

Forget hybrid, the future of work is asynchronous

Payne, Emily . BenefitsPRO ; New York (Jun 2, 2022).

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ABSTRACT (ENGLISH)

Modern companies need to ensure they're giving their employees the tools and resources to work efficiently wherever they are.

FULL TEXT

The battle over return-to-work rages on, with many CEOs desiring employees back in the office, at least on a part-time basis, while others tout the death of the office workplace. Caught in the middle are employees who have grown accustomed to the flexibility of remote and hybrid work arrangements but are still frustrated by some aspects of the process.

Missing from this discussion is not where the work gets done but how. The switch to remote work came with an influx of new tools, technologies and processes that made collaboration and work more efficient. But as more employees lament being called into the office just to log into another remote Teams meeting, employers need to turn their focus to embracing the lessons and work habits most beneficial to their workers during the pandemic and rebuilding a company culture around them.

Joe Du Bey, co-founder and CEO of Eden Workplace, describes this new workplace as asynchronous. But what does that mean? Well, let's find out.

What does a truly asynchronous workplace look like? What key elements are needed for it to work?

An asynchronous-first workplace is one that both has the cultural norms and software tools required to enable schedule flexibility for its team. This is important in the increasingly remote-first, hybrid world that we find ourselves in. When COVID-19 essentially made most desk jobs remote-first overnight, US companies dramatically accelerated the pace of hiring outside of existing office locations. The overheated US labor market and glut of lower-priced talent overseas, combined with the inability to work together anyways, made hiring outside of existing office locations an easy call.

Prior to the pandemic, most desk jobs required coming to the office five days per week. During the first couple of years of the pandemic, most desk jobs became fully remote. Now, with offices reopening in a largely remote-first, hybrid world, companies find themselves so scattered geographically that they need to reconcile a way to work together that is both effective and enjoyable. This path forward is asynchronous work. For norms, an asynchronous company typically requires explicit permission from the top to reply during specific working hours, as opposed to feeling the pressure to reply whenever their managers may message them.

All the above said, asynchronous-first organizations still do have some synchronous interaction –it just moves from the default to an alternative method of communication. People in asynchronous-first organizations still can meet in person at their hybrid offices, over video conference and phone for meetings, and in-person for various community events.

How does technology play a role in asynchronous work, and what types of software will businesses need for this model to be successful?

An asynchronous company must also have tacit or explicit acknowledgment that the central communication, or "Town Square," of the company has moved—from being in-person at an office, to in a messaging tool that works for

people in all locations, such as Slack. Such an acknowledgment creates new norms for an asynchronous company, including sharing all major team notifications in that tool. Additional applications required for asynchronous work include collaborative document sharing such as Google Drive, sales customer relationship management systems such as Salesforce, and often software that records conversations or presentations so they can be shared later for reference or training, such as Gong (for sales training), Sprig (for product development), or Loom (for general video messages).

How does this model of work impact productivity? What are the benefits of asynchronous vs synchronous work? For desk jobs, asynchronous-first organizations unlock new levels of productivity, as you are able to choose the best way to work for the task at hand. For collaborative and creative work, you can do asynchronous pre-work (agenda setting, notes sharing) and then have real-time discussion, typically either in-person, over video chat, or hybrid. For individual contributor work or more formulaic group work, asynchronous enables folks to do their best work in their local time zones, and avoid the context switching or "meeting burnout" that can come with largely synchronous cultures.

How are workplace relationships and sense of community altered in the asynchronous environment?

A modern asynchronous-first culture will include some synchronous activity, including time in a hybrid office, in video conferences, or at in-person community events. This synchronous time, especially in-person, tends to be helpful for social bonding and creating a more fun atmosphere. I have not heard of a 100% asynchronous culture, as even fully remote companies typically do occasional in-person retreats, or at a minimum, the occasional video conferences and phone calls.

That said, some of the 100% remote companies do have heavily asynchronous cultures. Especially for those companies, it is critical to find ways to build rapport, even if it cannot typically be as effective in building social bonds as regular in-person interaction. For some paths we see 100% remote companies pursue include local in-person community gatherings, annual in-person retreats, and virtual events over video conferencing software. Any recommendations for companies looking to transition to this model? Is Eden moving to an asynchronous model?

In terms of recommendations for this kind of transition, companies will need to look at what's required of both cultural norms and software tools in order to really enable schedule flexibility across its team and make the transition to an asynchronous model work. For any partially asynchronous organization, from the mostly in-office to fully remote, it is critical to implement team sentiment software so they can stay abreast of changes in team morale and intervene as needed. It can be much more challenging to assess the emotional state of colleagues who are virtual and do not work together in-person, which is why sentiment surveys with benchmarking across companies prove valuable.

What are your predictions for how this will change the shape of the future of work?

Asynchronous-first, remote-first hybrid is the optimal outcome for modern companies, as all preferred styles of US desk workers are accommodated. That is why it is the policy that we are seeing get widespread adoption across our customer base.

With respect to flexibility on location, a remote-first, hybrid policy empowers the ~80% of US desk workers who prefer to get some time in the office, while still allowing the roughly 20% of workers who prefer fully remote to have the method that they prefer.

Regarding flexibility on time, an asynchronous-first culture enables team members to optimize the time they spend working, with synchronous meetings for collaborative and creative work, and individual contributor work happening uninterrupted on their own time. Further, asynchronous-first cultures can be much more global, creating a more talented and diverse team.

DETAILS

Subject:	Software utilities; Customer relationship management; Corporate culture; Collaboration; Employees; Employment; Pandemics; COVID-19; Flexibility
Business indexing term:	Subject: Customer relationship management Corporate culture Employees Employment
Location:	United States--US
Publication title:	BenefitsPRO; New York
Publication year:	2022
Publication date:	Jun 2, 2022
Publisher:	ALM Media Properties, LLC
Place of publication:	New York
Country of publication:	United States, New York
Publication subject:	Business And Economics--Marketing And Purchasing
ISSN:	24730319
Source type:	Trade Journal
Language of publication:	English
Document type:	Feature
ProQuest document ID:	2672445422
Document URL:	https://www.proquest.com/trade-journals/forget-hybrid-future-work-is-asynchronous/docview/2672445422/se-2?accountid=44910
Copyright:	Copyright ALM Media Properties, LLC Jun 2, 2022
Last updated:	2022-06-03
Database:	ABI/INFORM Collection

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