

The last year and a half have been challenging for us all. For those of us not already working remotely, we had to abruptly adapt to a new working environment where we no longer see people face to face. And new hires joined companies, never having met a single colleague in person. Now we are entering the next era of the workforce, hybrid work environments, which has left many organizations wondering how to proceed and what to offer employees. At a recent HR Summit, research was shared that de-bunks some myths about hybrid work environments and sheds some much-needed light on possible paths forward and things to consider when designing this new reality.

1. All Networks are Created Equal

The way we work with others is not one-size-fits-all. There are close, cohesive working relationships, usually within teams or groups working towards the same goal. These are called bonding connections. And then there are working relationships that bring different groups and perspectives together (bridging connections). Each of these has a purpose and benefits to how work is accomplished. Bonding relationships increase speed and experimentation, while bridging relationships increase new insights. When looking at hybrid work, focus interactions on the intent of the network. *Source: Michael Arena*

2. All Interactions are Created Equal

Which is better: face to face interactions or virtual interactions? It depends. According to research conducted by Cross and Gray, there is a distinction as to when each type of interaction works best. For example, when you need to make decisions, coordinate work, gain approvals, or share information, virtual interaction is most effective. But when you need to influence, motivation, problem solve, provide feedback/coaching, face to face interactions are more effective.

3. Connectivity Doesn't Impact Productivity

When we were all relegated to the confines of our house and had to work remotely, one thing suffered – connections with our co-workers. We have seen that despite being apart, productivity remained the same or was even higher. But we need to add to conversation the impact the loss of connection has had on productivity.

Research indicates that our satisfaction of the connections we have with others is shown to impact how productive we are able to be. For example, in the US, those who are satisfied with their work connections are 3.2 times more likely to have similar or higher productivity levels. As connections wane because of lack of proximity, there is a risk that over time productivity will decline as well. *Source: BCG COVID-19 Employee Sentiment Survey*

4. Connectivity Doesn't Impact Culture

We teach culture, values, and norms in training, but the true test of culture is what happens in each shared experience with one another. Culture is formed interaction by interaction. Or to use a better-known phrase, "Culture is caught, not taught." When we work in a hybrid environment, the amount of interaction, unless intentionally created, lessens and culture is in jeopardy.

What does that all mean for the future of hybrid work? We need to be flexible and open to new ways or working that we may not yet have thought of. Instead of blanket decisions for everyone, we need to evaluate how work is being done and be intentional on how the environment is structured. We need to provide opportunities to ensure bridging interactions with other critical teams and customers and bring teams together regularly to build bonding connections.



Kristy Busija, ACC, BCC
Executive Coach / HR Consultant
www.NextConversationCoaching.com
kristy@NextConversationCoaching.com
412-337-2213