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Human-Centric Work Models Proven to Drive Performance the Most

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7 November 2022

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Published 7 November 2022 - ID G00777502 - 11 min read

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Initiatives: Executive Leadership: Talent; Future of Work Reinvented Resource Center

Human-centric work boosts employee performance, increases intent to stay and reduces fatigue. A recent Gartner survey of postpandemic work models that have already been implemented shows executive leaders which work-design attributes will have the greatest impact on key outcomes.

Overview

Key Findings

- Human-centric work drives superior outcomes. It is 3.8 times more likely to have high employee performance, 3.2 times more likely to have high intent to stay and 3.1 times more likely to have low fatigue than when human-centric work attributes are not present.
- Implementing work models with employee input and adapting over time outperforms top-down static approaches. Employees able to provide input to design and implementation of the future postpandemic work model are 2.5 times more likely to have high performance.

Recommendations

Executive leaders setting work and talent strategies should:

- Design work models around human needs, rather than expecting humans to conform to legacy practices or locations that constrain them.
- Drive work outcomes by focusing on three dimensions of human-centric work: flexible experiences, intentional collaboration and empathy-based management.
- Deliver human-centric work models by soliciting employee input into the design and engaging them in the rollout, especially through co-creation.

- Adapt the work model over time — particularly the next 12 to 18 months — by experimenting, measuring and continually optimizing to achieve key outcomes.

Survey Objective

The purpose of this study is to pinpoint possible real-world postpandemic hybrid work design and implementation leading practices that will drive common talent and business outcomes. It also provides data-driven advice to clients to help guide their reinvention of work to prevail in the new competitive talent and work landscape.

Data Insights

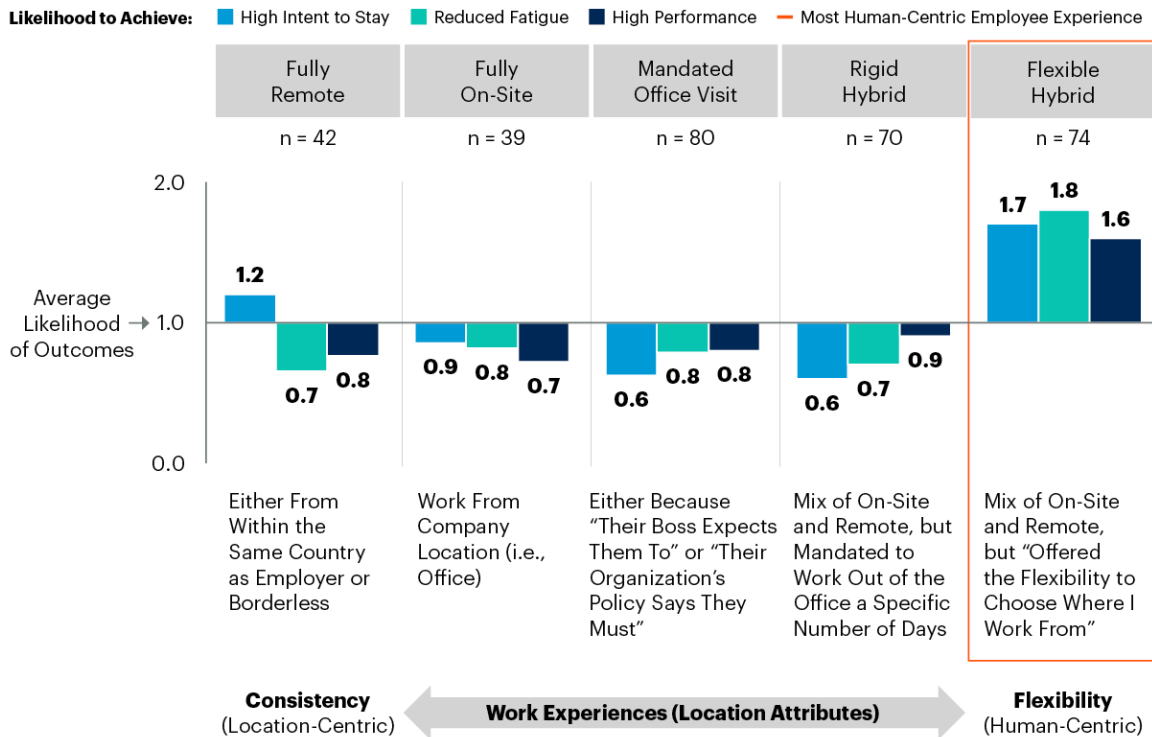
Most leaders accept that the future of work for office workers will be a more hybrid mix of remote and in-office work. Now, executive leaders must choose the best performing hybrid model. To help clients find the right solution, the 2022 Gartner Future of Work Reinvented Implementation Survey probed 401 employees and leaders from around the world who all worked for organizations that have already implemented their work models in advance of the end of the pandemic.

Most executive leaders think about hybrid work in terms of location. The survey tested five work approaches associated with location flexibility (see Figure 1). (In Figure 1 and the other charts below, 1.0 represents the average likelihood of a given outcome, 2.0 equals twice the average likelihood, 0.6 represents a 40% below average outcome and so on.) Four of the five location-centric models we tested delivered below-average outcomes. Only “flexible hybrid” scored above average — for example, those respondents are 1.6 times more likely to have high employee performance, compared with “rigid hybrid” (0.9 times) and “fully on-site” (0.7 times). In fact, the flexible hybrid model far outperformed the others on all three key outcomes tested:

- Employee performance — Critical under any business conditions.
- Lowering fatigue — Indispensable to sustaining employee performance over the long term.
- Intent to stay — Necessary to prevail in the intense competition for talent.

Figure 1: Effect on Employees of Work Experience (Location Attributes)

Effect on Employees of Work Experience (Location) Attributes



Source: 2022 Gartner FoW Reinvented Implementation to Drive Talent and Business Outcomes Survey
 Note: Employee View
 777502_C

But if leaders focus on location alone, they'll miss much larger benefits. A more-comprehensive work design that we call human-centric – including flexible experiences, intentional collaboration and empathy-based management – far outperforms even hybrid flexible designs in all three outcomes. For example, our study found that "intentional collaboration" increases the likelihood of high employee performance by 2.9 times, compared with just 1.6 times for even the best performing location model (flexible hybrid).

Human-centric work designed specifically for today's hybrid reality is one sure-fire decision executive leaders can make, despite confusing economic signals, such as:

- Is the economy growing too fast or entering a recession?
- Will the competition for critical talent remain intense or fade away?
- Is inflation raging or slowing?

For many enterprises, adopting a human-centric work design means adjusting their current plans for a postpandemic work strategy. Many leaders have strong views about their work designs or work for CEOs with passionate beliefs. They will need compelling evidence before they adjust their strategies. The 2022 Gartner Future of Work Reinvented Implementation Survey supplies this evidence. Two findings stand out:

- Human-centric work designs drive far superior employee performance, higher intent to stay and lower fatigue than any other models tested.
- Implementations that incorporate employees' perspectives and continually adapt outperform top-down, static approaches.

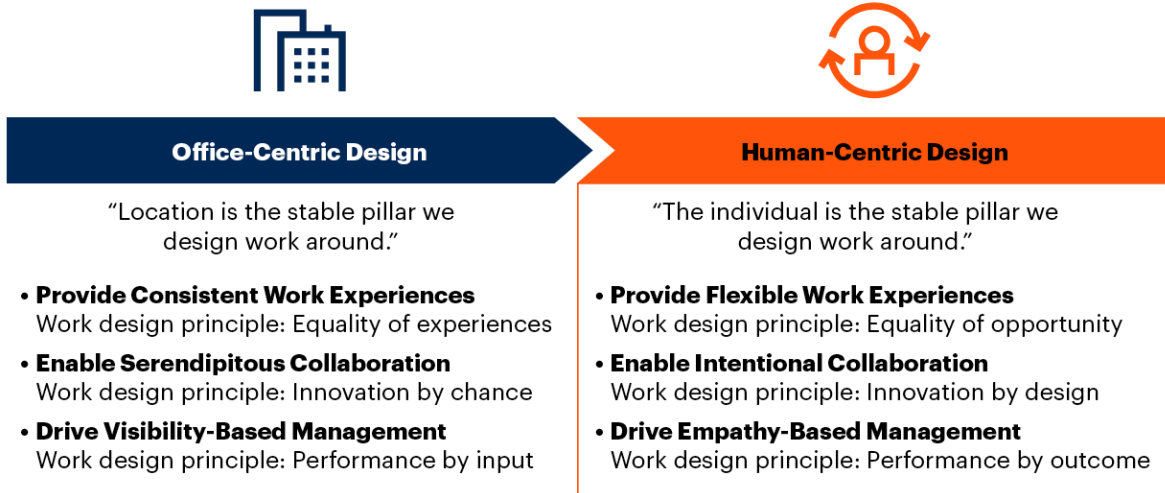
Human-Centric Work Designs Drive Far Superior Outcomes

Location-centric work designs are often rigid, amplify fatigue, drive workers away and degrade performance. For example, everyone must fully return to the office, everyone must work remotely or everyone must come into the office three fixed days a week. Human-centric work designs yield far better results — often multiple times better.

Human-centric design places human beings at the center of work and doesn't treat them as secondary components of the work environment. ¹ Executive leaders design workflows, work rituals and workspace around human needs — physical, cognitive, emotional — rather than forcing human abilities and behavior to conform to legacy processes or locations that constrain them. The human-centric work model includes three dimensions; flexible work experiences, intentional collaboration and empathy-based management (see Figure 2 and Redesigning Work For The Hybrid World: Opportunities for Knowledge Workers).

Figure 2: Critical Shifts and Three Dimensions of Human-Centric Work Designs

Critical Shifts and Three Dimensions of Human-Centric Work Designs

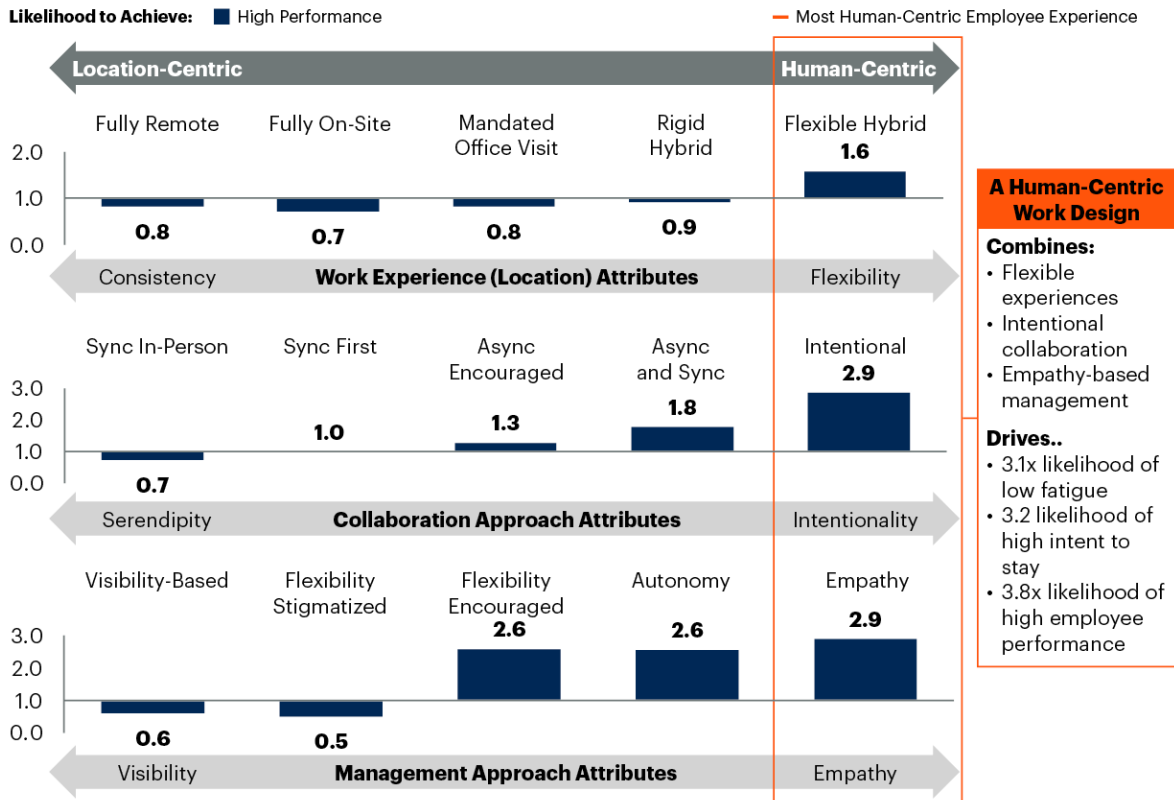


Source: Gartner
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Many leaders choose their future postpandemic work design by focusing on just one dimension: how flexible they want to be around where employees work. Human-centric work designs include all three dimensions in Figure 2. In each individual dimension, being human-centric drives greater performance than other work designs (see Figure 3). However, being human-centric in all three dimensions drives far greater performance.

Figure 3: Three Dimensions of Human-Centric Work Design and Key Outcomes

Three Dimensions of Human-Centric Work Design and Key Outcomes



Source: 2022 Gartner FoW Reinvented Implementation to Drive Talent and Business Outcomes Survey
 Note: Employee View; Average Likelihood of Outcomes = 1.0
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Accountable autonomy is key. Underlying all three dimensions is the principle of granting autonomy to people and teams to set their own work conditions, while holding them accountable for results. Some leaders will instinctively reassert themselves should business conditions worsen. If the economy goes into recession, those leaders will be tempted to take more control over work, such as mandating a rigid return to the office. That would be a big mistake.

Granting employees autonomy over how they do their work and how they achieve their outcomes pays huge dividends in overall performance (see Figure 4). For instance, employees who are allowed to decide when they work are 2.3 times more likely to achieve higher performance than employees without autonomy. Autonomy also reduces worker fatigue by 1.9 times (critical for sustaining performance over time) and makes people 2.3 times more likely to stay with the organization (essential for winning the talent challenge and competing with fully staffed, talented teams).

Figure 4: Autonomy's Effect on Employee

Effect on Employees of Autonomy

Employee View

✓ Statistically Significant Positive Impact

Autonomy	Likelihood to Achieve		
	Higher Intent to Stay	Reduced Fatigue	Higher Performance
My job allows me to make my own decisions about how to schedule my work.	2.3x ✓	1.9x ✓	2.3x ✓

Source: 2022 Gartner FoW Reinvented Implementation to Drive Talent and Business Outcomes Survey 777502_C



Flexible Work Experiences

Providing work location flexibility is a key element for employee autonomy (see Figure 1). But it's not the only one. Offering a reasonable choice as to where people will work, as well as on which days and during which hours, allows each employee to find the work-life balance that suits them best. If leaders offer this kind of flexibility, workers will be more likely to stay with the organization, experience less fatigue and achieve high performance (see Figure 5). Hybrid work models don't always include all aspects of flexibility – for example, if it mandates that everyone works in the office Tuesday to Thursday.

Figure 5: The Dimensions of Work Flexibility and Their Performance Effects

The Dimensions of Flexible Work Experiences and Their Performance Effects
Employee View

✓ Statistically Significant Positive Impact

Flexibility	Likelihood to Achieve		
	Higher Intent to Stay	Reduced Fatigue	Higher Performance
Location: I am offered the flexibility to choose where I work from (i.e., home, office, hybrid).	1.7x ✓	1.8x ✓	1.6x ✓
Days: I have the flexibility to choose which days I work from the office.	1.6x ✓	2.0x ✓	1.5x ✓
Hours: I have the flexibility to choose what hours I work, including outside 9:00 am to 5:00 pm.	1.5x ✓	1.7x ✓	1.8x ✓

n = Employees; excluding “Not Sure” responses

Source: 2022 Gartner FoW Reinvented Implementation to Drive Talent and Business Outcomes Survey
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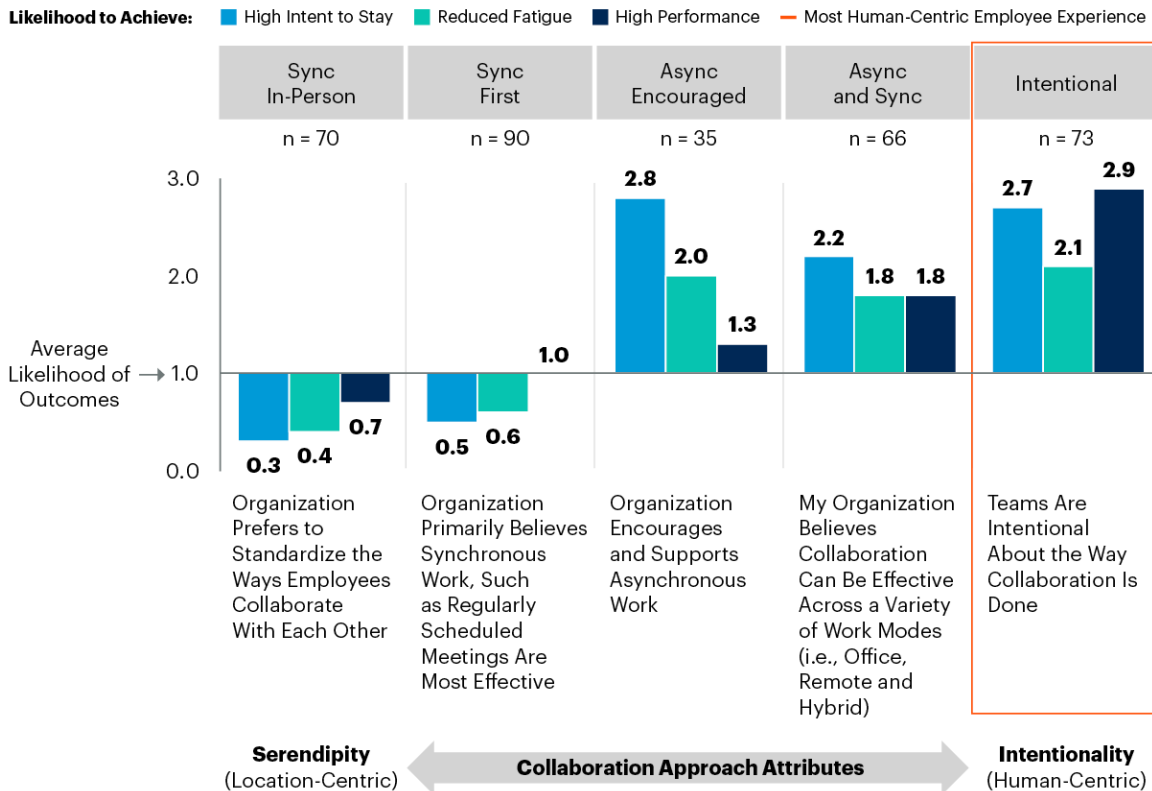
Intentional Collaboration

The second dimension of a human-centric work design is the approach to collaboration. The survey tested five modes on a spectrum of serendipity to intentionality (see Figure 6). Traditionally, enterprises relied on proximity in the office, meetings and serendipitous interactions for collaboration (“sync in-person” and “sync first”). These models yield below-average results in a hybrid world. Adding asynchronous collaboration to the mix dramatically improves outcomes, especially if the organization is purposeful about combining asynchronous and synchronous collaboration based on the teams’ goals.

But the most effective enterprises plan collaboration deliberately.² Employees at enterprises that are intentional about collaboration score well above average in the three key outcomes of performance, intent to stay and lower fatigue. “Intentional” enterprises encourage teams to devise a mix of synchronous and asynchronous collaboration that works best for the task at hand and the people executing it. Intentional collaboration optimizes collective performance and innovation, while also accommodating individual preferences so people can contribute their best work.

Figure 6: Effect on Employees of Collaboration Approaches

Effect on Employees of Collaboration Approaches



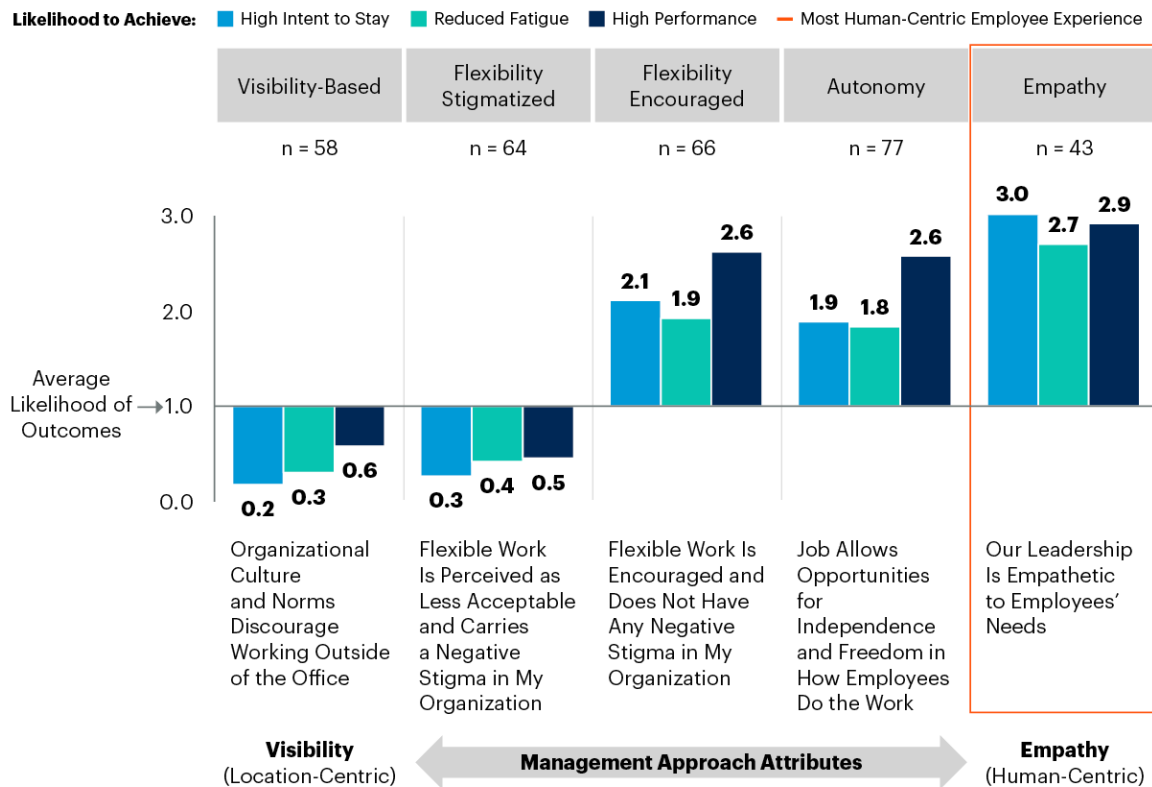
Source: 2022 Gartner FoW Reinvented Implementation to Drive Talent and Business Outcomes Survey
 Note: Employee View
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Empathy-Based Management

The final dimension of a human-centric work design is the management approach. Poor managers are a leading cause of employee attrition. Employees want to know that they matter to the enterprise and feel trusted. Traditionally, managers have relied on visibility or input to guide their management approach. But the hybrid world is one of low visibility. Many organizations are trying to recreate that visibility through, for example, the use of monitoring or additional manager-direct report check-ins. The survey tested five variations on a spectrum of visibility to empathy (see Figure 7). Organizations where managers want workers on site so that they can watch them (“location/visibility”) underperform the average, as do organizations where flexibility is discouraged.

Figure 7: Effect on Employees of Management Approaches

Effect on Employees of Management Approaches



Source: 2022 Gartner FoW Reinvented Implementation to Drive Talent and Business Outcomes Survey
 Note: Employee View
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Organizations that give workers flexibility and autonomy perform well above average. But the organizations that get the best outcomes ask line managers to care for workers' well being in direct, palpable ways. Empathetic managers have an outsized impact on employee outcomes. For example, when employees feel management has taken their perspectives and preferences into account, they score far above average in all three key outcomes.

Flexible hybrid work experiences, intentional collaboration and empathetic management each score the best within their respective dimensions. But combining these three dimensions into a human-centric design far outperforms every other work design we tested.

Implementations That Incorporate Employees' Perspectives and Continually Adapt and Perform Outperform Top-Down, Static Approaches

The way enterprises will implement a postpandemic work design also matters significantly. Executive leaders who impose new work models on employees without their input, or think they can get a new model right the first time, will suffer inferior outcomes. Business conditions and employees' needs change, so work models must change as well. Leaders should continue to account for evolving needs and continually adjust their work design, particularly over the next 12 to 18 months. Changing something as ingrained as the "9 to 5 Monday through Friday" work schedule will require learning and adjustment that can only happen over a period of time.

The survey uncovered strong evidence regarding the benefits of continually adjusting the work model, especially seeking employee input into it (see Figure 8). Employees who provided strong input into the work design were two and a half times more likely to achieve high performance and *four times* more likely to report lower fatigue. Reducing fatigue is critical to sustaining workers' productivity over the long term. Leaders must watch out particularly for fatigue, as employees have already gone through the trauma of COVID-19 and the acceleration of digital business models. ³ If leaders want employees to remain productive during the next waves of disruption, leaders must reduce fatigue, including by seeking employees' input into the work model.

Figure 8: The Inclusive, Adaptable Approach's Impact

Effect on Employees of an Adaptable and Inclusive Implementation

Employee View

✓ Statistically Significant Positive Impact

Implementation Approach	Likelihood to Achieve		
	Higher Intent to Stay	Reduced Fatigue	Higher Performance
Adaptable: The postpandemic work model was continually adjusted during implementation based on the experience and new data.	1.9x ✓	1.9x ✓	1.6x ✓
Employee Input: Employees were able to provide significant input to the design of the postpandemic work model and its implementation.	2.3x ✓	1.8x ✓	2.5x ✓

n = varies; excluding "Not Sure" responses

Source: 2022 Gartner FoW Reinvented Implementation to Drive Talent and Business Outcomes Survey
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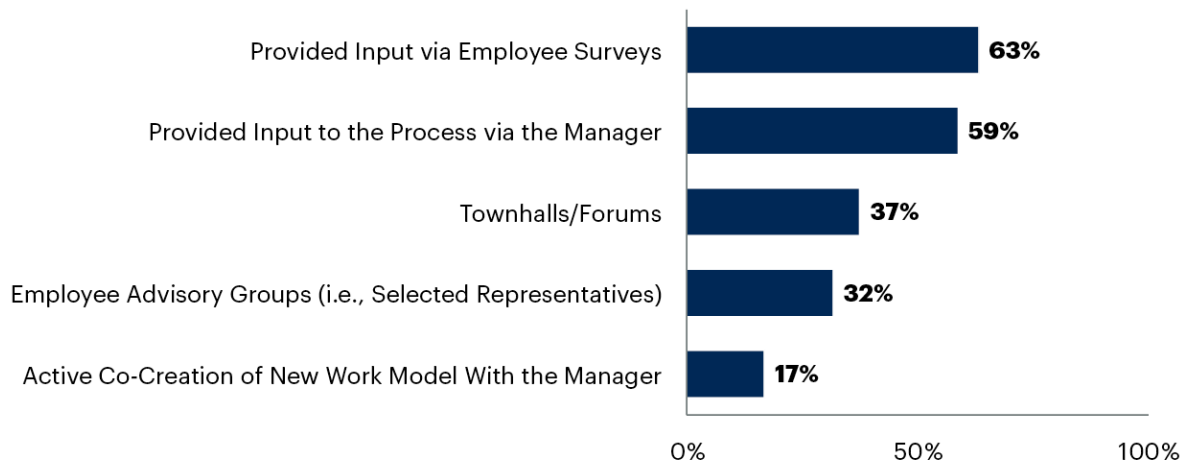


How should leaders seek employee input into postpandemic work models? They should engage employees directly in the design and implementation process, which doesn't always happen. The survey asked respondents to identify the various ways in which their input is sought (see Figure 9). The method that engages employees the most (managers and employees co-creating work models) is the least used, but it's also the only method that delivers outcomes by itself. Active co-creation raises intent to stay by 60%. Leaders should use active co-creation, along with a combination of other engagement methods, to gather sufficient input from employees.

Figure 9: The Most Common Ways to Seek Employee Input

Most Common Ways to Seek Employee Input

Multiple Responses Allowed



n = 155 Base: Answering “Employees were able to provide significant input”

Q. In what ways were you/employees able to provide input into the company’s postpandemic work model approach?

Source: 2022 Gartner FoW Reinvented Implementation to Drive Talent and Business Outcomes Survey

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Progressive, people-centric executive leaders will view postpandemic work design as an opportunity to move their organization permanently to a higher level of performance and to win the competition for talent. Human-centric models perform better than any other work designs. The ingredients are simple and clear. Now leaders themselves must demonstrate the flexibility needed to assemble these ingredients to drive outcomes in their own context.

Evidence

2022 Gartner Future of Work Reinvented Implementation Survey: This study was conducted to pinpoint real-world postpandemic hybrid work design and implementation leading practices that will drive common talent and business outcomes. The research was conducted online during June 2022 among 401 respondents from North America, Europe and Asia/Pacific. Of 401, 250 respondents are at employee level (entry-level/midlevel nonmanagers/individual contributors), while 151 are leaders (directors and above). Respondents were screened for the nature of their work, as only knowledge workers were screened for the survey.

Disclaimer: The results of this study do not represent global findings or the market as a whole, but reflect the sentiment of the respondents and companies surveyed.

¹ Future of Work Reinvented: Human-Centric Work Design.

² Future of Work Reinvented: Managing in a Hybrid World.

³ Executive Leaders: Address Employee Fatigue in Times of Crisis.

Recommended by the Authors

Some documents may not be available as part of your current Gartner subscription.

Future of Work Reinvented: Human-Centric Work Design

Future of Work Reinvented: Managing in a Hybrid World

3 Ways to Redesign Knowledge Work for a Hybrid World With Human-Centric Design

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