclusive

Connected

Flexible

First, let's acknowledge the progress made since 2020

Global desk workers

49%

work in a **hybrid arrangement**

34%

work **full-time in-office**

17%

work **full-time remote**

FF

Your employees want choice

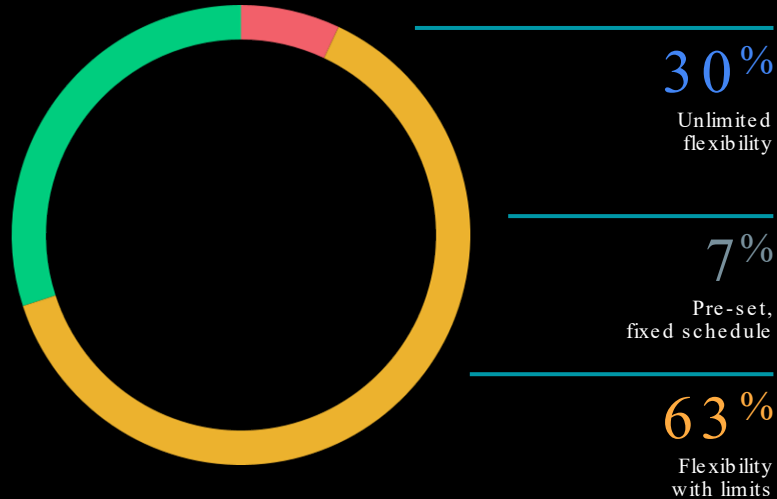Untether from the "9-to-5, five days in the office" way of working
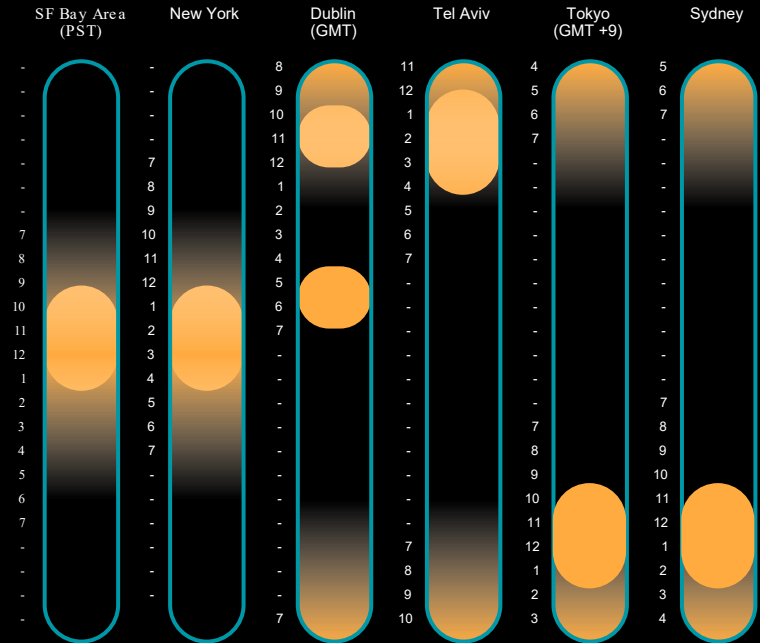
81%

want flexibility in where they work

93%

want flexibility in when they work
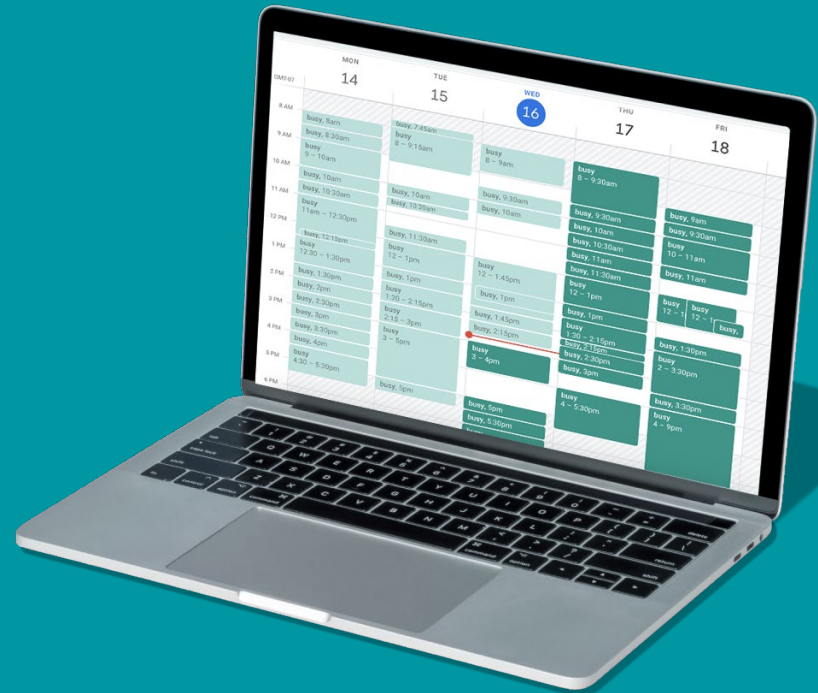
What we need is flexibility within a framework

30% Unlimited flexibility

7% Pre-set, fixed schedule

63% Flexibility with limits

This is what limited flexibility looks like

| | | Regional core collaboration hours | | Potential flex hours |

Does this look familiar?

No wonder people are burning out…

Schedule flexibility isn't just what people want—it also leads to stronger business results

Employees with schedule flexibility report

39%
heightened productivity

64%
improved ability to focus

Building flexibility

~~Core work hours~~

~~Saying "no" to more meetings~~

Asynchronous ways of work

Boston Consulting Group's PTO program

- **Predictability**
  - Protected time each week for every team member to go offline (and more importantly, learn to go offline w/o stress)
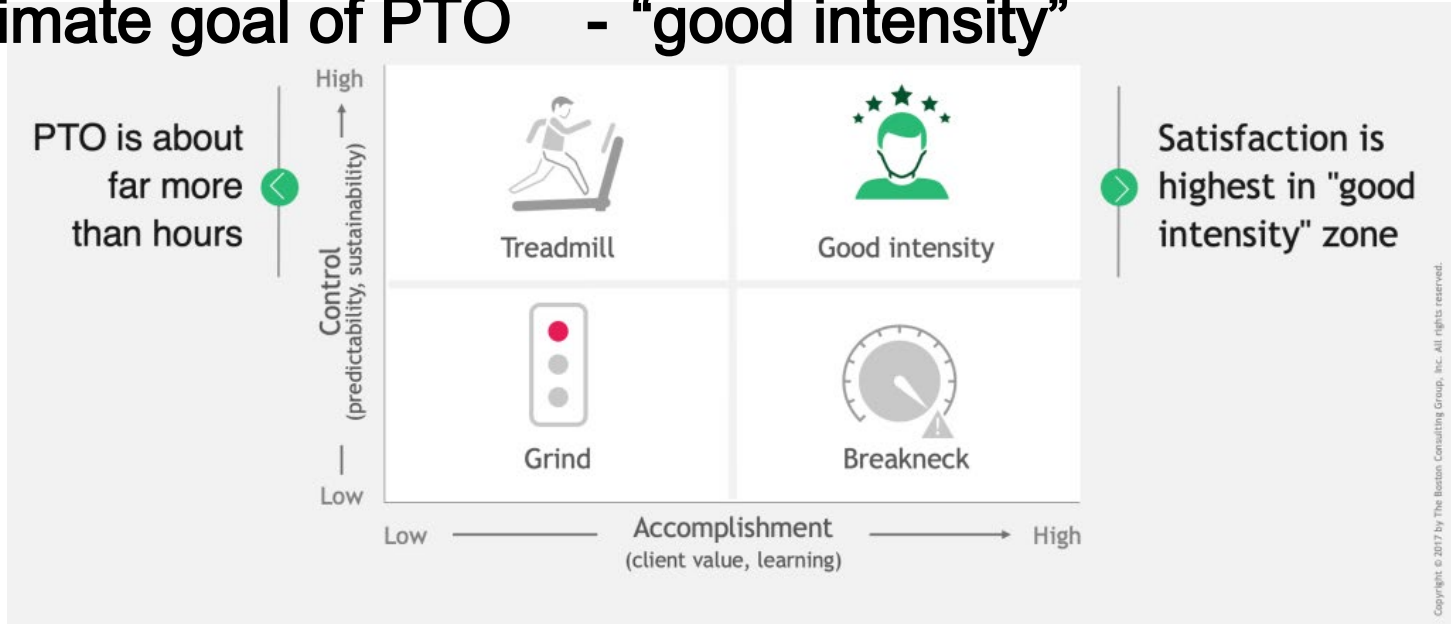
- **Teaming**
  - Expectations around unspoken team norms, including work hours, off-hour communication, and preferred modes of working

- **Open Communication**
  - Facilitated team and 1:1 conversations to resolve potential issues early

The ultimate goal of PTO – "good intensity"

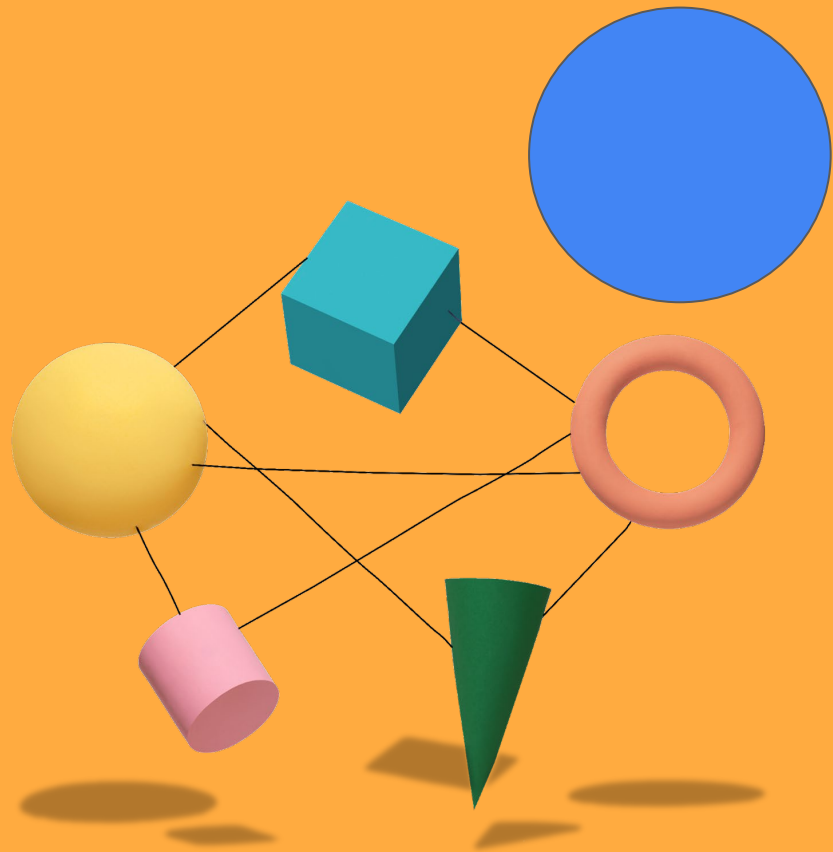
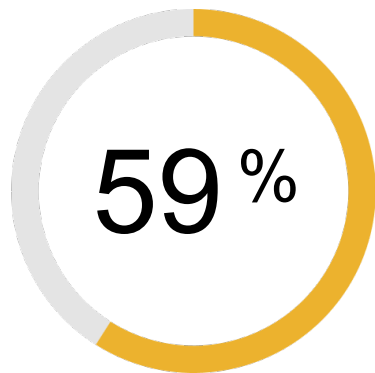Employee experience is measured DURING a project, rather than after it's completed

Flexibility is about finding ways to give employees more **autonomy** and choice.

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Inclusive

Flexible work is a gamechanger for inclusion

59 %

of working mothers
want to work from the office
2 days a week or less

Change in sense of belonging from May 2021 to November 2022

↑ **43** % for Black respondents

↑ **21** % for Hispanic/ Latinx respondents

↑ **2** % for white respondents

↑ **2** % for Asian/ Asian American respondents

"

"If you had asked me two years ago if I would ever return to work, I would've said no. It never entered my mind as a possibility until everyone was working remote ," said Anardi, who lost the use of her legs during the birth of her first child, after which doctors discovered and removed a tumor that had been pressing against her spine.

"It's a much more comfortable situation when you can interview over Zoom and people don't see a wheelchair as the first thing about you. "

Bloomberg, October 2022

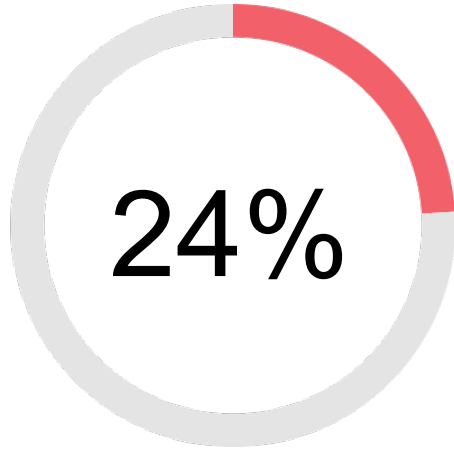There's a looming challenge: proximity bias and burnout

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Percentage of workers globally who say they are burned out rose to 42%

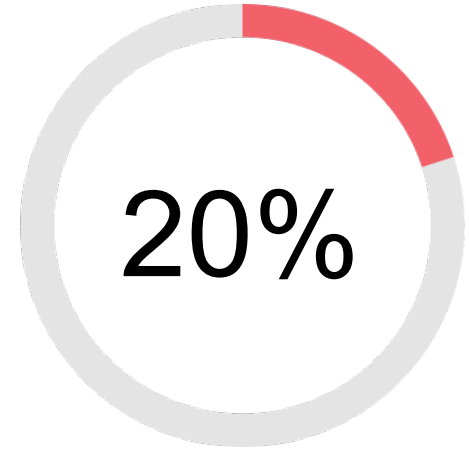Employees who are burned out report

3.9x worse

stress and anxiety at work compared to employees who are not.

Women and younger workers are more likely to report burnout

24%

Gender gap
Female workers show 24% more burnout than their male counterparts

20%

Age gap
18‑to‑29‑year‑olds show 20% more burnout than workers age 30+

Building inclusion

Principles & guardrails

Team level agreements

Outcomes - based management

EXAMPLE: Enterprise Principles

RBC's "Enterprise Principles" for Flexible Work

Flexible Work is here to stay: Hybrid work arrangements will be supported where feasible and optimal for the business, clients, and employees.

Our approach starts with our business strategy: Platforms have the flexibility to adopt a tailored approach to optimize across teams, roles, and regions; while enterprise standards set the parameters to enable consistency and scale.

Proximity still matters: Being close to our colleagues and the communities we serve is core to our culture and will remain so in the future; for the majority, this means residing within a commutable distance to the office.

Strategic investment is required: To fully enable our employees, we will invest in technology, infrastructure, and skills to operate in a more flexible environment.

Inclusive culture with growth opportunities: Employees should have a consistent and meaningful employee experience with access to development opportunities regardless of work arrangement or location.

EXAMPLE: Company behavioral guardrails

The IBM Work From Home Pledge

- I pledge to be family sensitive.
- I pledge to support flexibility for personal needs.
- I pledge to support "Not Camera Ready" times.
- I pledge to be kind.
- I pledge to set boundaries and prevent video fatigue.
- I pledge to take care of myself.
- I pledge to frequently check in on people.
- I pledge to be connected.

Empower your managers through the team level agreement

✨ **Values: What do we value in our working environment as a team?**

As a team, we value working in an environment that…

- **Example:** Allows everyone to participate fully whether in-person or remote
- **Example:** Encourages continuous feedback
- **Example:** Prioritizes and honors focus time

💡 **Tip:** You may find that company values are a good starting point for the team values discussion, especially if your company has built and communicated a set of <u>principles & guardrails for flexible work</u> that point to more specific flexible work values.

⚖️ Accountability: How do we hold each other accountable?

*As a team, we want to **set expectations and hold each other accountable** in the following ways...*

- **Example:** We clearly define work and deliverable requirements from the beginning, including a primary owner (also known as a "DRI - directly responsible individual")
- **Example:** We commit to making it clear when we need feedback (from whom and when)
- **Example:** Every major project will have retrospective meetings to reflect on what went well, what could've been better, and what we've learned

👥 Relationships: Coming together as a team

*As a team, we want to **build our relationships** with each other in the following ways...*

- **Example:** When it comes to bringing ourselves to work, we embrace vulnerability with boundaries. We operate from a place of trust — we can speak openly about our lives outside of work.
- **Example:** We commit to celebrating one another's successes both publicly and within the team.
- **Example:** We commit to being open and honest about when we are overloaded or need support, both personally and professionally.

🔄 Checking-in and evolving our team agreements over time

As a team, we want to check in on how things are going by...

- **Example:** Spending part of our team meeting every month discussing our team-level agreements and getting feedback on what is & isn't working
- **Example:** Creating a quarterly poll to get anonymous feedback across our department on our team-level agreements, and suggestions for improvement
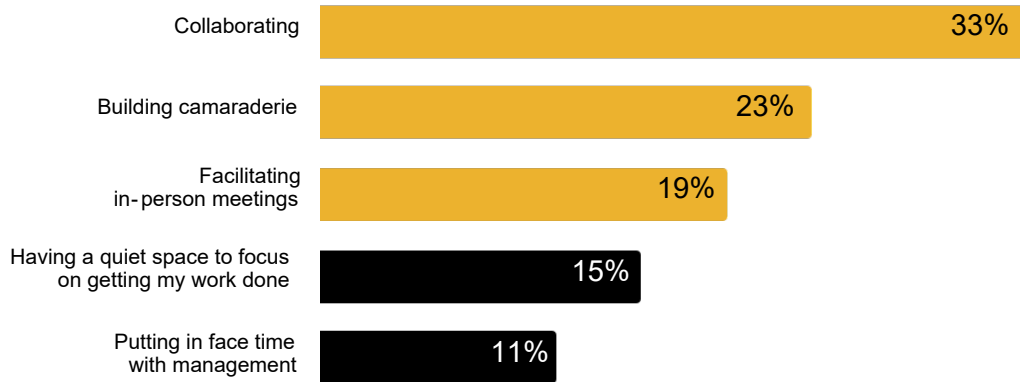
Connected

Executives' concerns around offering more flexibility at work are overblown

25%

of executives cite "team culture is negatively impacted" as a number one concern about offering employees more flexibility in an office

Here's what makes people want to come into the office

"What would be your primary motivation for going into the office?"

Motivation	Percentage
Collaborating	33%
Building camaraderie	23%
Facilitating in-person meetings	19%
Having a quiet space to focus on getting my work done	15%
Putting in face time with management	11%

Building camaraderie is dead last for the C-suite, at just

12%

The advantage behind flexibility: connection

Fostering connection isn't about slogans and perks: it's being intentional about how you work and what you reward

Remote and hybrid workers are

57% more likely

to say their company culture has improved over the past two years

These workers are

14% more likely

to say they feel "very connected" with their direct manager, executive leader, and company values

The Great Executive -Employee Disconnect

Different experience

___

45 %

higher satisfaction among executives than non -executives

Confirmation bias

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65 %

of executives say they're designing their companies' policies with little to no direct input from employees

Transparency & trust

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73 %

of executives believe they are being "very transparent" but only 41% of employees agree
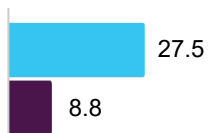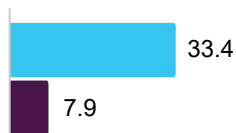
A deficit
of trust
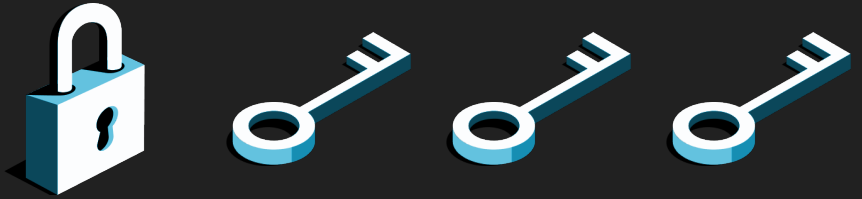
More than **1 in 4 workers**
do not feel trusted in the
workplace

Trust also drives employee wellbeing!

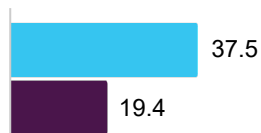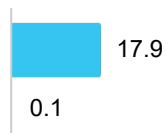■ My employer trusts me   ■ My employer doesn't trust me

Work life balance
27.5
8.8

Sense of belonging
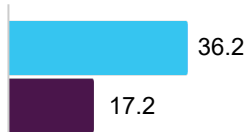33.4
7.9

Productivity
37.5
19.4

Feeling good about stress/anxiety
17.9
0.1

Level of access to relevant people, files, and resources
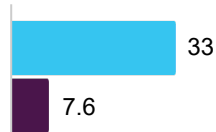36.2
17.2

Flexibility
32.2
11.6
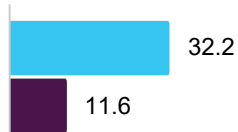
Ability to focus
34.7
16.6
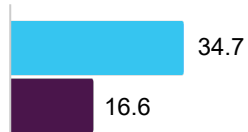
Satisfaction
33
7.6

Employees who feel trusted report higher experience scores than those who don't feel trusted.

↑ **2.1x** ability to focus

↑ **4.2x** sense of belonging

↑ **4.3x** overall satisfaction

… and trust drives engagement

Employees who feel trusted are

1.3x

more likely to put in more effort

1.2x

more likely to say they'll go above and beyond

Employees who don't are

2.2x

more likely to look for a new job

Transparency impacts trust

Employees who don't believe their company "is being very transparent regarding working policies are

2.3x

more likely to "definitely" look for a new position in the coming year

Employees who perceive their companies to be transparent have

8.8x

greater job satisfaction than employees who have the opposite perception

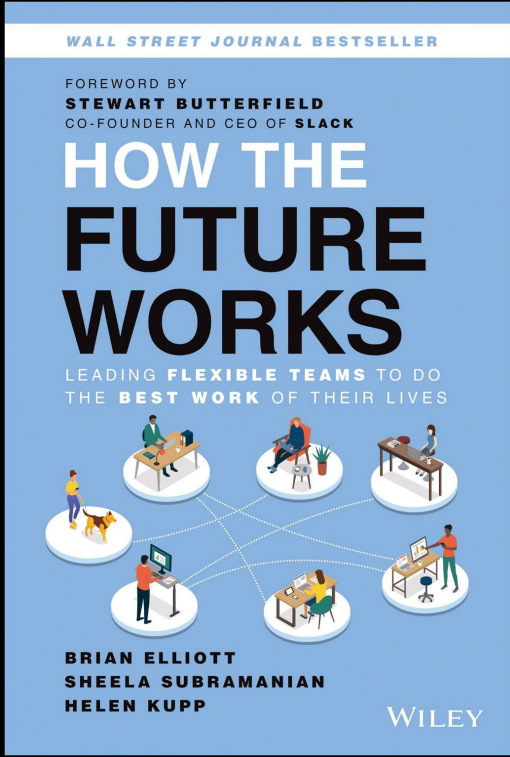Connection is more than seeing one another in -person.

It's about trust.

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Fostering connection

~~Redefine your culture~~
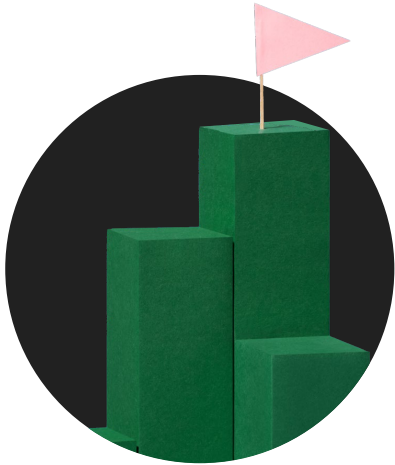
~~Two - way transparency~~

Say "thank you" more.

The seven steps to getting there:

1. Stand for something: agree on **Purpose** and **Principles** .

2. Level the playing field: Create **Guardrails** for behavior.

3. Commit to how you'll work: Develop **Team - Level Agreements.**

4. **Experiment, experiment, experiment:** Normalize a **culture of learning.**

5. Create a culture of connection from anywhere: **Reimagine your HQ.**

6. Train your leaders to make it work: "Soft" skills matter more than ever.

7. Focus on the outcomes: Avoid the "doom loop" and **embrace the "boom loop"**

It's time to redesign.

Flexibility is about choice.

Inclusion is being valued, seen, and heard.

Embrace trust and transparency

How the Future Works

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Find me on LinkedIn!

Building a hybrid model around key events:

95%
___
Team satisfaction

99%
___
Team compliance

BCG