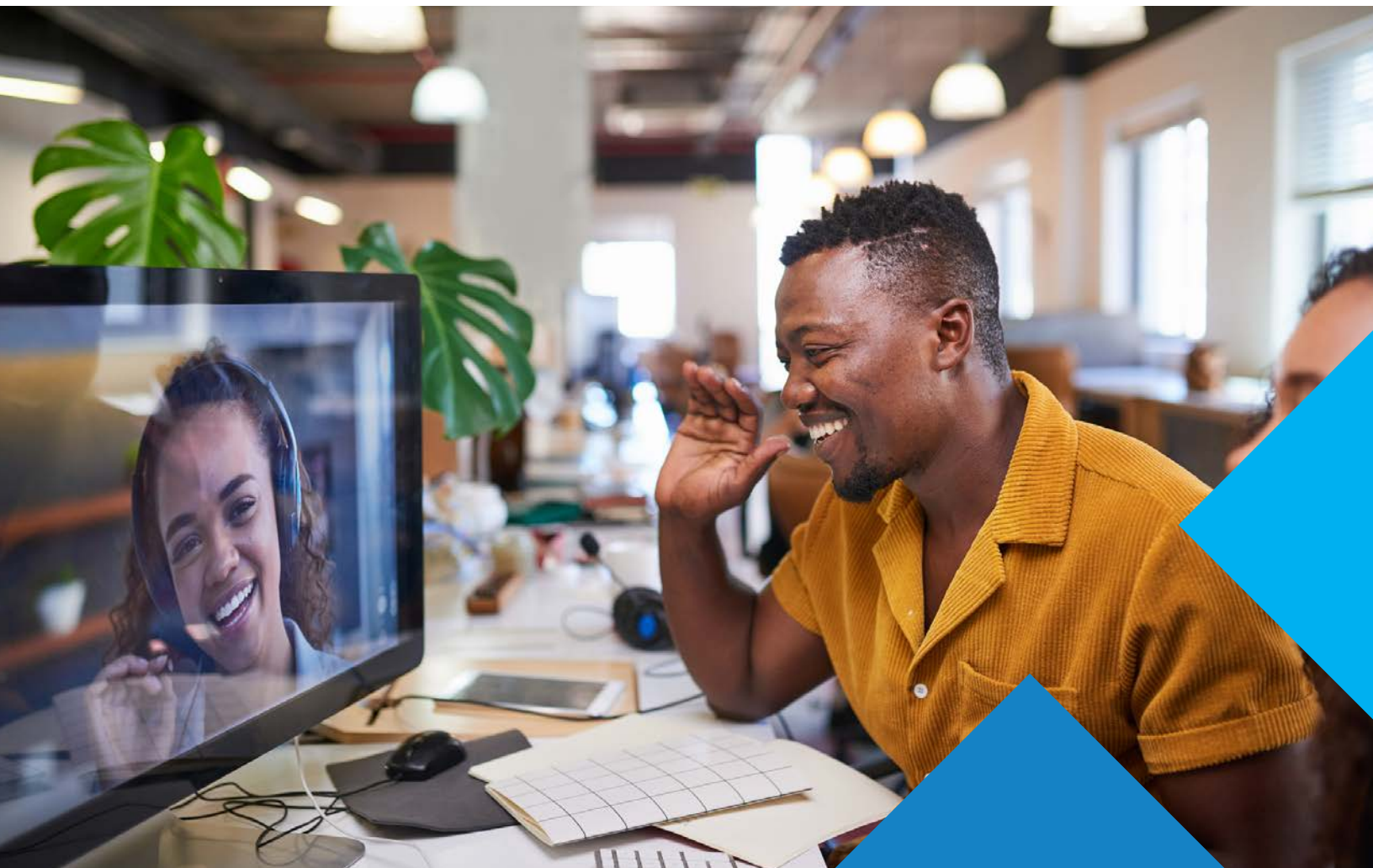


# How to Enhance Employee Experiences in Hybrid Work Environments



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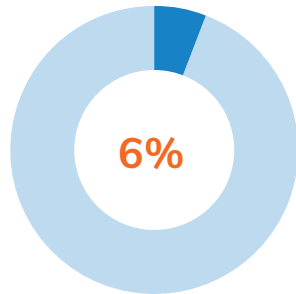
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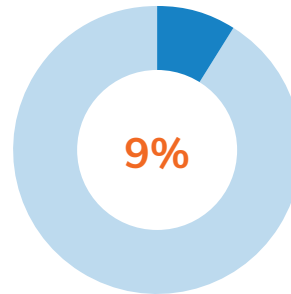
## Introduction

In 2022, Frost & Sullivan conducted a global survey of thousands of IT and business decision-makers across industries and organizations of all sizes to identify go-forward technology plans as the world progresses through the pandemic and beyond. The results are telling.

Respondents offered the following when asked about plans to support remote/hybrid work in the future:



plan to have a fully remote workforce



do not plan to support remote/hybrid work

This means that if carried out as planned, an astounding 91% will support some level of remote/hybrid work. In doing so, these organizations will experience several potential benefits and challenges.

### Hybrid Work Benefits and Challenges

Top Benefits of Remote Work	Top Challenges of Remote Work
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Greater access to talent located anywhere</li> <li>• Increased employee productivity</li> <li>• Reduced costs (e.g., real estate and carbon footprint)</li> <li>• Lower employee turnover</li> <li>• Enhanced inclusivity</li> <li>• Improved business continuity</li> <li>• Improved employee work-life balance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of proper technology tools</li> <li>• Complicated access to corporate applications &amp; services</li> <li>• Meeting fatigue</li> <li>• Disengaged employees</li> <li>• Distractions/no dedicated office space</li> <li>• Lack of meeting equity</li> <li>• Weakened relationships with coworkers</li> </ul>

Frost & Sullivan recently hosted Virtual Think Tank discussions with enterprise leaders, stakeholders, and influencers to gather sentiment on the dynamic and evolving topic of engaging employees in the era of hybrid work. What follows are key highlights from those discussions.

## Hybrid Work's Impact on Culture, Connection, and Collaboration

The employee experience can vary greatly within the same organization, based not only on their role and where they perform their work, but also on how distributed the company's workforce is. Remote and hybrid work have a significant impact on how people connect and communicate—particularly when physical proximity is not an option—and require different tools and ways of sharing information, more attention to social cues, and new approaches to managing expectations.

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**“It’s hard to schedule innovation, to schedule sparks on Zoom calls. The people that really need shoulder-to-shoulder collaboration to establish familiarity and trust, the ability to take risks that are going to drive innovation, that’s the primary reason we want to get people back in the office.”**

—Chris La Pata, Senior Manager, Workplace Strategy, Charter Communications

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By now business leaders recognize that no single workstyle is appropriate for all employees or roles, and that people's workstyles may need to change throughout the week. Leaders must not only support diversity, but also embrace it to drive a culture of collaboration, connection, and innovation.



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**“We try to stay engaged and collaborate on an optional daily call. People from all over come together for one full hour. We talk about different strategies. If we have a problem, want to complain, need to soundboard ideas, or anything, we have that one hour. We come up with different ideas to engage. If they’re working in-office, we come up with different plans for them to have fun, to feel a sense of comradery.”**

–Kathy Neder, Regional HR Director, Nexstar Media Group

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## **The Role of Technology in Building Trust and Community among a Dispersed Workforce**

Many workers, whether in the office or in the field, are inundated with information. They have multiple channels and modalities that continuously flow information to them, even when they are off the clock. At any given time, it is up to the workforce to disseminate what’s important, weigh their priorities, and decide how to be most productive in their individual roles and within their broader teams and overall organization.

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**“We have upwards of 100,000 employees, 80% of which are field or frontline workers. We find that reliable access to information, whatever it is, just being able to get to it on a regular basis and making sure it’s relevant to their workflow and accurate are the two main factors in building trust and connection, because with these elements in place, the provisions for clear communication and honest feedback are there.”**

–Roby Myles, IT Procurement Manager, ABM Industries

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Identifying trusted sources of reliable, relevant information is crucial. Well-organized meetings prioritize sharing key information in a defined time period, which impresses the importance of the information on meeting participants. Video conferencing combined with high-quality audio is increasingly perceived as a tool that helps to build trust through face-to-face interactions. Equally important, however, are the nuances of verbal queues picked up through high-performance audio, whether the speaker is on video or not.



## Keeping a Remote Workforce Engaged and Motivated through Integrated A/V and Unified Communications

Communications technology can make or break the collaboration experience for both the speaker and their intended audience. For example, if someone has a high-quality microphone, they rarely hear the difference themselves, but people on the far end of the conversation benefit from the superior audio.

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“Take into consideration the physical environment, if you’re going to incorporate technology into it and ask people to come in for a different experience than the remote experiences they are having. You must take into consideration the full environment, rethinking what a conference room is. We’ve seen a lot of technologies come out that are going to help. There are a lot of nonverbal cues that we just cannot pick up on, and the AV integrators are going to have a huge role in that.”

—Chris La Pata, Senior Manager, Workplace Strategy, Charter Communications

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Similarly, in a conference room outfitted with enterprise-class audio, the people physically in the room may not necessarily experience the benefit, but enhanced performance is priceless to the people on the remote end of the call. Mimicking in-person conversations by using modern technology allows users to feel the natural rhythm of a conversational pause, to interject and queue others to respond. This is likewise possible on the visual side when seeing people's reactions. Seeing how people react to what others are saying and knowing when to respond is important for seamless, natural collaboration.

## A People-centric C-suite Makes Collaboration and Connection More Meaningful

A people-centric C-suite is imperative to the success of hybrid work practices. The three key elements of any change program are communication, guiding the user through the experience, and active leadership. If leadership does not model the behavior, it's not going to happen.

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**“Culture-wise between countries, some glitches exist in ways of working. North America is very different than France than it is to Asia than it is to Scandinavian countries. In some countries, they follow the rules, and collaboration is more like a framework. Collaboration across a big company is a bit challenging. Leadership needs to show people how to respond to adversity in collaboration.”**

—Marie-Pierre Bélanger VP Product Management, Cloud and Digital Services, Schneider Electric

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How does the C-suite make people comfortable and have them buy into the organization, buy into the strategy, and all grow together?

It starts from the top. It is in the way the C-suite operates, uses technology, includes people, and hosts meetings; the number of meetings they host; and their visibility to the rest of the organization. The proximity effect is real for everyone. Being present is critical and it's the leaders' responsibility to bring people together as part of their job.

## Best Practices for Long-term Success

Training the workforce on how to effectively use modern collaboration technologies is vital, not only for stronger ROI, but for better experiences and productivity. People need to know operationally what to expect. Understanding how the technology works and coming into the environment with that knowledge is comforting to those who participate.

Use cases for different applications and modalities, shared etiquette, and respect for boundaries of when, how, and how often to communicate with others are important for building relationships and team bonds.

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**“In a user-centered approach, you’re going to come up with better answers. Empathy must be the first step to understand what the population is really going through; defining the problem; ideating around the problem, testing, prototyping. And from those learnings identify what you have, and then do it over again. This is what will help organizations get where they need to go.”**

-Director of Technology Partnerships, Shure

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Organizations increasingly see the benefits of implementing a collaboration technology stack that people can use in different ways, individually or as part of teams, but with the expectation that the capabilities will be there for everyone.

It is quite possible that in 18 months the work environment will look and feel totally different than how it does today. With the right people and the right technology, an amazing opportunity awaits leaders who are ready to create a new future for their organization.



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This article is produced from a recent Virtual Think Tank session conducted by Frost & Sullivan.

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