REWRITING THE HR RULEBOOK FOR HYBRID WORKING

Leveraging hybrid work to attract and retain top talent

GN Making Life Sound Better

Talent in a hybrid world

Organizations need to stay ahead of the hybrid curve to remain relevant in an increasingly competitive labor market.

When employees went to work from home in March 2020, most organizations saw this as a temporary deviation from the traditional way of doing business, one which would eventually return to "normal." But as we've moved along, employees' attitudes towards work have changed drastically. As a result, a new interpretation of work has taken hold, one which all available data suggests will be around for a long time to come: hybrid.

A recent SHRM study found that over 40% of US workers are actively searching for a new job right now, or plan to soon.[1] This confirms our own data, which shows that since the start of the pandemic, 48% of workers globally have considered changing jobs for an employer with hybrid work options. Looking beyond the horizon of the global pandemic, we can see that monumental shifts in employee sentiment and the overall labor market will occur. Organizations – and especially human resources teams – need to be ready to encounter these shifts head-on.

The stakes are high and getting hybrid right in the eyes of current and potential employees will be one of the key differentiators in the search to attract and retain the best talent out there. In this guide, we will break down the latest talent trends in the context of hybrid working and look at how organizations can navigate the new landscape of talent to thrive in the hybrid future.

[1] Deconstructing the Great Resignation

What do employees want from their employer?

One SHRM study found that 64% of US workers said their expectations for a job have changed since the Covid-19 pandemic, a phenomenon their Chief Knowledge Officer Alex Alonso has labeled "Covid clarity." But what exactly are these new expectations?

Empowering employees with real flexibility

Of the 5,036 global knowledge workers we recently surveyed in our Hybrid Ways of Working 2021 Global Report, 59% reported that having the ability to work from wherever they want is more important to them than salary and other benefits.[2] Similarly, 77% of employees say they would prefer to work for a company that gives them the flexibility to work from anywhere rather than a fancy corporate headquarters. Instead of sleek buildings and more benefits, employees indicate that what they really want is more autonomy to make their own decisions about how, when, and where they carry out their work: 61% said they prefer that management allows them to come into the office when they need to and work from home when they need to. Similarly, 65% want to be able to set their own schedule in a hybrid future. Together, this data touches on some of the most basic elements of the employer-employee relationship and suggests a radical rethinking in the way companies organize work for the future.

Professional technology to include everyone from everywhere

In hybrid working, employees want everyone to feel included and present in teams, meetings, and the overall organizational culture. In fact, 9 in 10 employees globally agree that it's important for all employees to feel valued and included, whether they should choose to work from home or in an office. To address this, 84% believe that professional collaboration technologies will help create a more equal and inclusive workforce.

Needless to say, employees know that flexible work will present challenges, but that the tools to address these challenges are out there. Increasingly, they'll be looking toward employers to equip them and their teams with technologies fit for a hybrid world.

[1] Deconstructing the Great Resignation

[2] Jabra Hybrid Ways of Working: 2021 Global Report

Top benefits of technology for an inclusive workforce

Helping provide equal access across different work environments
44%

Helping employees feel comfortable with virtual workspaces that are accessible anywhere
42%

Helping make everyone feel included and represented in meetings
41%

Reducing meeting fatigue
37%

Giving employees equal screen space
30%

Principled guidance and fair performance evaluation

When it comes to their work arrangement, employees know what they want: flexibility and autonomy enabled by technology. But that's not the same as knowing exactly how it will play out in reality. While flexibility, autonomy, and technology are all essential for individuals to thrive and feel confident in their job, the ship still needs to be steered in the right direction for teams to succeed together. This especially rings true when members are spread across different locations and working at different times.

In a hybrid environment, 86% of employees think that careful work guidelines are needed for an equitable hybrid experience. However, they don't want guidelines that take the form of restrictive policies on when and where to work; this would be a direct infringement on their autonomy. Rather, guidelines can simply be a set of principles that set the standard for how employees are expected to operate, such as encouraging the use of the office for collaborative tasks rather than mandating a minimum number of days in the office per week.

Finally, 52% of employees say they would prefer to work from home but are concerned their career would suffer as a result. This is part of the reason why 7 in 10 of employees would prefer that managers focus on employee output over time spent in the office. By focusing on output, organizations will assure all employees that the regularity of their physical presence (or lack thereof) will not impact their performance evaluation, and that promotions will occur based on merit rather than on proximity to leadership. In this, there is a major opportunity to retrain managers for hybrid work, as output evaluation is an attribute of organizational culture that will be increasingly on the radar of employees as they seek fair and equitable employers.

Top 3 concerns about a hybrid working future

Lack of clear expectations around when or how often to go into the office or what type of work to go in for

28%

Lack of consistency of hybrid working best practices across my company

26%

Lack of equal opportunities for employees who choose to work from home more often

25%

How to attract talent in hybrid work

HR teams will play an essential role in building a communicative and tech-first hybrid organization.

Clarify and communicate your hybrid plan

With 59% of employees globally saying they would not work for a company that required them to come into a physical office five days a week, it's clear that employees want a flexible work future. But how do they know that's what they'll get when they take a job at your organization? A first major step is to clarify and communicate what their everyday work arrangement will look like.

A recent McKinsey study found that while 9 in 10 executives envision some form of hybrid model going forward, only 1 in 10 have actually begun communicating and piloting that vision.[3] With 66% of employees agreeing that their company needs guidance on what a hybrid work model looks like, this lack of communication can be seen as one of the major contributors to employees' uncertainties or doubts about a company's ability to support them in hybrid work.

For a company to clarify its hybrid plan, multiple stakeholders need to come together. First, senior management needs to take an official internal stance on flexible work arrangements within the organization; HR teams can play a decisive role in delivering the case for hybrid with supporting data from both external sources and from employees already within the company. To streamline this process, creating a stakeholder group with representatives from across the organization will ensure that all voices are heard and incorporated into the discussion on how to move forward with hybrid work.

Next, it's crucial that this hybrid approach be accessible and understandable to all possible job seekers. To do this, HR managers must identify key hiring channels (e.g. a careers/vacancies page, hiring agencies, headhunters, etc.) and provide those responsible for these channels with the necessary resources to effectively communicate the organization's approach to hybrid. Employee testimonies can help share real stories from individuals within the organization, while a resource such as a written hybrid strategy can provide the leadership's vision for the future of work at the company.

[3] What executives are saying about the future of hybrid work

> " *Give people more autonomy to decide themselves where they are at their best, but leaders need to make equally sure that if employees choose to work from a location other than the headquarters, that they don't feel left behind.* "
>
> *Holger Reisinger,*
> *SVP, Jabra*

Spotlight your tech strategy

During the remote work transition, the lack of digital maturity in many organizations became rapidly apparent. While some distributed companies who had been operating remotely for years had the tools in place to transition seamlessly, many did not. And for the latter, this lack of proper tools and technologies was felt most of all by the employees who relied on them to communicate and execute their daily tasks. So now, when looking for a job, employees will be looking for companies that take a "virtual-first" approach to work; they'll be making sure that their prospective employer will invest in their ability to stay connected. In fact, 80% say they would rather work for an employer that invests in technology to connect the workforce in the hybrid future.

So, what should HR teams focus on when communicating with and hiring prospective talent? While many organizations are beginning to allot each employee with an allowance to buy the tech that works best for them, our most recent data actually shows that 68% of employees want standardized professional equipment across the company. And with many organizations shifting to hot-desking in the office and remote working from anywhere, 55% of employees want their tech to come in the form of a flexible tech bundle that they can transport between work environments.

Investment in superior technology will play the same role that many on-site benefits such as gyms or lounge areas have played in the past: it will signal that you value your employees and care about their well-being. Showing that your company not only allows employees to work flexibly, but also *enables* them to do it with tools fit for a flexible world, will be a major differentiator in the search for top talent.

Technology is critical to a work-from-anywhere future

'Collaboration technology is critical to a work-from-anywhere future.'

■ Agree
■ Disagree

Gen Z	Millennials	Gen X	Boomers
74%	84%	86%	86%
27%	16%	14%	13%
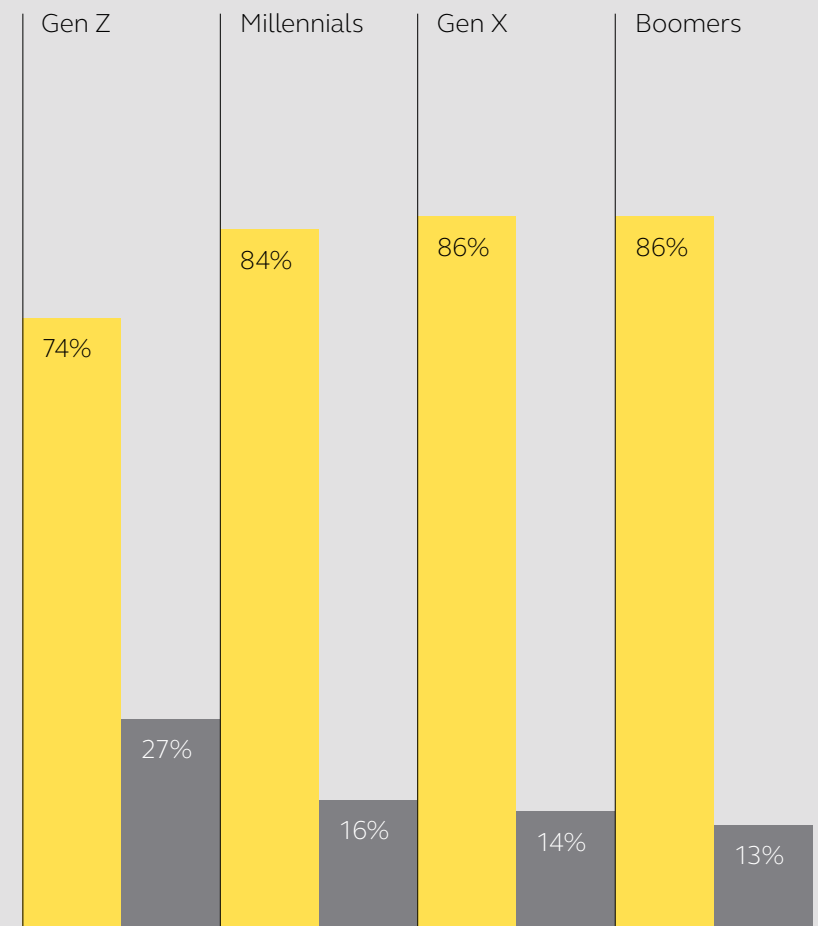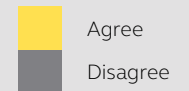
Creating an environment that retains top talent

Building pathways for empowerment and development will lead to highly engaged and satisfied employees.

Listening then acting – employees want to be consulted and see results

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Hybrid working is extremely complex, and particular interpretations of what it should look like vary greatly, even within organizations and individual teams. To address this, HR can encourage management to create team agreements, which can be tailored to individual teams rather than entire organizations. This is especially relevant in larger organizations, where the nature of teamwork varies greatly from one team to the next.

But to make sure that the model your organization chooses is purpose-built from top to bottom to increase retention, engagement, and satisfaction, consulting your employees on what they want in their work arrangement is crucial. In fact, data shows that employee inclusion in the planning processes of future work arrangements increases both their productivity and well-being.[4] This desire for inclusion is reflected in our own data, in which 85% of employees said they believe companies should consult with employees and key personnel before implementing a hybrid working strategy. For this, consider conducting anonymous employee surveys, Q&A sessions, and continual dialogue.

However, while work arrangement consultation is great to increasing retention, it's not enough. A recent study from the Workforce Institute showed that while 51% of employees say their employer has already solicited their feedback on remote and hybrid work preferences post-pandemic, 18% say their employer is "horrible" at acting on that feedback and never does anything with it.[5] An additional 34% were only "okay" at acting on it. Consultation must be accompanied by action.

To demonstrate commitment to action, set a timeline for the organization's work arrangement changes. For example, this could be a four-month period with monthly updates on any changes to the plan, which align with the local public health situation. Instituting a practice like this does both you and your employees a favor: they know when to expect the changes that you asked them for feedback on, and you have the time you need to institute a plan of action that considers the practical realities of the world in which you're operating.

[4] What employees are saying about the future of remote work

[5] Workforce Institute 2021 Engagement and Retention Report

> "
> *For hybrid to work, each company, each team, and each individual will have to figure out what works best. It will be an iterative process requiring patience and compromise from all.*
> "
>
> *Holger Reisinger,*
> *SVP, Jabra*

RETENTION

Consider hybrid work in employee development plans

Realistic development plans are one of the primary ways to keep employees engaged; if they can visualize a clear path to achieving their goals, they're more likely to want to work hard to achieve them. And while we've long understood the benefits of investing in employee development, hybrid work creates a new range of challenges to address through development programs. With teams more distributed than ever, it's possible that many employees will feel less in touch with their long-term development trajectory.

When creating development plans, HR teams should consider how employee desires for flexibility will play into setting and achieving goals. If an employee wishes to move into a management position, consider establishing pathways for them to develop the soft skills necessary to effectively manage teams distributed across spaces and time zones, such as trust-building and empathy.[6] Offering avenues for employees to develop these skills can help to facilitate a natural culture of engagement in a dynamic hybrid organization.

Retrain managers to lead hybrid teams

Boosting employee retention will depend largely upon their experience with hybrid in the very near future. We already know that many employees are actively seeking jobs elsewhere, and that the positive impacts of their work arrangement changes will need to be felt immediately. The place where they will perhaps feel those changes most acutely are in the manager-employee relationship.

There's no doubt that hybrid will require a certain degree of dedicated management retraining. But which skills should you be training managers on? One of the biggest ones will be hybrid inclusion and bias training. As discussed before, many employees are concerned about unfair treatment or unequal opportunities should they choose to work remotely. Managers will need to be particularly sensitive to any biases they may be holding towards physically present employees. Similarly, training managers on inclusive meeting techniques will ensure that hybrid meetings aren't dominated by in-person attendees or by those who are more comfortable in virtual environments.[7] Feeling alienated in these situations can easily lead to a sense of disconnect with one's team and company culture and a subsequent drop in levels of engagement.

A second major area of focus for management retraining should be how to deal with the "autonomy threshold." The autonomy threshold refers to a given employee's degree of autonomy determined by the company hybrid strategy. If the company approach to hybrid is that employees are allowed to work from home three days per week, no employee should feel pressured to be in the office any more than is required. Any infringement of this threshold may be interpreted as a lack of trust by their manager or team. Training on when managers can intervene in one's work arrangement – and more importantly, when they cannot – will be essential.

[6] Three soft skills leaders need for hybrid work environments

[7] Creating emotionally supportive hybrid teams

> *By providing the right technology and training your leaders how to effectively manage hybrid teams, you can attract top talent from anywhere in the world by promising them the flexibility they're looking for.*

**Morten Lyngstrand Baagoe,
Head of HR, Jabra**

CONCLUSION

Hybrid work as a qualifier, strategy as a differentiator

Most companies will implement some form of hybrid work arrangement, so your hybrid strategy must be the differentiator.

The data is clear: hybrid will be the dominant approach to work moving forward. As such, just being a hybrid organization isn't enough to attract and retain the best talent. HR teams will need to work in concert with executive leadership to develop a hybrid strategy that stands apart from the crowd.

Many companies that say they're "going hybrid" have yet to establish clear plans detailing how they'll go about this. To attract the best talent and to provide certainty to prospective hires around their future work arrangement, a clearly communicated and well executed hybrid plan will be essential. A key part of this plan will be the tech experience. Employees are looking for companies that will provide them with standardized, professional, and flexible technology so that they can be productive and included no matter where or when they're working.

As for retaining employees, empowerment and development will be two of the key areas of focus for HR teams. Hybrid working is complex, and employees have many different opinions about how it should be done. Pulling together these opinions and acting on them in an inclusive and responsive way will go a long way in helping employees take ownership of their work arrangement. Finally, to make sure employees thrive in that arrangement, the different dimensions of hybrid work must be considered in employee development plans and management retraining programs. This will ensure that your organization has a hybrid-ready workforce to fit into the hybrid model you've chosen to proceed with.

In the past, to build a talent-rich organization in a world where everyone worked in the same place, many organizations invested in on-site perks and benefits to be an anchor in employee attraction. But now, as every organization crafts its own unique approach to hybrid working, HR teams will need to rethink attraction and retention to win in a hybrid future.

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