

Hybrid Transformational Leadership

Insights and Best Practices from Leaders at Microsoft

Leadership - Part 2/2 Our previous article was focusing on the challenges of hybrid work environments. In this continuation of our exploration, we delve deeper into the strategies essential for success in hybrid work environments.

1. Strategies for Success

Leaders must effectively leverage the four dimensions of transformational leadership to overcome the challenges posed by hybrid work environments:

Idealized Influence

In hybrid work environments, the significance of idealized influence, where leaders serve as role models, is heightened. Role modeling becomes a deliberate and conscious process due to the dispersed nature of teams. Leaders must en-

gage in role modeling across various levels and directions to ensure all team members benefit from it. However, being a role model in both online and offline settings present challenges, particularly in expressing authenticity and openness. Therefore, transparent leadership, involving sharing and honest conversations, becomes crucial in hybrid contexts which means that leaders openly discuss business challenges and strategies, fostering trust and a sense of belonging. To effectively role model, leaders must begin with sharing their fundamental

principles and personal values, gradually introducing themselves as individuals. This requires leaders to engage in introspection and develop a clear understanding of their own values and managerial approach. By doing so, leaders demonstrate authenticity, however, to be authentic goes beyond the mere verbalization of values; leaders must demonstrate their values through their actions – in the office as well as through online interactions.

Effective communication is crucial for leaders to serve as role models in hybrid work environ-



ments. They should proactively engage in communication through various channels and adapt to different listening styles and preferences. Utilizing tools like email and Microsoft Teams can significantly enhance the effectiveness of communication. Moreover, video collaboration platforms such as Microsoft Teams or Zoom offer valuable features like meeting transcriptions and recordings, promoting inclusive communication. Sharing meeting recordings in different formats, such as making them available on platforms like SharePoint, Intranet, and

Teams, enables team members who couldn't attend the actual meeting to access and benefit from the discussions. By embracing multiple communication channels and recognizing individual differences, leaders can foster inclusive discussions and ensure that all team members can contribute meaningfully.

Role modeling and authenticity directly address the challenge of building personal relationships and cultivating a sense of belonging in hybrid work environments. Authentic leadership and leader-follower identifica-

tion contribute to the creation of a culture grounded in shared values and ideas.

Inspirational Motivation

The traditional top-down approach to visionary leadership may not be as effective in hybrid environments, where team members have different work styles and schedules. Instead, leaders should collaborate with their team members to co-create a shared vision for their teams or units. Through this involvement, leaders can foster a sense of own-

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ership and commitment among team members. In addition to co-creating the vision, leaders should provide clarity to team members about the purpose and significance of their individual tasks. This is particularly important in hybrid work environments where remote workers may feel isolated and disconnected from their colleagues. By connecting individual tasks to the bigger picture, leaders can help remote team members understand the value and impact of their work. Creating a culture that accepts failure and encourages risk-taking is another effective strategy in hybrid work environments. Team members may feel more isolated and less supported in remote settings, making it crucial to create an environment where mistakes are seen as learning opportunities. By fostering a culture of failure, leaders can motivate team members to innovate and contribute to the vision while

feeling supported and motivated to continue taking risks.

To maintain motivation and engagement, leaders should personalize incentives and expressions of appreciation for team members. As face-to-face interactions are limited, it's important to make team members feel valued and recognized for their contributions. Personalized incentives, whether in the form of monetary rewards or sincere appreciation, can go a long way in keeping team members motivated and engaged. Another way to do so is by keeping team members informed about the latest developments and industry trends. By highlighting the relevance of the vision to broader industry or societal trends, leaders can help team members see the significance of their work and foster a sense of connection to something larger than themselves. Sharing innovative ideas and discussing the excitement

around them can further fuel motivation and engagement.

Implementing best practices addresses challenges and brings benefits such as improved clarity, enhanced well-being, increased productivity, and greater engagement. It connects tasks to the bigger picture, enables effective time management, fosters innovation, and boosts motivation and concentration.

Individualized Consideration

In hybrid work environments, empathy, trust, and active listening play crucial roles in effective communication and employee satisfaction. These qualities work together to foster open dialogue, create psychological safety, and make employees feel valued and supported. Empathy is particularly important in hybrid work settings as it helps leaders understand and address the challenges associated with

remote work. By demonstrating empathy, leaders establish a positive and supportive work environment that enhances employee well-being, engagement, and productivity. However, virtual interactions present challenges in accurately interpreting emotions, making it necessary for leaders to actively listen, ask questions, and show genuine interest to cultivate empathy in remote interactions.

Active listening plays a critical role in fostering open communication, trust, and understanding of employee needs in hybrid work environments. It enables leaders to identify areas where employees may be struggling and where additional support is required. By actively listening and engaging in high-quality exchanges, leaders are perceived as more trustworthy. Creating a culture of open dialogue and transparent communication is essential, as it encourages employees to share their thoughts and concerns honestly, leading to better decision-making and an improved work environment.

To establish openness among employees, trust in leaders is essential. Leaders can cultivate trust by making their regular one-on-one meetings more personal and sharing openly about themselves. These meetings enable leaders to connect with each team member on a personal level, fostering relationships and ensuring employees feel valued and listened to. Additionally, actively seeking challenges and feedback demonstrates a willingness to listen and adapt to employee needs. To address issues like burnout or work-life balance, coaching can be an effective ap-

proach. Rather than immediately providing solutions, leaders guide employees towards finding a solution by themselves. This approach helps leaders understand individual needs and offer per-

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sonalized support, empowering employees to find optimal resolutions to their unique challenges.

Addressing challenges such as work-life balance in hybrid work environments requires consistent implementation of strategies. Personalized one-on-one meetings, coaching, and trust can

support employees struggling with work-life balance. However, managers must follow through on their commitments to provide support to avoid damaging trust and respect. Trust takes time to build but can be destroyed in an instant, emphasizing the importance of managers taking these strategies seriously.

Intellectual Stimulation

Promoting intellectual stimulation relies on empowering employees and granting them increased ownership and responsibility in their work, particularly in a hybrid work setting. This approach encourages employees to think critically and develop problem-solving skills. By giving employees autonomy to find their path to success, leaders foster creativity, innovation, and problem-solving skills while allowing individuals to work in ways that suit them best.

In non-traditional work settings, supervising employees'

Overview: Comparing Traditional Transformational Leadership with HTL

Dimension	Meaning in Traditional Theory	Manifestation in Hybrid Transformational Leadership
Idealized Influence	inspiring team members by serving as a role model	Role-modeling happens in online and offline environments through authenticity and effective usage of different communication channels
Inspirational Motivation	motivating team members to become committed to a vision	Vision is co-created with the team members to enhance motivation, engagement, and clarity
Individualized Consideration	ability to treat followers as individuals with unique needs and interests	Empathy, trust, and active listening increase psychological safety, and give a sense of value and support
Intellectual Stimulation	Encouraging team members to challenge the status quo, think critically, and be innovative	Empowering team members with ownership and responsibility enhances critical thinking, autonomy, and a sense of contribution

Source: Own presentation.

work becomes more challenging. Empowering employees with ownership and responsibility helps bridge this gap by making them more self-sufficient. It fosters a culture of critical thinking and autonomous decision-making, enabling intellectual stimulation. By building employees' confidence, determination, sense of purpose, and competence, managers can promote their psychological well-being and sense of contribution to the organization. This trust in employees' capabilities cultivates a sense of ownership and accountability among team members, especially in a hybrid work environment where independent work is more common.

Concrete approaches to fostering intellectual stimulation in hybrid work environments include giving employees the freedom to explore and experiment with their work. This investment in the organization's success motivates employees to do their best work. Leveraging employees' unique skills and abilities is also effective in developing leadership skills, promoting collaboration, and achieving common goals. Understanding team members' strengths allows managers to assign tasks that match their skill sets, enhancing productivity and time management.

To promote a positive trajectory and address the challenge of work-life balance, it is crucial to empower employees not only with freedom in their work but also with personal responsibility for time and task management. By shifting from control to empowerment, employees can combat feelings of disconnection and take charge of their own

schedules, fostering a better work-life balance.

Implementing these practices helps address specific challenges in hybrid work environments. By empowering employees and involving them in meaningful tasks, leaders increase their engagement, motivation, and con-

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centration. Employees who feel a sense of purpose and are encouraged to contribute their unique approaches are more likely to be engaged and focused. Additionally, promoting autonomy and work-life balance allows employees to take control of their working hours and approach, leading to improved well-being and job satisfaction.

2. Outlook

Hybrid Transformational Leadership (HTL) has emerged as a dynamic approach to leadership in the ever-evolving workplace. Microsoft's leaders have embraced HTL, blending the principles of transformational leadership with the unique challenges of hybrid work environments. As we look ahead, it is important to consider what the future of work will entail and how leadership will be influ-

enced: Work models are expected to undergo experimentation, with remote work and new models like the four-day workweek rising, innovation and investments in advancements to revolutionize workflows such as AI can assist employees with tasks such as document writing, asynchronous meetings and freeing up leaders to focus on complex and strategic responsibilities.

In this era of rapid technological advancements, the future of leadership remains uncertain. There are two contrasting paths ahead: one where technology renders leadership obsolete, and another where leaders must cultivate their emotional intelligence to connect with employees in ways that technology cannot replicate. While the truth likely lies somewhere in between, it is clear that technology is profoundly transforming the business landscape. Leaders must continuously evolve their approach. Integrating AI and other emerging technologies into HTL can enhance communication, collaboration, and decision-making processes, further optimizing the hybrid work experience. ■



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