Navigating our hybrid work environment

Due to its use in describing eco-friendly cars that combine conventional engines with electric propulsion, 'hybrid' is a term with some credit in the bank. It denotes compromise, innovation, responsibility and altruism - unlike most banks, one might be tempted to say. Thankfully, these connotations have displaced other semantic hooks to the term, which existed at least in my mind, such as the hybrid cyborg Arnold 'the Governator' Schwarzenegger in the *Terminator* series. (Although I may just have reintroduced that into my consciousness…)

And now, earlier than anticipated for some, we need to grow accustomed to a new use of the word in the term 'hybrid working'. Loosely speaking, hybrid working means combining working from the office with working from home. This new phenomenon has been reflected in HR's <u>*Working from Home Policy*</u>, and is currently possible for some of us, but not for all, as our situations depend on the <u>stringency of government responses</u> where we live. But wherever we reside, as we emerge from the crisis in the coming months, hybrid working will serve as a transition from our pre- to post-COVID worlds.

I will resist the trope of referring to new norms in this article, I am sure we are all a bit jaded with that reference. In any event, it is apparent that our ways of working have changed recently. This has been accelerated by our current situation, but we were already making our way inexorably down this path due societal and technological changes.

> *'Work is no longer a place, it is a result.'*

So how do we deal with working in different locations?

Try to focus on the flexibility of the situation, which will allow us to navigate through this unusual period. We now have autonomy as to when we choose to go to the office, should we be able to.

1

1. **Office days** – use them for team-building, project kick-offs, staff inductions, etc., so basically chats in one dressed up form or other.

2. **Home days** – use them for concentrated work, writing, reviewing reports, etc., so not so chatty days.

'You are all individuals'

As per the sage advice in *Life of Brian*, remember 'You're all individuals'. Each person has their own set of needs. Some people will find this way of working more difficult than others due to various issues such as the lack of a set routine each day, limited space at home, sharing of work files or documents between home and the office, or discomfort with digital versus in-person communication.

That's okay, transitions are always difficult. Why? Well, because they all begin with an ending and end with a beginning. *Psychology Today* refers to transitions as a 'discomfiting neutral zone'. (Thank you *Psychology Today*!) It also references a ritual around making 'pubescent boys live in the wilderness for weeks to teach them about the transitional space between boyhood and manhood', an experience I'm not sure I would describe as 'discomfiting' or 'neutral', however I bow to the experts. But no matter how you describe it, it does make complaining about excess Zoom meetings or lugging one's laptop back and forth feel a tad petty.

Community

Having said that, individuals make a community and people in a community, well, they like to commune, so to speak. Recently, Salesforce (the world's number 1 customer relationship management business) undertook a global survey of 3,500 workers and found that over 64% of workers wanted to spend at least some time in the office. It turns out, when working from home, there's only so long before cabin fever sets in and contact with other human beings is welcome. The office is the hub of our professional lives and a gradual return to seeing our colleagues in real life will be welcome 'on the real'.

We wish to thank our news team member, Lucy Hogan, for writing this article for the OIE In-house Times.

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