

How to make hybrid working sustainable

Why building a connected culture is essential



Summary

As many countries prepare for something of a return to normality, companies forced into remote work arrangements for the past year now face a difficult decision. Should business leaders enable workers to stay at home, bring everyone back to the office or find a middle ground?

While tech business Dropbox opted for “virtual-first”, others like Google, Amazon and Spotify continue their discussion around adopting “flexible” or “hybrid” working models. The approach to hybrid and flexible work differs between businesses, but the core principle is that employees have the choice each day to work wherever they want – at home, in the office or even in another space.

Regardless of what organisations choose to do next, one thing is certain: there will be more change to overcome. The question is, how will companies keep workers motivated, connected and productive through another adjustment?

Something we all learnt during the pandemic is that a remote workforce can be productive. At the start of the crisis, some made observations that the boost in productivity could be short-lived, but as events unfolded, we saw this was not the case. Even [studies published as recently as April 2021](#) indicate that people are still working efficiently from home. Yet findings almost downplay the struggle organisations and workers have gone through to keep this up.

The fact is it has been challenging to maintain productivity because our work and personal lives collided last year more than ever before.

New ways of working caused the rise of video fatigue, burnout and the stress of doing everything from home. These challenges will continue as hybrid working comes into the picture, but the news isn't all bad. Research from RingCentral shows that amid all the uncertainty, some businesses – and individuals – thrive. This success isn't an accident, rather an outcome of what the study calls a “connected culture.”

This type of culture comprises three main parts. Technology to help teams stay connected, leadership deeply committed to supporting the work-life balance of employees and regular opportunities for teams across departments to get to know each other.

The highlights below capture some of the key findings from the global study, which looked at 4,000 office workers in a COVID-19 remote-work environment.

HIGHLIGHTS

HIGHLIGHT 1 What employers can do in a remote or hybrid work future to foster collaboration and connection among teams to improve the wellbeing of employees.

HIGHLIGHT 2 Companies that prioritise collaboration from any location, both social and technological, see greater productivity and wellbeing among employees – more than double that of companies that didn't prioritise remote collaboration among employees.

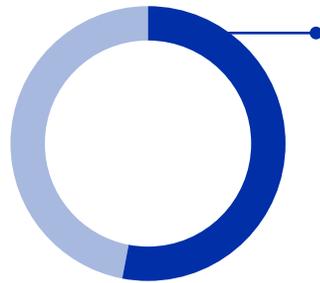
HIGHLIGHT 3 Employees struggle most with group work (or team-based work) when working remotely. Collaboration technology can help resolve this issue and companies should use this when transitioning to a hybrid working model.

HIGHLIGHT 4 While many employees struggled to adjust to remote work, a subset of employees thrived in this environment. These "remote champions" maintain high levels of productivity and a healthy work life balance.

HIGHLIGHT 5 Caregivers report much higher levels of productivity working remotely, likely due to increased flexibility in their schedules.

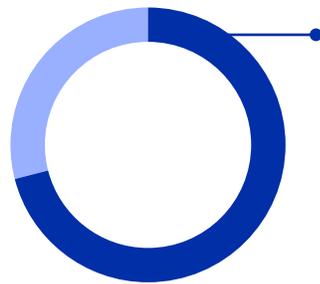
Embracing a “connected culture” improves employee productivity and wellbeing

In a remote or hybrid working environment, employers can take steps to help employees feel more connected to their colleagues – leading to many benefits.



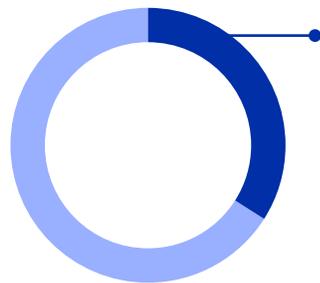
55%

Globally, companies that promote a connected culture cite better emotional wellbeing (55%) than those that do not promote one (48%).



71%

Employees who feel more connected are more productive. Of those employees who stated they were more productive, 71% reported feeling more connected to their colleagues than before the pandemic, compared to 22% who felt the same or less connected to their colleagues.



34%

Of those who reported working at companies that foster a connected culture, 34% say they're **more productive working from home**. Of those working at companies that don't encourage a connected culture, only 15% said they were more productive.

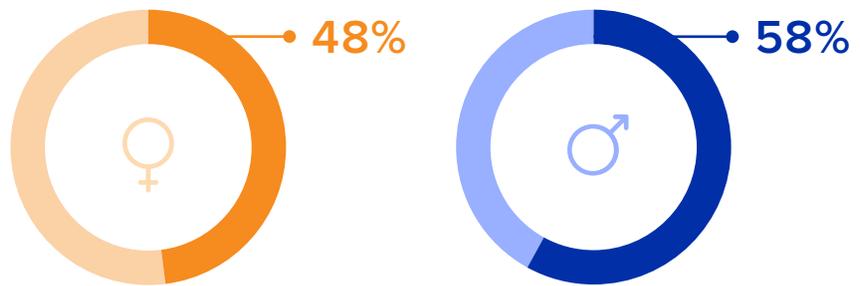
Takeaway

Connection is about so much more than technology. Company initiatives that helped employees feel more connected included: frequent employee communication, enhanced collaboration tools, virtual happy hours, informal chats, video games and virtual worlds. This should continue as social restrictions ease, and people begin to choose where they work from.

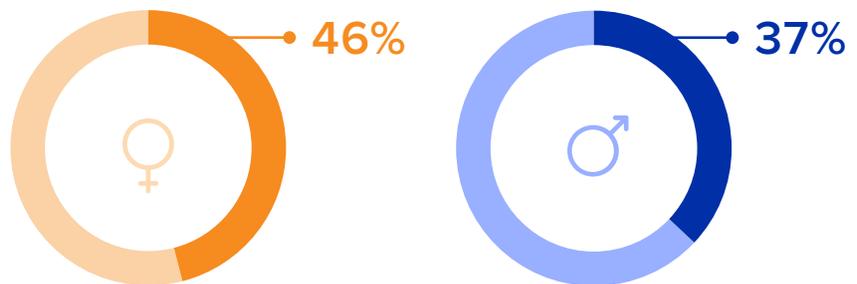
Working from home hasn't levelled the playing field

Differences among men and women in the workplace carried over to remote working during the pandemic, with men reportedly handling remote work better than women.

Women reported lower levels of happiness and emotional wellbeing than men during this time, with 48% of women and 58% of men reporting good or better mental health.



Group work (defined as any tasks performed among teams) was the least productive task for women, with 46% saying they struggle with it vs 37% of men.



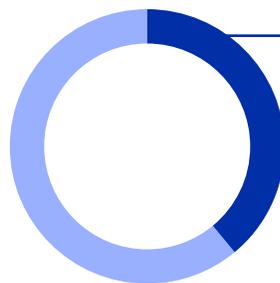
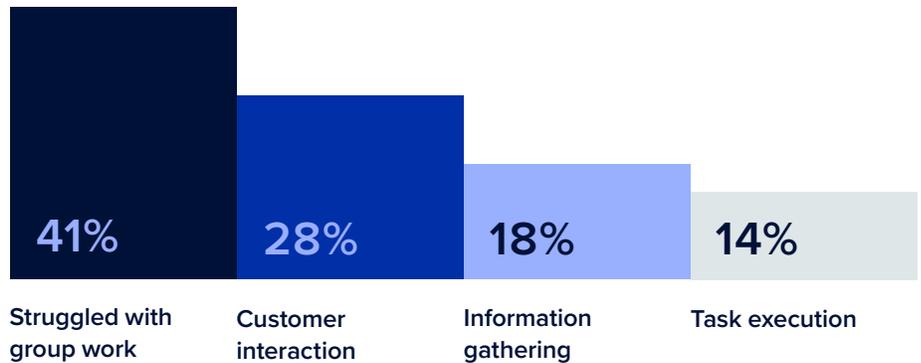
Takeaway

As companies decide how they return to normality, leaders should figure out how to introduce initiatives for women that promote health and wellness and improve collaboration.

Nearly half of employees struggle with group work

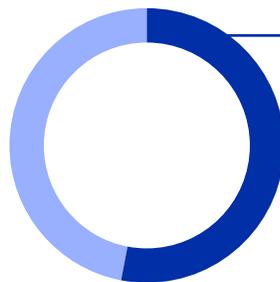
Group work was the least productive task overall for all surveyed employees.

Nearly half of all employees (41%) struggled more with group work versus other types of work, including customer interaction (28%), information gathering (18%) and task execution (14%).



39%

Over a third (39%) of employees said that their companies attempted to help them feel connected so they could complete work.



53%

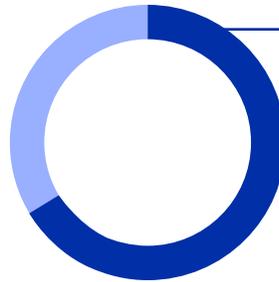
More than half of employees (53%) reported that their companies did not make significant attempts to help them collaborate remotely, which made collaboration more difficult than in a physical office.

Takeaway

Collaboration technology is critical to improving group work and overall productivity and wellbeing. Those who struggled most with group work were: women, those less connected to colleagues, those whose companies aren't trying to make connections and those who didn't work from home pre-pandemic.

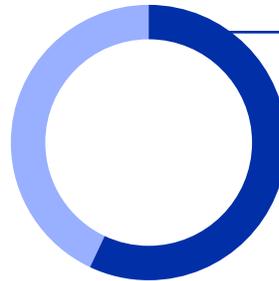
Globally, certain personalities thrive working remotely

“Remote champions,” defined as those who have been more resilient during this pandemic, are happier, physically healthier, more productive and feel more connected to their colleagues.



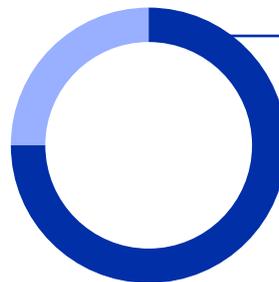
68%

of remote champions said they were more productive working from home.



57%

of remote champions report that they are both physically and mentally healthy.



75%

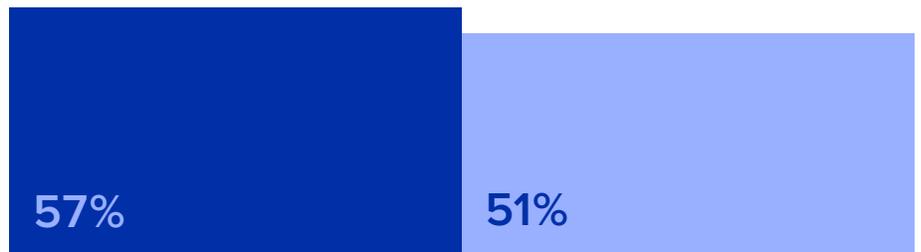
of remote champions feel more connected to their colleagues in the remote work environment.

Takeaway

Some traits seem to define the remote champion: clear communicators; structured routine-followers; open-minded; tech-savvy collaborators and introverts. This tells us that while remote work has been beneficial for some, businesses need to consider what’s best for all employees based on their preferences.

Purpose matters: Caregivers are more likely to be productive in their work than non-caregivers

Caregivers are happier and more productive, despite having more household interruptions.



57% reported higher levels of well-being vs. 51% of non-caregivers.



They also report higher levels of productivity, with 35% citing higher productivity levels compared to 24% of non-caregivers.



Takeaway

It's possible that caregivers – who may have struggled with balancing time when going to an office – feel greater balance (and happiness) working from home. This is something businesses must consider carefully when deciding on how their employees will work in the future.

METHODOLOGY

- CITE Research, working with Kaleido Insights Research, conducted an online survey among knowledge workers in the US, UK, Canada, and Australia.
- A total of 4,000 surveys were completed among knowledge workers (N=1000 per country).
- The research was conducted between 15 July and 23 July, 2020.
- Screening criteria included employees who:
 - Work on a laptop or computer always
 - Collaborate with others constantly or sometimes
 - Work at a company with at least two employees
 - Are ages 18+, although 35-44 was the most common response group
 - Mostly (53%) are in a detached, single-family home

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RingCentral UK Ltd. 85 Uxbridge Road, 4th Floor, Ealing, London, W5 5TH, UK

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