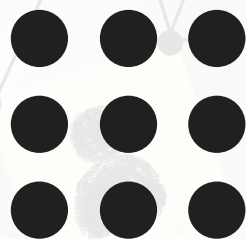




A Guide For Managing The New Reality Of Work

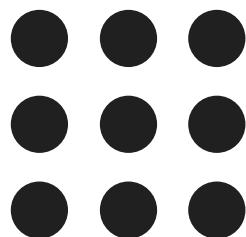
Should Your Organization
Be Co-Located, Fully
Remote, Or Hybrid?



A Guide For Managing The New Reality Of Work

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Introduction

The world of work is about to be upended again. This time for a good reason.

More than a year after the COVID restrictions made work from home the norm (and Zoom a verb), offices are beginning to reopen. Soon we could see the full parking lots and bustling hallways as physical signs that we are, finally, back to normal.

But should we?

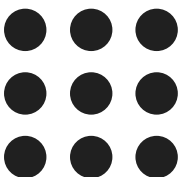
That's a deceptively complex question. As a recent article in the [Wall Street Journal](#) points out:

It took months for bosses and employees to adjust to working remotely in the pandemic. The next era of work might be even more messy.

All in person? Fully remote? A hybrid system? There is no universal answer to what the 'next era of work' will be.

There are, however, points every organization should consider as they plan for what comes next. There are ways to minimize the mess.

We've created this guide so that you can effectively inspect and adapt your organizational concept of a workplace. To better align your rules and norms with your vision and purpose. To help kickstart your organization's transition to the new normal.



Capture Feedback On 2020: It Is Worth Remembering



Think of it as an organization-wide retrospective.

2020 is in our rearview mirror. But the lessons learned during those 12 trying months (and the first half of 2021) shouldn't be. You need to capture feedback on what worked and what didn't when it comes to full remote work now.

Why the urgency?

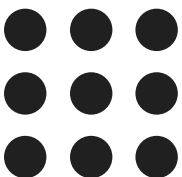
Uncollected feedback is perishable; the longer you wait the less reliable it is. Your ability to make an informed decision between co-located, fully remote, or a hybrid workforce model depends on reliable data.

This feedback can take many forms. We talked with several individuals from a variety of industries which yielded some [powerful results](#).

You can start by focusing on these two areas:

- Team happiness and hopes - talk with or survey teams, team members, and leaders. Ask them directly about the good and bad of full remote vs. colocation. Listen to what they have to say. And ask what they would like to see going forward.
- Business outcomes - Were customers happy? Did projects and products get done? Did the numbers work? It's time to sift through the data. But remember, the pandemic created a challenging and complex business climate. This requires more than a simple apples-to-apples analysis.

Once you have this feedback you can begin to make data-driven decisions on the workplace model and norms for your organization. Perhaps more importantly, you will also have an established baseline and mechanism to inspect and adapt that model and those norms going forward.



What Is The Purpose Of An Office And Why Do We Need Them?



Pandemic restrictions forced us all to work in new ways. We now know what is possible. What can be done remotely versus what must be done in a shared physical space.

It's time to test our assumptions and ask these fundamental questions; What does having employees report daily to a particular building accomplish? Are offices providing value that justifies their cost?

Those in favor of physical office spaces often point to things that are hard to replace or replicate virtually. These include:

- Collaboration, communication, and the sense of belonging that comes with colocation
- A place to work away from the distractions of home
- Creation of physical products and use of specialized tools
- Space for gatherings and training
- A need to directly interact with customers
- A place to focus
- The status and stability a physical location conveys

These points are all valid (as are others not included) and should be weighed when considering what model your organization should adopt.

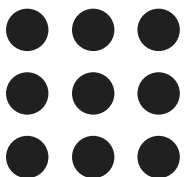
But note they likely don't affect all functions of an organization at all times.

Physical office spaces should be thought of as a high-cost tool. The value an office space delivers must outweigh the overhead associated with it.

If the return on investment is positive, great. Colocation may remain your best choice.

If the R.O.I. is not clear (or worse yet, a net negative), it's likely time to either downsize and move to a hybrid model or consider remaining fully remote.

And what about the R.O.I. as viewed by employees? Are they happy? Does the workplace accelerate their ability to achieve? A decision like this should not be made without hearing the perspective of those who do the actual work.



Is Colocation As Important As It Once Was?



Colocation has long been a mantra in the Agile and Scrum communities. And for good reason. Colocation builds team chemistry, increases communication saturation, and is a pattern commonly used by high-performing teams across industries and functions.

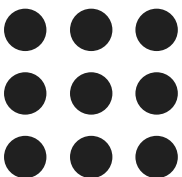
Is all that now a thing of the past?

Maybe yes. Maybe no. But consider the updated 2020 Scrum Guide. Prior versions suggested Scrum teams be colocated for all the reasons stated above. The 2020 Scrum Guide removed that reference because technology has improved to the point that colocation is no longer a must.

Video conferencing tools are cheap, reliable, and allow us to read body language and hear conversations. Digital 'whiteboards' and other tools allow swarming and work to be done in real-time regardless of geography - and make transparency and accountability easy.

Yet there is still undeniable value in colocation. This is why many organizations are considering a hybrid model of work. One where Scrum Teams colocate when they need to and work remotely when they can.

Your organization should inspect the data collected from 2020 and before and ask, "when is colocation a must for our success?" Use the data to empirically and honestly answer that question.



Are You Looking To Refresh Or Reboot Your Culture?



A return to “normalcy” does not mandate a return to “the way things were.” Right now you have a unique opportunity to reshape not just your workplace but the culture of your organization.

Examining your organization’s structure is a critical piece of that work. [Structure begets culture](#). It defines the processes and tools that determine the frame within which we can interact.

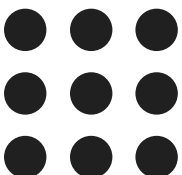
A top-down or command-and-control structure creates a culture where people expect to be told what to do and when. Innovation and creativity evaporate. Empowerment is nothing more than a buzzword.

An Agile culture, of course, revolves around the first value of the [Agile Manifesto](#), an awkwardly phrased term that points out a fundamental truth: Empowered people and the connections between them are what truly matter.

So what your organizational culture really? How is it described not by leadership, but by the individuals and teams that comprise the organization? Does your culture foster the innovation, empowerment, alignment, and collaboration required to thrive in the modern business world?

Honest answers to these questions may be hard to hear. They are, however, invaluable.

One way or another your organization is about to change. [Maximize the positive impact of that change](#) by creating a structure, and therefore a culture, that empowers teams, eliminates impediments, reduces bureaucracy, and fosters innovation and the individual.



Retaining And Recruiting Talent

Motivated and skilled people who thrive on empowered Scrum Teams are more than a resource - they are the organization. They will determine your present and future success.

Your competitors know this. Every organization does (or should).

One of the potential 'messier' aspects of creating your next concept of a workplace is the very real threat of losing or not being able to effectively recruit talent.

A recent [study by The Grossman Group](#) found, "nearly half of employees now working from home want to stay remote." That survey is not an outlier.

There are plenty of studies and surveys out there sounding the alarm that a vast majority of employees are enjoying working virtually. Many say working from home has improved their work/life balance. They report lower stress levels and improved productivity.

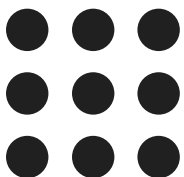
Many but not all.

Others report missing the experiences being in office provides. They enjoy directly interacting and collaborating with others, a chance to chat, walking to Starbucks, and going to lunch with colleagues.

Organizations need to consider the benefits of both being in the office and working from home. And they need to consider this from the viewpoint of the individual and the organization.

Most modern organizations employ people from all over the world that work together daily from different office locations. So, is there a benefit to bringing people back to work, to sit at a desk, and spend all day working with people that are not in the same office?

Empowering employees to select what works best for them is a powerful tool for retaining and recruiting talent. Many organizations are (or have already) added it to their arsenal. Will yours?



Effect On Diversity And Inclusion Initiatives

Does having an option to work remotely or in a hybrid model increase inclusion, diversity, and equity?

As technology changes and globalization continues to spread, organizations can find talent across cities, states, regions, and countries.

Removing geographical barriers can increase access to a diverse workforce. A hybrid or fully remote work model can also equalize the playing field by ensuring no one feels sidelined or left out because they're not at 'base'.

But let's be clear when it comes to diversity, equity, and inclusion, an option to work remotely or in a hybrid model is just a start.

Meaningful change requires equally meaningful priorities, policies, and promotions to take hold. Your organization's workplace model can help, but much more is needed if you strive for real inclusion and equality in your organization.

Work Pace And Sustainability

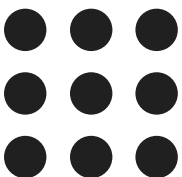
A group of employees at an international fortune 100 organization say they worked an extra 4 hours a day because they didn't have to commute.

A consultant reports she starts her day working with clients in London, then switches to California during the day, then clients in Hong Kong in the evening.

Individuals reporting their day consisted of jumping from one video conference to the next within seconds- not even taking time to refill their coffee cups or stretch their legs.

For many, if not most, work from home meant spending a lot more time working. But at what cost?

The negative effects of "Zoom fatigue" have become so prevalent that both the [Harvard Business Review](#) and [Stanford University researchers](#) have outlined ways to fight them.



And what about productivity?

Working more hours to get less done is not a recipe for success.

A sustainable work pace matters for many reasons. Perhaps the most obvious one is this; individuals and Scrum Teams experiencing burnout are less productive, less creative, and less able to focus, align, and deliver.

The longer burnout goes unchecked, the more damaging it is to the individual, team, and organization.

Fostering a sustainable work pace needs to be weighed as your organization settles on whether to go fully remote, colocated, or hybrid. There will be times when after-hours work will be needed. These need to be the exception - not the rule.

Your organization needs to make [Principle #8 of the Agile Manifesto](#) a priority:

Agile processes promote sustainable development.
The sponsors, developers, and users should be able
to maintain a constant pace indefinitely.

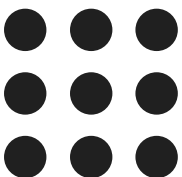
One of our own Scrum Teams was experiencing burnout. So they dug into it during a [Sprint Retrospective](#). They made figuring out their individual #P8 (their shorthand for Principle #8) the [Kaizen](#) for the next Sprint.

Some blocked out time on their calendars for either multiple short breaks or a long break in the middle of the day. Others vowed not to work on weekends. As a Scrum Team, they supported and encouraged each other during the Sprint.

In just one week, the team metrics for happiness and sustainability were noticeably higher than before. And they got more done.

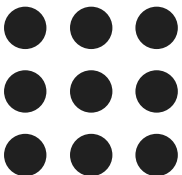
Further Refining Your Model

Once your organization has decided what 'returning to work' means, you can start refining how you will implement that vision. Here are some ideas to build on for each of the models. These suggestions are grouped into hybrid, fully remote, and colocation. However, many are equally applicable in every model, so it's worth reading through them all.



Ideas For Hybrid Workplace

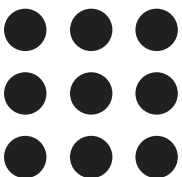
- **Have designated team days for in-person work:** You need a structure to ensure you generate the benefits of colocation days. Mondays and Fridays seem to be a popular choice for designated team days but remember - those are the most common requested days off. As always, you need to determine what days work best for individuals, teams, and the organization.
- **Institute policies to fight 'Zoom Fatigue' and burnout:** Build-in 10-minute breaks between meetings. Start tracking feelings of burnout in Scrum Retrospectives. Identify and tackle negative trends in happiness before they become a problem. Empower Scrum Teams to ensure they are keeping a sustainable pace. Ask for ways to improve work/life balance and listen to the answers. There are countless ways an organization can prioritize the well-being of its employees. Which will have a positive impact on the organization and its bottom line. But the organization must make it a priority.
- **Always hold team events in virtual conference space:** And we mean always, even if the entire team is there. Dialing into a video conference or chat is now second nature. Holding team events in these spaces ensures team members who may need to work remotely on a particular day (or at a particular time) can contribute and be equally heard. Turning on a conference room camera and microphone does not provide that same level playing field.
- **Publish all meeting notes in a visible space which can be accessed remotely:** Flexibility is the biggest benefit of a hybrid model. That benefit is diminished - or even eliminated - if everyone needs to be at every meeting to know what's happening at any given time. Posting meeting notes on a digital whiteboard, collaboration tools, and (or) other communication channels help people who could not attend stay aligned and incorporate the outputs, backlog items, and other important information into their work.
- **Only use virtual whiteboards:** We have all joined a virtual meeting that features someone who starts diagramming something important on a physical whiteboard. There is nothing that feels more isolating to someone on the phone or stuck trying to decipher the blurry video. Virtual whiteboards are more inclusive and collaborative in a hybrid workplace. They are also better at capturing and radiating important information as work progresses. Make it a habit to just use virtual tools always so that everyone can follow along and participate as equals regardless of their location.



Ideas For Fully Remote Organizations



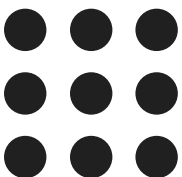
- **Institute policies to fight 'Zoom Fatigue' and burnout:** Yes, we included this in the hybrid model as well. It is as important and applicable here. Build-in 10-minute breaks between meetings. Start tracking feelings of burnout in Scrum Retrospectives. Identify and tackle negative trends in happiness before they become a problem. Empower Scrum Teams to ensure they are keeping a sustainable pace. Ask for ways to improve work/life balance and listen to the answers. There are countless ways an organization can prioritize the well-being of its employees. Which will have a positive impact on the organization and its bottom line. But the organization must make it a priority.
- **Office hours for Subject Matter Experts:** Trying to schedule a meeting for Subject Matter Experts working in a fully remote setting can be difficult. This is because even a quick five-minute question is often booked as a 30-minute meeting. Adding to the problem is the workflow of the Subject Matter Expert themselves. They are often so inundated with interruptions that they can't get any of their planned work done. So try incorporating regular office hours for your Subject Matter Experts. Scrum Teams with quick questions will know when and how to reach them. And the Subject Matter Experts will be better able to finish the work on their backlogs.
- **Regularly host virtual social events:** Chemistry, conversations, personal connections - they can happen in fully remote organizations. You just have to be creative in how you do it. Hosting 50+ person video conferences alone won't do the trick. But the use of breakout rooms, guided activities, happy hours, virtual coffee sessions, or even work sessions where teams are assigned at random can be powerful tools to create connection, conversation, and more. The goal here is to create a purposefully healthy space for people can talk and enjoy each other's company.



Ideas For Improving Colocation



- **Collaborate with individuals and Scrum Teams on what their colocation space will look like:** This is about much more than aesthetics. It's about making sure the workplace is an accelerator. That it actually has a positive R.O.I. for the organization and improves team velocity and happiness. Do Scrum Teams have reliable access to conference rooms, places to [swarm](#), places to think, innovate, collaborate, and create? Do they all sit together? Ask what individuals and teams need in a workplace and listen to their feedback. You'll likely be surprised at what you hear and thankful for the insights.
- **Institute policies to fight 'Zoom Fatigue' and burnout:** Starting to sense a pattern in this suggestion? Build-in 10-minute breaks between meetings. Start tracking feelings of burnout in Scrum Retrospectives. Identify and tackle negative trends in happiness before they become a problem. Empower Scrum Teams to ensure they are keeping a sustainable pace. Ask for ways to improve work/life balance and listen to the answers. There are countless ways an organization can prioritize the well-being of its employees. Which will have a positive impact on the organization and its bottom line. But the organization must make it a priority.
- **Identify what fully remote tools or processes to keep:** Returning to colocation does not mean you should return to the old status quo. Are there tools that helped improved alignment and productivity? Are there processes or information radiators that Scrum Teams now prefer to the pre-COVID ways of working? Your organization won't know unless it asks. Scrum is about inspecting, adapting, and improving both product and process. Take this opportunity to continue what works.
- **Identify what aspects of work from home you can incorporate into a collocated workplace:** As we stated above, a significant number of surveyed workers now prefer the ability to work from home in some form. That can put organizations that choose to colocate at a disadvantage when it comes to retaining and recruiting talent. Colocated organizations can try to level that playing field by finding out what aspects of remote work their employees value and replicating that experience in the workplace. Is it pets? Dress code? Autonomy? Easier access to childcare? More flexible hours? Accommodating every request may not be feasible. But some may be easy to incorporate. You won't know until you ask and it is worth asking.



Concluding Advice

Transitions, like all forms of change, can be difficult. They force us to focus, challenge our assumptions, and make us consider what's more important; present or productivity.

Transitions make us decide what the path going forward will be. That's never easy. It can indeed be messy.

Feedback. Inspection and adaptation. Empirical evidence. These are the cornerstones of positive change.

Agile and Scrum are about bringing people into the conversation. Listening and learning from what they have to say, and making decisions based on those learnings.

If your organization gathers these now, you will not only be able to make an informed decision on your workplace model, you'll establish a baseline for future examination that can inform future decisions and changes. Every organization should do that regularly. What works today may not a few years from now.

