Driving Engagement and Retention in the Hybrid Workplace

HR strategies to boost engagement, culture, and performance in the new world of work

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Introduction

Hybrid work isn't a brand-new notion. Forward-thinking companies have allowed employees to work from home full-time or part-time for decades. What has changed, as a direct result of the pandemic, is that organizations who weren't open to remote work now realize the benefits of allowing it.

Organizations that once believed on-site work was the best way to operate and serve customers have evolved their thinking. They've come to understand that providing employees with more flexibility is vital to keeping them happy — and maybe even keeping them at all.

> " *39% of knowledge workers could leave if organizations insist on a 'hard return' to fully on-site work.* "

According to the 2021 Gartner Hybrid Work Employee Survey, 75% of hybrid and remote knowledge workers say their expectations for flexible working have increased, and 55% say whether they can work flexibly will determine if they stay with their organization. Perhaps what's most scary, given the current talent shortage, is that 39% of knowledge workers could leave if organizations insist on a "hard return" to fully on-site work.

Attracting new talent could be even more challenging if organizations abandon the idea of hybrid work altogether. Today, a large majority of employees want the flexibility to work from anywhere.

Employees want flexibility. But what else do they *need?*

While organizations are increasingly committed to long-term hybrid work, many aren't prepared to navigate the complexities of the new norm, particularly when it comes to employee engagement. Flexibility is part of the equation but isn't the only thing to consider.

Employee engagement has always been foundational to successful companies. When employees are engaged, they're more productive, loyal, and accountable. Yet, despite HR's and leaders' best efforts, employee engagement is low at just 20% globally, according to Gallup's State of the Global Workplace: 2021 Report.

In a hybrid workforce, where supervisors and HR teams are trying to connect with and rally highly dispersed employees, the challenges compound. Specifically:

- **Remote staff often feels excluded.** They feel [overlooked for promotions](#) and exciting projects. Many don't feel like they are equal participants in meetings, compared to on-site staff.

- **Collaboration can be tough.** Hybrid work creates technical and logistical challenges, [making it difficult](#) for remote staff to connect with, problem solve, and brainstorm with coworkers and other teams.

- **Burnout is very real.** As the lines between work and life blur, remote workers may be more prone to working after hours or on the weekends. Because they are out of sight, they feel the burden to be always available and always on. It is highly stressful and can [quickly lead to burnout](#).

People teams will play a major part in optimizing hybrid work so employees get what they want: more flexibility. And what they *need* is to feel like valued, respected members of the organization.
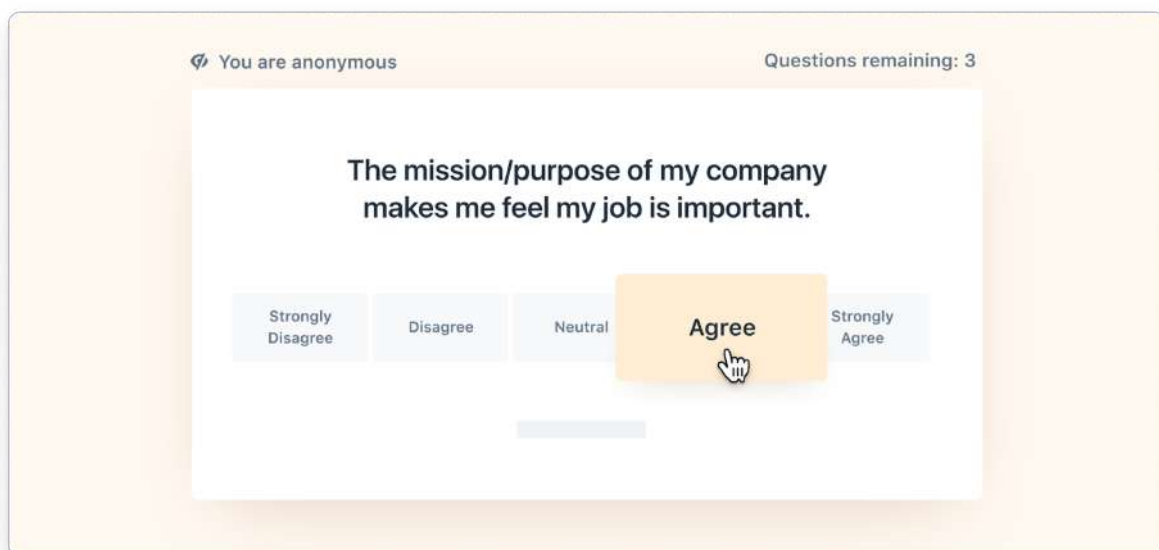
Hybrid work can be wildly beneficial, but it does require a shift in thinking, and a need to consider solutions and make decisions with the entire workforce in mind. This ebook will explore some of the tactics HR teams can employ to drive engagement and retention in the new world of work.

HR's Checklist for Engaging a Hybrid Workforce

1. Conduct regular engagement surveys.

How do you know if employees are engaged if you aren't asking? You need to elicit their feedback. Engagement surveys empower you to assess how employees feel and are managing their work.

Employee surveys let you collect feedback about workplace culture, employee satisfaction, and actions or initiatives which could impact morale and performance. Additionally, engagement surveys offer employees the opportunity to share their concerns and offer feedback without fear of repercussion. And when you act on their feedback, they feel heard, valued, and respected. For remote employees, surveys enable them to provide potentially culture-changing feedback, and it makes them feel like they are very much a part of the organization.

An employee fills out a short, three-question pulse survey using Lattice.

Strike a balance between longer engagement surveys and pulse surveys, which are short surveys that allow you to collect feedback on various topics quickly. Pulse surveys, with an average response rate of 85%, are ideal for evaluating how people are feeling after organizational changes or to gauge the effectiveness of HR programs over time. That real-time data empowers you to adjust and act fast to drive more successful outcomes.

Furthermore, take a tailored approach to your survey strategy and conduct targeted surveys to glean insights you can use to drive positive change. For example, you could survey a group of new remote hires to understand the effectiveness of a new onboarding program.

Do understand that employee engagement surveys aren't as helpful if you don't have the visibility and ability to glean insights from the data. Ensure you can filter data by work location, full-time status, and other demographics to understand the experiences of both on-site and remote workers.

Survey Questions to Ask

To gauge whether your organization offers equitable experiences to all employees, consider asking some of the questions below. All prompts are rated using the Likert scale (strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, and strongly agree). Find more survey questions here.

- ✔ My perspective is valued here.
- ✔ I feel comfortable speaking up in meetings.
- ✔ I seldom feel overlooked during meetings.
- ✔ My manager regularly asks me for feedback.
- ✔ Collaborating and communicating with teammates is easy.
- ✔ I seldom feel stressed or overwhelmed.
- ✔ I have ready access to learning and growth opportunities.
- ✔ I get enough one-on-one time with my manager.
- ✔ I have the technology I need to be effective.
- ✔ I can take time for myself during the workday.

2. Encourage leaders to hold weekly one-on-one meetings.

Few aspects of work are more connected to employee satisfaction and high retention rates than the supervisor-employee relationship. When communication is open and honest, employees feel like their needs are being met and engagement is higher. That's why one-on-one meetings are so powerful. Managers and remote employees should meet once a week to discuss progress, goals, priorities, and challenges.

> *"For remote staff without the benefit of casual chats throughout the day, virtual one-on-ones can ease feelings of isolation."*

While team meetings offer an opportunity to connect, brainstorm, and problem solve, the one-on-one provides supervisors and employees with time to troubleshoot challenges and get ahead of issues that could impact the employee's morale or performance. They offer managers a chance to acknowledge and praise an employee's efforts in a highly personal way. Lastly, they give managers time to connect and learn more about each employee, which is essential for building trust.

For remote staff without the benefit of casual chats throughout the day, virtual one-on-ones can ease feelings of isolation. To help your managers facilitate stronger one-on-one meetings, consider sharing Lattice's Manager One-on-One Agenda Template with them.

One-on-One Questions to Ask

The one-on-one empowers managers to dig deeper and offer employees a chance to open up about their experiences. Here are some prompts managers can use to guide those discussions.

✔ How are you feeling right now? What's your energy level? Stress level?
✔ Do you feel like you're able to maintain meaningful connections at work?
✔ Are you facing challenges working remotely you don't think you'd face in the office?
✔ Do you feel like you're clear on your priorities and goals right now?
✔ Do you feel you have the right tools and information to succeed in your job?
✔ Do you feel supported by your teammates?
✔ Do you have the power to adjust your schedule for non-work priorities?
✔ Are you experiencing any daily communication challenges?
✔ Are there projects or tasks you feel are blocked because you're remote?
✔ Do you feel like you have time to focus on your professional development?

3. Focus on employee career development.

Remote workers are worried about being left out of important meetings or being overlooked for raises and promotions, and for good reason. Managers or team leaders often fall into the trap of "out of sight, out of mind" when it comes to remote employees.

The good news is that providing a strong employee development roadmap is one of the most effective ways to keep employees engaged. Just make certain that employee development is available to all employees — and base promotions on merit and experience, not location. Formalized and widely available job tracks, levels, and competencies make this crystal clear to on-site and remote employees.

Product Management Track			
Competencies	Associate Product Manager	Product Manager	Senior Product Manager
Product Craft: Customer Focus Leverages empathy for the customer and user research to inform product decisions	Customer informed. Talks to customers using their area of product and has an understanding of their requests. Relies on guidance to understand how insights might impact product direction. Effectively partners with Design and Eng to validate decision-making.	Customer focused. Talks to customers using their area of product, always looking for deeper insight. Understands their requests and uses this information to logically prioritize their product roadmap. Partners effectively with Design and Eng, helping to define the problems we should be seeking to understand and to valid...	Customer focused. Talks to a range of customers and others, always looking for deeper insight. Is an expert in customer needs for their area of product. Is able to use this insight to effectively create the best possible value in their product area. Anchors.....
Product Craft: Analytics Focus Leverages data, research, and product analytics to challenge investments in search of the best solution.	Seeks out data to guide and validate product hypotheses but needs support from others in order to interpret and apply the information.	Anchors decisions in data. Uses data insights to evaluate and inform the story they tell. Understand how data insights might impact product strategy. Can independently seek basic data insights.	Anchors decisions in data. Uses data insights to evaluate and inform the story they tell. Uses data insights to inform product strategy and defines the analysis we need. Can independently seek and evaluate their own data insights. Is the 'go to' person for analytics insight for their area of product. ....
Product Strategy: Influence Defines, shapes, and understands how product strategy fits into overall company strategy.	Understands product strategy and how it fits into overall company strategy. Contributes to strategy at the team level.	Shapes product strategy with close support from manager. Understands how product strategy fits into overall company strategy. Contributes to and influences product strategy at the team level.	Shapes product strategy with minimal support from manager. Understands how product strategy fits into overall company strategy. Creates and clarifies strategy within ambiguous areas with limited guidance.

Above, a product manager uses Lattice to review their job track, including the competencies they'll need to improve to be promoted.

Tips for Making Career Growth Equitable

The following strategies will help you provide meaningful growth experiences for everyone, regardless of where they are.

✔ **Put a plan in place.** Have managers chat with employees about their career goals. Together, map out the necessary training, certifications, knowledge, and experience they need to get there. Once you put the plan in place, offer them the resources and opportunities to progress in their career, including setting aside time for them to learn on the job.

✔ **Make it clear what it takes to move from role A to B.** Broadly communicate your job levels and competencies. When employees know what it takes to advance, they are more likely to invest time and effort in their personal development. Learn more about that here.

✔ **Offer equitable learning experiences for on-site and remote employees.** Everyone should have access to the same training, mentorship, events, and conferences. If you are offering on-site training, invite remote workers to attend. At the very least, ensure online offerings are valuable, intuitive, and provide a positive experience.

✔ **Check in regularly.** Career conversations shouldn't be reserved solely for annual performance reviews. Managers should regularly discuss employees' long-term goals, offer real-time feedback and coaching, and support their direct reports in making their career aspirations a reality.

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4. Set hybrid work "rules" and norms.

Even with greater flexibility, teams still need to operate under agreed-upon norms. Why? Remote workers often feel overlooked and undervalued by their on-site co-workers. At the same time, on-site co-workers may think their remote teammates aren't "working as hard," or worse, they think their remote teammates should be available around the clock. Information silos can quickly form, and misunderstandings can escalate into conflicts.

Setting expectations for how employees will treat one another and work together builds trust among team members and helps to ensure everyone feels respected. To improve communication, foster connections, and build trust, establish these guidelines for hybrid teams:

- **Work to set realistic boundaries.** Remote employees shouldn't feel like they need to work all hours of the day and night or be available 24/7. At the same time, on-site employees shouldn't feel compelled to adapt their schedule if a remote worker chooses to work during off-hours. Agree to respect one another's time.

- **Train everyone on key technology.** Whether it's Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Slack, or some other tool, provide plenty of training so every person knows how (and when) to use each tool to its full potential.

- **Provide parameters for asynchronous communication.** For asynchronous communication, employees work on their own time and answer colleagues when it's convenient for them. Offer guidance for how quickly people need to respond (i.e., within 24 hours) and what to do when a response is urgent.

- **Encourage team-wide information sharing.** Keep both remote and on-site employees in the loop by sharing updates and announcements during group meetings, rather than in one-on-one sessions. Or use group chats or emails to share updates or disseminate information.

- **Make meetings inclusive and remote-friendly.** That starts with providing everyone with the right technology, but it also means giving everyone a chance to speak up and be heard. Don't let on-site employees monopolize the conversation.

- **Prioritize PTO.** Not enough people are taking their earned vacation days, and it's driving up their stress and leading to burnout. Encourage all employees, including remote workers, to take time off to completely unplug.

- **Focus on outcomes.** Ultimately, everyone works differently, and everyone has their preferences. However, it shouldn't be a sticking point for teamwork. As long as everyone is pulling their weight, hitting their goals, and producing quality work, team members will have to adapt to approaches to working that differ from their own.

Conclusion

Hybrid work isn't going anywhere, and that's a good thing. It enables organizations to be more agile, attract and retain top talent, reduce overhead costs, and more. While all these strategies are battle-tested, it's critical to understand if they are working for your organization and your people.

Engagement surveys, **one-on-ones**, and **career development** are critical to ensuring both remote and on-site employees feel equally valued. When HR teams make each of these a core part of their People strategy, hybrid work becomes a differentiator, not an obstacle. A thoughtful approach, complemented by the right software, can give HR leaders the support they need to make that jump. And that's where Lattice comes in.

Lattice transforms how companies approach People Strategy by connecting performance management, employee engagement, compensation, and employee development in one unified solution. Our analytics helps HR teams and managers better understand what keeps employees engaged, regardless of where they are in the world. Whether your workforce is on-site, remote, or somewhere in between, our platform drives more successful outcomes for your people and, by extension, your business. Experience it for yourself by requesting a [live demo.](#)

About Lattice

Lattice is the people success platform that enables HR leaders to develop engaged, high-performing teams. By combining continuous performance management, employee engagement, development, compensation, and growth in one solution, organizations get powerful, real-time analytics that leads to actionable insights turning managers into leaders, employees into high performers, and companies into the best places to work.

Lattice works with companies that aspire to put people first. Whether redefining the beauty industry or building self-driving cars, all of our customers have one thing in common: They value their employees and want to invest in the development and success of their people. To see Lattice's platform in action, schedule a product tour.

Trusted by the best places to work

Join **3,900+ organizations** that use Lattice to help power their people strategy

Request a demo