OPTIMAL NETWORKS PRESENTS

RE-ENTRY PLAYBOOK
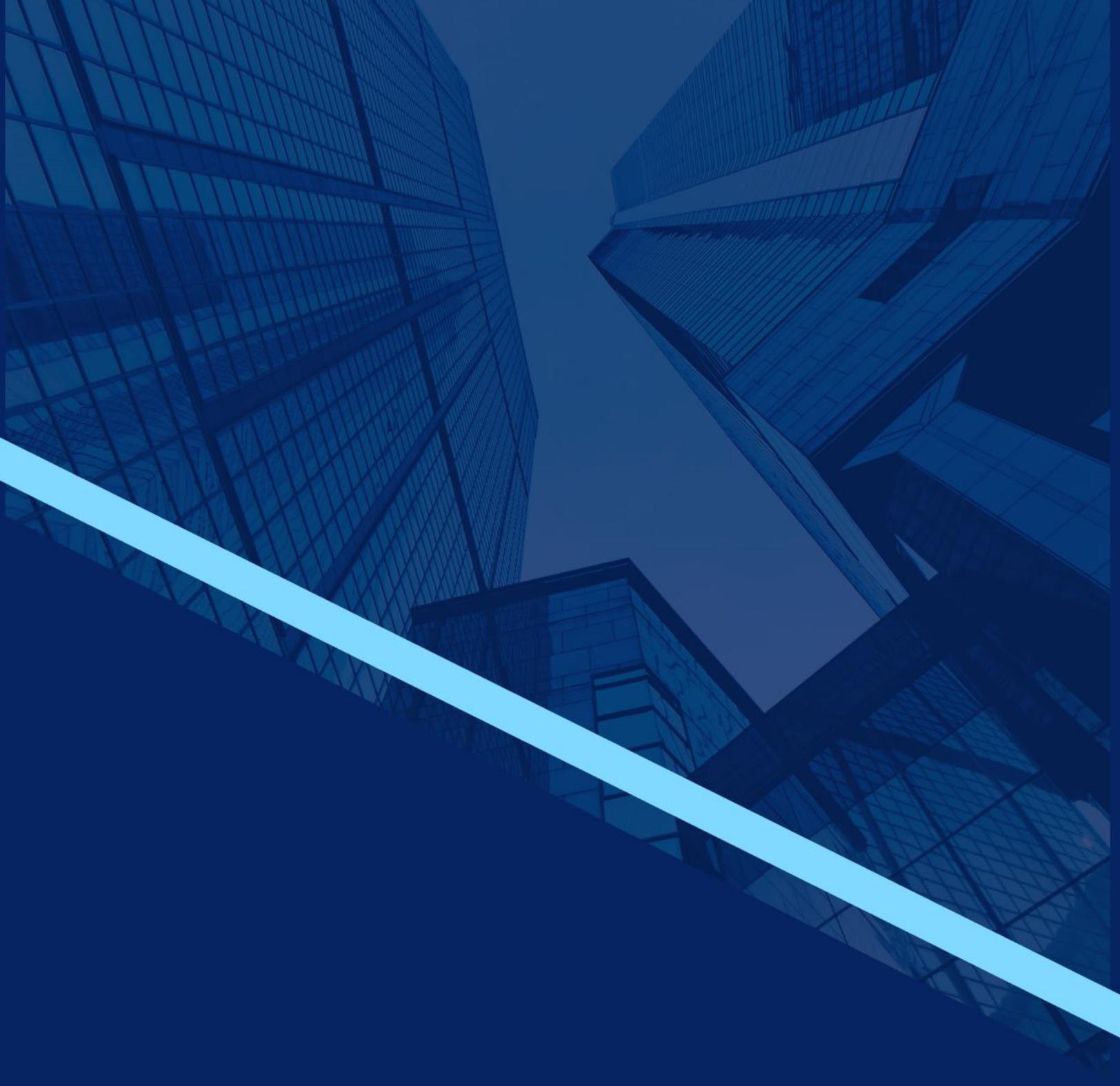
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RE-ENTRY PLAYBOOK

In many ways, the transition to hybrid work is much more complex than our shift to working from home—and, if not tackled thoughtfully, it could have a huge impact on **productivity, engagement, and revenue.**

To help us all navigate this new territory, Optimal Networks pulled together six industry experts to offer guidance with key considerations.

We've compiled top takeaways in this Playbook. We hope it's of value!

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THE SCIENCE OF SAFE RE-ENTRY

What does safe re-entry look like from a scientific perspective? We've compiled key insights and recommendations from Hopkins-trained epidemiologist Dr. Grace Macalino.

A SAFE RETURN TO OUR OFFICES DEPENDS ON:

(1) Vaccination rate, (2) COVID positivity rate in your area, (3) the amount of people following prevention best practices.

VACCINE 101

- The science behind the vaccine has been in development for the last **5-10 years** (mRNA for Pfizer & Moderna, adenovirus for J&J).
- Previously, it looked like the COVID vaccine can impact **transmission** due to lowering the viral load in someone's body if they do get infected. This does **not** appear to be the case for the now-prevalent variants like Omicron.

Click for the most up-to-date information from the CDC

RETURN TO WORK STRATEGIES

- Consider the needs of your staff and the ability/need to shift from telework.
- Understand the unique COVID risk profile of your staff (age, health, vaccination status, etc.) and workplace (ability to distance, ventilation, shared spaces, etc.).
- Beyond vaccination rates, also consider contact tracing, daily checks, masks, and social distancing policies for your office.

Click to learn about Synexis BioDefense products for air quality

*Please keep in mind that this is a fluid and rapidly developing situation that requires staying current with official recommendations.

ABOUT GRACE MACALINO

Dr. Macalino holds a PhD in Epidemiology from Johns Hopkins, and graduate degrees in Physiology and Public Health from Georgetown and George Washington University. She is the Founder & CEO of Marimac Insight, a management consulting firm that provides executive scientific advisory services.

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SPACE (RE-)PLANNING IN THE NEW NORMAL

How do we create a space that keeps hybrid teams engaged? Veteran space planner Jennifer Banga, LEED AP, encourages you to focus on the "Four S's" to find the best fit; no one size fits all.

SPACE

Analyze your office/workspace setup including full path of entry into the building as well as activity-based needs.

→ *Click for a helpful visual thought-starter from Herman Miller*

SCHEDULE

Look into flexibility with work hours as well as following local jurisdictions' pandemic restrictions being lifted or reinstated.

SAFETY

Follow cleaning protocols, communication of information and ways to incorporate employee wellness elements.

STAFF INVOLVEMENT

Engage with your employees so that they are comfortable with the end result and maintain your corporate culture in this opportunity to rethink how they work.

→ *Click for a sample employee survey from SnapSurveys*

ABOUT JENNIFER BANGA

Jennifer is the Founder of J Design Consulting. With over 25 years of experience with corporate interior design and project management including work with Booz Allen Hamilton, EY, and Raytheon Technologies, she has helped businesses across the country design and construct practical, thoughtful, and engaging spaces.

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MASTERING HYBRID MEETINGS & EVENTS

What does an effective, inclusive meeting look like for hybrid teams? Joanna Pineda, CEO of Matrix Group and creator of BeSpeake virtual/hybrid meeting platform, offers these tips.

EXPECTATIONS HAVE CHANGED

- Speakers/presenters must be more engaging both virtually and in-person
- Audiences expect higher production quality on virtual meetings.

Click to read Joanna's top strategies for engaging virtual meetings

BRINGING HYBRID AUDIENCES "TOGETHER"

To unify a large hybrid audience, bring the physical attendees into the virtual meeting (i.e. virtual sessions held in physical meeting rooms), and the virtual attendees into the physical meeting (i.e. livestream).

Click to learn about custom hybrid/virtual event platform BeSpeake

VIRTUAL MEETINGS

In the past, physical meetings were the standard and remote workers were accommodated. The reverse will be true in the workplace going forward. Hybrid meetings will naturally cater to the most people and be most inclusive.

TOOLS TO CONSIDER

- **Padlet** (multimedia collaboration) and **Slido** (polls, quizzes) apps
- **Vibe** interactive whiteboard
- **Poly Studio** sound bar/camera with speaker tracking
- **Meeting Owl Pro** 360° camera

ABOUT JOANNA PINEDA

Joanna is CEO and Chief Troublemaker of the digital agency Matrix Group. With over 25 years of experience, Joanna has worked with some of the most prominent association and nonprofit brands. Joanna is passionate about the user experience and helping organizations "be better." Her latest venture is the development of a virtual meeting platform, BeSpeake.

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SECURING YOUR DATA, NOT YOUR NETWORK

How do we keep our mission-critical data secure when our teams are widely dispersed and highly mobile? Frank Schipani, Senior CIO Consultant with Optimal, shares these guidelines.

THINK THROUGH WHERE YOUR DATA IS

As you take advantage of cloud offerings (and of portable devices like laptops), keep tabs on where your data is stored and shared. Identify all the places your data touches, and assess your policies and defenses in each of those places.

Click to download our how-to: Getting started with data classification

YOUR PEOPLE ARE STILL YOUR WEAKEST LINK

Even the most air-tight security strategy can be easily undermined by human error. To stay safe, your team must know how to identify a social engineering scam and how to avoid falling victim. Regular training and constant reminders are critical to keeping cybersecurity top-of-mind.

MULTI-FACTOR AUTHENTICATION IS A MUST-HAVE

Strong passwords are not enough to keep our accounts—which we have so many of these days—protected. Enforce multi-factor authentication wherever you possibly can to add an essential second layer of protection.

Click to download our security questionnaire: Hybrid work preparedness

ABOUT FRANK SCHIPANI

Frank is one of Optimal's own Senior Consultants. With over twenty years of experience leading the IT strategy for law firms in the DC area, and with degrees in both Computer Science and Law Firm Management from George Washington University, Frank Schipani is an expert in both the technical and human elements of cybersecurity.

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THE EVOLUTION OF CYBERSECURITY

by Heinan Landa, CEO - Optimal Networks | as published in *Legal Management*

Last year we saw cybercriminals seizing a massive business opportunity. Our rapid shift to working from home due to COVID-19, plus heightened financial, political, social and emotional stressors, presented a perfect storm:

- The consumer-grade routers and electronics we use at home are inherently less secure than the centrally managed commercial-grade devices at our offices.
- Many home networks are already compromised. In April 2020, BitSight found that 45% of companies had malware originating from an employee's home network.
- Social engineering hacks like phishing, vishing and smishing thrive when victims are preoccupied or fearful.

Our organizations became very vulnerable suddenly, and bad actors did not hesitate to cash in. In March alone, scammers ramped up COVID-19-related phishing scams 667%. Overall, the FBI's Internet Crime Complaint Center (IC3) saw a 400% increase in reported cyberattacks in early 2020.

While the events of last year presented a unique scenario for all of us, the swift and aggressive response from bad actors is indicative of a trend that will, unfortunately, persist. Cybercriminals have organized themselves into a successful enterprise that continues to innovate and evolve for maximum profit. And that profit is sizable. According to a March 2020 study by Atlas VPN, cybercriminals bring in over $1.5 trillion per year in revenue — more than Facebook, Walmart, Apple, Tesla and Microsoft combined.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Our only option when it comes to mitigating (not eliminating) the risk of a breach is to match ever-evolving threats with ever-evolving security strategy. Cyber defenses cannot be "set and forget" anymore; while antivirus software, firewalls and active monitoring tools are essential components of that defense, they are no substitute for human vigilance.

Not only that, but our concept of vigilance must recognize the potential for highly sophisticated cyberbreaches that span weeks or even months. Instead of snatching valuable data in discrete intrusions, cybercriminals are siphoning it off via prolonged, methodical interactions with victims. One popular scam works like this:

The bad actor identifies who in your organization processes payments. They gain access to that person's email account, generally through a standard phishing email. They then monitor the email account over a period of time to identify high-dollar vendors. Meanwhile, they craft a spoofed domain and impersonate that vendor. The target receives an unassuming email from the "vendor" with instructions to remit future payments to a new account — guess whose? The target continues paying the fraudster until you or your vendor realizes the mistake.

These targeted exploits cost U.S. victims roughly $1.7 billion in 2019, up 33% from 2018. Attacks like this harm your business in two ways:

- **Directly:** In addition to funds stolen by a hacker, you may incur ransom payments, downtime while your data is recovered and steep labor costs for emergency IT support. In the case of ransomware attacks, average downtime is 19 days, and costs to remediate averages $730,000 for those who don't pay the ransom, and $1.45 million for those who do.
- **Indirectly:** Your reputation takes a hit when news of a breach gets out (every state government requires some form of disclosure). Cybersecurity audits are becoming a popular precursor to business engagements and memberships, and 38% of businesses report losing customers because of real or perceived gaps in their cybersecurity posture.

While there will never be a silver bullet when it comes to cybersecurity, it's imperative we adapt both our defenses and our mindset to best protect ourselves in this new landscape.

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

More cybercriminals are entering the space, and they are more organized, disciplined and persistent than ever. This means that our cybersecurity strategies must rise to meet this new challenge, and that what we used to view as "advanced" measures must now become our baseline.

At minimum, we recommend you implement the following:

1. Advanced endpoint protection on all machines accessing corporate data: Centralized antimalware only checks for known virus definitions. Add next-generation protection that uses artificial intelligence to flag all "unusual" behavior, and either kill the process or alert a security operations center (SOC) to intervene.

2. Two-factor authentication (2FA): Strong passwords are no longer sufficient. Turn on two-factor authentication for any accounts and systems that don't already have it. Check regularly to make sure all accounts are covered — 2FA makes it much harder for unauthorized users to gain access to your system even if they obtain your password.

3. Backup and recovery for all cloud apps: Most popular applications (like Microsoft 365) have some built-in backup but in a limited capacity. Do you have sufficient retention policies? Would you be able to restore files encrypted or lost to malware? Protect your Microsoft 365 email, SharePoint, Teams, OneDrive and other online apps with a supplemental cloud backup service.

4. Firewall with intrusion detection: An up-to-date firewall is a start, but we recommend also employing intrusion detection to monitor network traffic for potentially malicious behavior.

5. Security awareness training: In addition to annual training, continually feed your employees security tips, and continually test with phishing simulations. It is essential that security remains top of mind year-round.

There are several security frameworks like NIST, ISO and CMMC that can provide structure to your security efforts even if you aren't subject to compliance regulations. These can feel overwhelming to tackle, but the items above will get you well on your way to fulfilling the core requirements.

Beyond this, it's critical to embrace the mindset that a network is only as secure as its users are vigilant and adaptive. The sophistication and sheer volume of today's cyberthreats demand that cybersecurity expenditures get their own line item in your annual budget and that your cybersecurity posture is reviewed annually. New threats are emerging all the time.

Most importantly, you need a resource who is qualified to assess your specific business needs and construct a solution that coordinates the technical and human components of your cyber defense. ||

MORE ARTICLES LIKE THIS

LEADING DISPERSED TEAMS EFFECTIVELY

As we see workers quit their jobs in droves, how can we keep our employees engaged and set up for success? Leadership coach Jeff Lesher of SHIFT Consulting recommends the following.

EMBRACE FLEXIBILITY

Even before the pandemic, flexibility (including control over one's schedule) was emerging as a dealmaker/dealbreaker "benefit." Finding ways to provide agency to as many people as possible sets you apart in a good way

BE COLLABORATIVE... WITHIN REASON

Ask questions to better understand how you can support your team's success and be open to working with them to find mutually agreeable solutions. That said, leaders hold the rights of authorship over their culture, and the highest performing teams are comprised of people who opt into that culture.

COMMUNICATION IS KEY

Some employees will require equipment at the physical work site. We can help make time out of the office possible for those people, but likely not in the same measure as it will be others. Be aware of the potential sense of classism when one category of people seems to be exempted from requirements. Communicate ahead of that, being clear about what is expected and why.

Click to listen to Jeff's podcast "Inevitable: The Future of Work"

ABOUT JEFF LESHER

Jeff Lesher is Managing Director of SHIFT Consulting, a firm that helps businesses unleash the fullest potential of every employee in ways that do good and feel good. With an M.A. in Organizational Management, Jeff is certified as a Master Coach in Behavioral Coaching and in Advanced NeuroCoaching. He is the Executive Producer and Co-host of "Inevitable: The Future of Work" podcast.

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NAVIGATING HR FOR HYBRID TEAMS

How do we approach the return to our offices? What does hybrid work mean for policies and benefits going forward? Here are some key considerations from HR expert Kathy Albarado.

RETURNING TO THE OFFICE

Your employees already know where they'd prefer to work going forward—and to what extent they're willing to compromise. Find out what they want and what you can (or cannot) accommodate.

→ *Click to read Helios HR's return-to-work questions for employees*

VACCINATIONS

Some state governments have a vaccine mandate for certain workers, while others have banned mandatory vaccines. Employers should keep track of the changing rules in their area.

→ *Click to read Helios HR's vaccine policy guidelines*

BENEFIT REVAMP

Now is a good time to revisit your company benefits. For better retention and recruitment, consider offering:

- A stipend for employees to apply toward their home offices.
- Flexible PTO versus accrued time, which can encourage hoarding and increase the risk of burnout.
- Other hybrid-friendly policies & perks.

ABOUT KATHY ALBARADO

Kathy Albarado is Founder and CEO of Helios HR, an award-winning HR outsourcing, consulting and recruiting firm that has helped organizations ranging from star-ups to the Fortune 500 enhance their corporate culture and thrive as the result. An Alumni of GMU, Kathy holds her B.S. in Psychology and her M.A. in Human Resource Management.

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TOP 5 UNEXPECTED CULTURE-KILLERS FOR HYBRID WORK

by Heinan Landa, CEO - Optimal Networks | as published in *Chief Executive*

We're nearly there.

In just a few months, almost all organizations will allow their employees to return to their offices after over a year of working from home. And even at that point, almost no organizations will have 100% of their teams in the same physical space five days a week.

Based on all indications, neither employers nor employees will abandon remote work altogether: Less than 1 in 5 business owners intends to return to pre-pandemic office conditions, and the majority of U.S. workers want to maintain some regular telework schedule going forward.

Most likely, we'll all settle into a hybrid work environment where a portion of our team is in the office and a portion is working remotely on any given day. After a full year of working almost exclusively from our separate homes, this will be yet another disruption for our organizations to endure.

The good news is that this go-around we have time to prepare.

MISTAKES MADE; LESSONS LEARNED

Years ago, my company expanded to bring a couple out-of-state employees aboard for the first time. We brought them into the office for their first week for orientation, training, and our traditional Friday Breakfast cooked fresh by their new teammates in our office kitchen. Then we sent them home, confident that they had been successfully imprinted with our award-winning corporate culture which would continue to be magically transmitted to them over the airwaves.

If you guessed that both of these folks later quit, you'd be correct.

What we learned, the hard way, is that our corporate culture was deeply rooted in our physical office, and the routines and traditions we had built there. This is true for a lot of us, which is what made a sudden quarantine even more challenging from an engagement perspective. And when that's the case, it is extremely easy for workforces to splinter into perceived groups of "us" and "them."

In a hybrid work environment, the risk of developing such internal factions is high: You'll have your permanent remote workers, those who are in the office every so often, those who are in the office frequently, and those who will be in the office day in and day out.

Each of these groups will necessarily experience our companies differently—this is simply the reality of hybrid work. The trouble creeps in when these "different" experiences become imbalanced, impersonal, or inequitable.

Based on the lessons from our past mistakes, and based on 30 years of serving the technology needs of law firms and associations, we've since uncovered a number of subtle culture–killers that, if left unchecked, can do serious damage to employee engagement and retention.

I'll walk you through them below, along with how thoughtful policy and technology solutions can help flip a weakness into a strength.

FIVE WAYS HYBRID WORK WILL UNDERMINE YOUR CORPORATE CULTURE

1. Scheduled Meetings
The first potential culture-killer is your everyday internal meeting. After living on Zoom and/or Teams for a full year, we all know how to hold virtual meetings. While a screen full of tiny boxes can grow tiresome, each of the people in those boxes takes up the same amount of space, has the same means of contributing to the discussion, and experiences that meeting in the same way everyone else does.

Now, consider a meeting where half

the participants are in the office, and half are at home. Will the office group join a video call from your conference room, where the remote folks are projected onto a small TV screen? Will the remote participants be able to distinguish who is speaking when? Do they have the same access to any whiteboarding or relevant visuals? How hard will it be for them to interject and be heard?

2. Unscheduled Meetings
Outside of formal, planned meetings, a return to the office means a return to spontaneous chit-chat that snowballs into meaningful conversations and innovative ideas. In some cases, you'll be able to yell down the hall to any other stakeholders and have them join the discussion, and everyone will walk away on the same page. In most cases, at least one person will be left out.

Do you have a way to quickly pull more people into a conversation on the fly? How are the whiteboarding capabilities now? Is collaborative note-taking an option? If some people simply aren't available, is there a place to share a full summary afterwards? A policy for how and when to do this? Or will one or two people be forced to chase down the information they need to get up to speed while the rest of the team carries on?

3. Team-Building
Looking beyond day-to-day meetings, our overall team- and relationship-building strategies also need reevaluation. Nine months into

the pandemic, a Pew Research survey found that 65% of employees felt less connected to their coworkers. Those of us who have been used to building and maintaining relationships through in-person interactions and events have been struggling to translate those skills digitally. Some, viewing the pandemic as a temporary scenario, probably didn't try all that hard to begin with.

If we continue to treat in-person activities as our default for team-building, with virtual participants "included" as exceptions that need to be accommodated, we are almost guaranteed to exclude a segment of our team, make them feel less-than, erode engagement, and risk turnover.

4. Coaching and Advancement
This is another one for managers. When your direct reports all report in the same way, evaluating performance is fairly straightforward. Over the past year, for example, we've all more or less settled into a routine of virtual delegation, collaboration, check-ins, and so forth. But what happens when you see one member of your team in person three times a week, another twice a month, and another never?

Will the person with the most face-time get preferential treatment simply because they're the most accessible? Will they naturally receive more coaching from you, and advance more quickly because of it? Will you develop an unconscious bias that the remote teammate isn't as invested because

you can't physically see how hard they work every day?

5. Shadow Cultures
Lastly we have the more insidious threat of what I'll call shadow cultures. Say, in the spirit of inclusion, your in-office cohort shares photo after photo of all the fun things your team does in the office in Slack for your remote workers to see: meals shared, pranks pulled, kids and pets visiting, and on and on.

Behind the photos there's plenty of silent hard work, open conflict, and all the other facets of a normal company that aren't so photogenic. But your remote team doesn't see this side, and they start to invent their own concept of your culture—one that is entirely separate from both them and reality—as a result. At that point, there's no scenario that does not leave that employee feeling disconnected and dissatisfied.

BEST PRACTICES FOR A STRONG, INCLUSIVE CULTURE

Fortunately, we can head these challenges off with some thoughtful planning and a new technology tool or two.

Be intentional with your meetings. For every internal meeting, make a habit of thinking through who needs to join, where they'll be joining from, and how to empower each person to contribute effectively using the various technologies at your disposal. Opt for whichever format creates the most equivalent

experiences, not what's most convenient.

There's a logistical element here as well—can you simplify meetings by having groups who regularly collaborate come into your office at the same time? (There's an app for that.)

Upgrade your conference room.
You don't have to invest tens of thousands of dollars in conference room technology, but you do need to consider solutions that will level the playing field for on-site and remote participants. Interactive whiteboards with app integration (like the Vibe) and high quality sound bar/camera combos with speaker tracking (like this from Poly Studio) will help your remote workers feel seen, heard, and able to fully participate.

Revisit your existing collaboration tools.
If you rushed to implement Slack, Teams, SharePoint or any other real-time communication and collaboration tool, kudos—this was a smart way to keep your team connected. It's time to take a deeper, more thoughtful look at these packages and all they have to offer in the way of features and integrations—because they offer quite a lot.

And make sure any "new" findings filter all the way through your organization, not just the savviest departments.

Get your team trained and aligned.
As you bring new tools into play, be just as thoughtful with the

implementation as you were with the selection; make sure your team knows (a) how the thing works and (b) your company's guidelines for when and how to use it. A mix of group training sessions (record these for new hires!), individual sessions, and how-to guides or infographics for reinforcement generally work well.

Your management team in particular needs to understand the purpose behind the changes you're making, and the consequences of not taking them seriously. They also need to be made explicitly aware of factors like proximity bias that might influence their treatment of direct reports.

Experiment and solicit feedback.
Once you have your foundational procedures and technologies in place, you're in for some trial and error; this is new territory, and we're not going to achieve perfection no matter how many hypotheticals we anticipate. This is why the most critical element of success is to *involve your team.*

From formal company-wide surveys to spontaneous polls to pilot groups to one-on-one discussions, keep your finger on the pulse as you navigate this transition. Get your team's input as you craft your strategies, and collect their feedback once you try them out. And listen. Your team's perception is the only reality that matters here.

Where to start
Our first order of business is to make sure we have a clear vision of what our workplace will look like

once our teams are vaccinated and able to return safely. Who will work from where, and when?

From there, consider how the different people or groups in your company will experience your culture given the routines in place and tools at their disposal today. Will they get facetime with your leadership every single week? Will their only exposure to those outside their department be through a monthly all-hands video call where they can't reasonably contribute? Will they fall somewhere in the middle?

Identify the spectrum at hand and where your culture has room to fall down.

As you begin to take action, I encourage you to be transparent with your team about the steps you're taking and why. The more clearly you communicate your intended outcome, the more buy-in you'll generate and the more useful feedback you'll receive.

We've been presented with a new opportunity to show our people that they are, in fact, our most valuable asset.

I hope you'll seize it. ||

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ABOUT OPTIMAL NETWORKS

Optimal Networks is a DC-area IT company that helps law firms, professional services firms, and associations achieve measurable business results by way of thoughtful technology guidance and white-glove support.

For 30 years clients have turned to us when they are spending too much time overseeing their IT team, worried about the security of their data, or concerned their technology isn't providing the flexibility their employees and clients expect.

Besides comprehensive managed IT services, Optimal provides strategic consulting and assessment services, security and cloud solutions, compliance assistance, and technology maturity consulting.

If you or someone you know could use a partner like us, we'd love to chat!

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