



Webinar: Equipping leaders for long-term hybrid working.

SPEAKERS

- Daniel Lambie and Kate Went (scarlettabbott)
- Brett Skinner (Nationwide)
- Dr Nicola Millard (BT)

Kate Went

So thank you so much. And welcome, everybody to another one of our Q&A sessions. We are talking about equipping leaders for long term hybrid working.

So, as we tentatively emerge from lockdown, we are stepping into a changed world of work. Although there is much that we've missed in the last year, it's unlikely that we're going to see employees returning to the office five days a week. For many, a year of remote working has been the use-case that we needed to prove the value and viability of a more flexible approach to work. But what does that mean for the culture of organisations and for the role of the leader? Remote working challenges traditional hierarchies and ways of collaborating. Fundamental shifts in mindset are required for leaders to make long term hybrid working a success. There is no playbook, there's no 'how to guide'. So, what do our leaders need to do?

As we shift to a more fluid work way of working, will the challenges of visibility be greater? And how can leaders still make an impact in a more fragmented team?

My name is Kate Went, I'm marketing manager at employee engagement consultancy scarlettabbott. And I'm joined today by my colleague, Senior Consultant Daniel Lambie. And we're really pleased today to be joined for the session by Brett Skinner, senior consultant leadership and capability at Nationwide. And Dr. Nicola Millard, principal innovation partner at BT.

Together, we're going to explore the landscape for leaders in the coming months and look at how HR and IC can help bridge the gaps in a hybrid world of work. I'm particularly excited for this session because our guests bring three very different but complementary perspectives. Nichola scans the horizon for future trends, looking at opportunities for innovation, Brett will consider professional development and learning. And Daniel is the voice of the internal communicator, considering content and cadence and channels.

So, we'd love to have your questions throughout the session, please do send them as you think of them. We'll cover as many as we can. But before we do I have a question for you.

I'm going to throw a poll up on the screen. Hopefully this is going to work! And I'm going to ask: 'how visible have the leaders in your organisation been throughout pandemic?' So hopefully that is pinging up on your screen right now.

You have said 70% 'more visible', 15% 'Less' and 14% 'Same'. Interesting to see!

So, I'm going to ask our panel the first question, I'd love to ask each of you in turn: 'What have you observed over the last year in terms of leadership?' And I think I'm going to start with Brett, if that's okay?

Brett Skinner

Yeah, and thank you for having me, I think at nationwide, in particular, I've been really inspired. Because this has obviously been probably the most challenging time most of us will have experienced in our working lives. And just the level of commitment and the ability of leaders to really after their people has been a bit of an inspiration for me. And probably the biggest thing I've noticed through leadership is a willingness to embrace new technology, new ways of working, probably not at the pace they had time to plan for. I think the other thing I'd probably say that's come with that and an observation is that with that speed and pace of change that's happened, I feel like leaders have really absorbed and taken on a lot and probably put more pressure on themselves, as well to look after their people and their teams. So, always think about that kind of analogy. Our CEO uses it about, kind of, 'when you're on an aeroplane, put on your oxygen mask first'. So always think for leaders in terms of making sure you're looking after yourself. You're well and you're not 'always on' and you're managing that kind of pressure. So yeah, that's what I've noticed.

Kate Went

How about you, Nicola?

Nicola Millard

So we've been doing a lot of research. I ran a programme around the future of work. We've kind of arrived at that around this time last year, so a lot of it's really been consolidating and understanding how the pandemic has accelerated a lot of the trends that, to be perfectly honest, we we're already developing before the pandemic.

But as a lot of people have said, it's sort of three to five years' worth of innovation that's going on in the past 12 months. So absolutely agree that, you know, humans are incredibly adaptable and resilient. I think that's the first lesson we've learned from the pandemic and leaders have had to adapt, so had to embrace new technologies. Because, I mean, those new technologies were around for a while, I mean, a lot of stuff around cloud and collaboration tools and connectivity has been around for five years.

It's the cultural issue moving to a much more remote way of working that has been the cultural anchor, if you like. And, again, the pandemic has forced us into this massive global remote working experiment. So, my role largely is to try and figure out what's going on and what the data is telling us as to what's worked, what hasn't

worked, and what's almost worked, which is sometimes the most interesting bit from an innovation perspective. I think in terms of managers and leaders, we've done a lot of interviews over the past 12 months. And then I think the first thing is that, actually, it's made the leadership role a lot more difficult. I mean, I think good leadership often was around being visible managing by walking around and leading by example, and how do you do that, when you're not in an office? You can't see people.

So, I think the first thing we found is that, firstly, leaders have had to be a lot more visible and so on back to the poll is showing that they've had to communicate a lot more, I think they've had to articulate things that maybe they might have taken for granted. So, you know, in an office space, it's easy to see the brand, it's easy to observe behaviours. In a remote environment, you have to make that very explicit.

So, you know, I think leadership and storytelling have gone very well together here. So how do you tell stories about your purpose? How do you make people tangibly feel that sense of purpose by articulating loyalty right down to that team level? So obviously, the team leaders also have that responsibility. I think, empathetic leadership, transparent leadership, all of that, again, was emerging prior to the pandemic as simply 'good leadership'.

I do my observation, particularly around leading in a more digitally oriented remote world is that that Yeah, firstly, you are very reliant on the technologies. But the kind of skill set you need is around networking. And again, you know, it's how do you network better than in physical space? Absolutely. But also, how do you network better in digital spaces as well. So, I think in terms of the sort of skill sets we're seeing, really highly network oriented, digitally enabled leaders who are able to storyteller and articulate purpose, are really succeeding and thriving, I think there are some that are struggling as well. And partially, that's probably because we haven't taught them how to do a lot of this stuff. Because it's should be taught. It's good leadership, but actually, we maybe don't promote people for those kinds of skills in the first place, or at least don't help them when they have been promoted in acquiring those skills.

Kate Went

Absolutely. Really good points. How about you, Daniel, what have you observed?

Daniel Lambie

Yeah, I mean, as Nichola said, I think what we've seen from a constant engagement perspective is an acceleration of a direction of travel, rather than a change of a direction of travel. And one big thing that has happened is leaders have been forced to let go of command and control, which is something that we've, we've been trying to encourage them to do for some time, but there was no option but to do that now.

And they've had to embrace, as Brett said, different ways of working and different ways of managing and personal, specific authenticity and credibility is more important than it has ever been. And people want their leaders to lead by example, and behave in the way that they're asking that leaders are asking them to behave, but also, they want their leaders to make decisions. They want them in a time of upheaval and turmoil. You're looking for strong leadership. And we've seen it with both BT and Nationwide and other examples where the leaders have come out with a North Star: 'this is where we want to get to', and they've engaged people in how

they get there. My what my colleagues did with Nationwide was helping them to get colleagues to co-create a direction of travel, not get them to define what that direction of travel was because that's what the leaders have paid to do. But help them to co create and that builds on Nichola's empathy piece. So, you know, emphasising with works for everyone. across your organisation and building the solutions and the flexibility to care for as many things as possible.

Kate Went

Absolutely. It's great to hear empathy emphasised for sure. And so that bring us to today. we've looked back over a year of reactivity, scrambling and trying to do the best that we can, and changing at breakneck speed to situations that challenge our BAU and force us to have to flex constantly. And now offices are opening back up and, where possible, businesses are exploring the much touted 'hybrid working' that we are hearing everywhere, and ostensibly, is a flexible approach that's going to allow employees to continue to work remotely or at least have the option to. What do you think the main challenges and opportunities are going to be for leaders as we shift into that way of working? Nicola, can I ask you your thoughts first?

Nicola Millard

Sure, because I'm actually doing quite a lot of work on hybrid at the moment because it is the hot topic at the moment.

I think the problem is that most people are using the word 'hybrid' to mean 'flexible' working and I don't think it is that. Firstly, flexible working has been around for a very long time. And, you know, I take inspiration from my favourite hybrid, to be honest, in terms of trying to sort of think about this.

So, my favourite hybrid is a 'Zedonk' – half zebra and half donkey. Now, I can tell you that a Zedonk does not spend three days a week as a zebra and two days a week as a donkey. It is an entirely different breed. And that's my interpretation of a hybrid. It's a different way of working, it's not flexible working, it's actually removing the element of time and space actually from relevance,

I guess in the workplace, because it shouldn't matter where you are, and where you are working. The emphasis is really around how you create engaging employee experiences, wherever you happen to be. Now, that is a very different way of working. I think the other thing that gradually, as I've been reading more about how this is very different from flexible working, is that this is mainstream. So flexible working; you probably knew a few people that did it. Now we're looking at a very large proportion of the workforce doing it.

So, I think that in itself is a challenge. And there are lots of things we need to think about when we untether people from time and place. I think my paranoia at the moment is that we end up with horrible hybrids. Now, one example of a horrible hybrid that we've probably all experienced, prior to the pandemic, were those meetings, which were split between physical and digital. So, you've got half the people in the room and half the people are not in the room. And the problem then is the people in the room ignore the people that are not in the room, because 'out of sight, out of mind'. So that's a bad experience, to be honest, for everybody. But worse, probably, for the digital people. So, I think the pandemic has taught us that digital is a great equaliser. So,

when everyone is their own little celebrity square on a screen, you can see everybody, everyone has a right to speak.

Now a lot of it is also down to leadership and facilitation as to how well that goes. But my feeling is as we go into this hybrid, if you're looking at those split meetings, in fact, what you're probably looking at is a digital-first hybrid. So, in other words, regardless of whether you're in the room or remote, you're on the digital platform now, that probably means short to medium term, at least we're all going to be little celebrities on the screen. So, we're going to be very reliant on video now that's got a huge impact on the office space. So, is it equipped to do video? Certainly, on a network level, do you have enough network capacity to do it? And we're talking about a lot more rooms equipped with screens and cameras and microphones, lots of noise, cancelling all sorts of things you have to think about even just in the physical workplace, to actually make that enabled.

And then obviously, you know, a lot of us have equipped themselves to work from home very well. But how do we also enhance that experience? I mean, we're also looking at extending that out, obviously into things like innovation. So most excitingly, I guess, we're even talking about holograms. In the extreme maybe the future of this might be, I think it was Kingsman, wasn't it, wherever what appeared as a hologram around the table. That's kind of things like virtual reality, which I'm a bit skeptical about augmented reality, to try and make this a lot more tangible, a lot more like face-to-face, and a lot more, you know, familiar, rather than necessarily forcing everybody to come into a physical environment all the time.

That does not mean that we're never going to go into a physical environment because I think most of us are missing that social contact, and it's incredibly valuable. I did a webinar to Hong Kong yesterday morning from my kitchen. But I do remember flying to Hong Kong for a day once for a meeting. And I'm never doing that again, frankly, because it kills your productivity for a start. And we've proved that it does work digitally. So, I think a lot of the consideration is around what's the common ground for this? What is the right platform? Is it accessible to everybody? And is it appropriate to the task?

Kate Went

Absolutely. Well, I've written down Zedonk and highlighted it several times, because I just think that's an absolutely fantastic way of looking at it. And, Brett, what do you think in terms in terms of challenges and opportunities for leadership in this space? What are your thoughts?

Brett Skinner

I'm definitely nicking the Zedonk analogy. That's a really good way of talking about it.

So, the opportunities, I think, being one that's been a remote worker, probably for the majority of my career, I've never been co-located with the team. I think what this does is it just opens up work anywhere, work in a way that works for you. So hopefully, some of the pressures that people have felt around, especially schools and like that, won't be as acutely felt going forward. There's an opportunity to think about 'how do I get the work done in the best way for me?' And there's something about autonomy and empowerment, that's a real driver, and a motivator that sits with that. I also think there's an opportunity around creating a more inclusive environment. So, like I said, digital is a great equaliser for everyone, and feels quite a lot more democratic. I think we can be

more inclusive, we can take care of our wellbeing better, both in terms of our mental wellbeing, but also our physical wellbeing as well. And then if we have organisations that are truly location agnostic, that really opens you up for talent, and the opportunity as a leader to develop yourself, but also to attract and retain it. And if I was to look at the flip side of that, I suppose it's a bit of a double-edged sword, because more autonomy means you need to be really deliberate about how you work, you need to build practices that work for you.

And also, I think, from a leadership perspective, one of the things that I've noticed is that rituals that teams get into, can quite quickly start to not work for people in the digital space where they might have worked a little bit longer in the physical space where everyone's co-located. So, there's something about constantly listening to your people, managing the competing expectations and having an open dialogue, so works for the teams, you work within your colleagues. And I think the challenge will be that it's not going to be them. They're going to need everyone on board to make this kind of happen for them.

Kate Went

I think that's really interesting. And I liked what you said there just about rituals. I think there's a lot that we risk losing around our cultures because of having to be very deliberate, we lose some of that spontaneity, the natural interactions that we get in the in the physical space. So, I think there's something about being quite deliberate in trying to maintain that sense of culture and cohesiveness as well. Daniel, what do you think? Challenges and opportunities from an IC perspective?

Daniel Lambie

Okay, well, from an opportunity - and it's not necessarily just about IC. It's about the opportunity to embrace the agility that people had to embrace during the pandemic and not lose that. And if you look at things like the adoption of a digital workplace, and you know, all the policies and procedures that businesses had to put in place overnight, even into the first lockdown, those things would have taken businesses months, even years, and probably millions and millions of pounds, to enable those things to happen.

So, leaders need to take that experience, and continue to work in that agile and flexible way. Not being forced by a pandemic to do it, hopefully, but you know, using that experience to say: 'we can do this and we can do it quickly and effectively'.

Challenges? There's a couple of things and one which I've seen emerging already with the clients I've been working with is the polarisation of the employee experience. We talk about flexible working and that's not available to the entire workforce. In some businesses, it's available to a minority of the workforce. And we've always had this difference between people who work on the shop floor or on the frontline, and people who work in the back office. But that has been exacerbated by some of the flexible working policies that have been enacted.

So, we really need to take care of the entire workforce and make sure that those who don't have the luxury of some of this flexibility are looked after. And, you know, they don't feel like they've been left out. The other challenge that I see emerging is, how do businesses preserve and evolve their culture. So, the way that culture tended to be developed and you know, to evolve was predominantly in a physical space. And the building

blocks of culture, a lot of them have been removed now, and many of them have changed. So how do we preserve that sense of oneness? Instead of us having 10 offices, you know, you've now got 10,000 offices. So how do you make people feel part of a culture and encourage that sense of belonging? I think that's a big challenge that we haven't yet got our head around how we do that in this new world of flexible working?

Kate Went

Absolutely. It's going to be really interesting to see how individual organisations tackle that over the coming months, I think it's going to be another year of the use-case experiments as we go forward into this new phase.

I'm going to throw another poll up on the screen. I know that this is one that Daniel is going to be really interested to see the results of. I'm going to ask: 'What impact do you think flexible working will have on the role of line managers?'

So, I'm interested to see your thoughts on this. Looking very unanimous so far. So overwhelmingly 'more difficult', some saying 'the same' and a very small minority saying 'easier'. So yeah, I'm going to close that poll and see if I can share those results.

Yeah. And we say, overwhelmingly 81% 'more difficult'. 13% 'same' and 6% 'easier'. Daniel, is that any surprise to you?

Daniel Lambie

It's really reassuring. You know, the next thing that I know that you were going to ask us, Kate, is how we as businesses, support leaders now. And something, for years, that the IC industry in general has failed to grasp is how we better equip line managers to be great communicators.

And, you know, there's a couple of statistics just to press here. Polls have shown us that for 75% of workers, their main source of trust, for information, or the information they trust most, comes from their line managers. And yet only 30% of workers in the UK actually feel like engaged in the workplace. So making sure that the line managers are able to share the strategic messaging and localise that strategic messaging, and get people engaged behind that has never been more critical.

And I've described line managers as being the 'buckle in the belt' in an organisation. So, they are the part that joins the two elements of this. So, we really need to create this compelling business case that makes sure that communication in this new world of flexible working is a core responsibility of line managers, and give them the tools, the equipment, the confidence, and the understanding that communication is probably – and you know, I would say this coming from my background – is their most important job.

And, you know, now is the best opportunity that we've had to actually say to people at board level, 'we need to equip our line managers to be able to be great communicators, because they're gonna hold this business together.'

Kate Went

Absolutely. So thinking about the broader question, you know, 'how can businesses support leadership?' So, line managers or leaders further up, how can businesses, and what should businesses, be thinking about now in order to put that support in place for their leadership, to make the most of this hybrid working? Brett? What do you think?

Brett Skinner

Firstly, I think it's interesting, just to consider those two hats. Like, what does a manager do? What does the leader do? And some of the tensions that sit there? Because I always think, direction versus enablement, those types of things, and there's never one or the other, it's what's appropriate.

So just reflecting, what if that question was 'leadership'? Would we have a different answer to the poll? And I think the thing that organisations can do is listen to people. So the first thing we did was we took time to understand, actually, what are people asking for? So, actually listen to your leaders, listening to your people as a whole and being really open to feedback.

And then I think, not just listening but acting on it. And I think what comes from that is the ability to set expectations for people. So, what that will allow people to do is feel more comfortable, they'll feel more secure, if the expectations are clear. Then it's about empowering leaders and trusting them. Set the conditions for them go out and lead. And I do think there is also something about the greater the organisation can set those conditions, in terms of making sure everyone has the kind of tech and the systems, there's core policies and processes that back it up.

I'm not a comms specialist. But one of the things I've noticed, during this period of time, and a lot of the wider reading I've been doing, is you can't over communicate in this kind of world. It's definitely not a 'one and done' and we've cascaded that message. It's about constant communication, listening, taking action and being open to feedback.

Kate Went

And Nicola, what do you think?

Nicola Millard

I think it's interesting, because certainly, from a line manager perspective, when you're looking at the hybrid workplace, a lot of the challenges of hybrid coordination. There's a lot of danger that you end up with almost a 'two speed' organisation. So, you've got some of the organisation in a physical office, some of them, permanently, that are predominantly working in big chunks of time (so, whether it's nine to five, one could debate) maybe you take a little bit of time off for lunch and a couple of breaks during the day. But what we've learned is when you're a remote worker, it's very different than nine to five for a start. So typically, what we're seeing at the moment is, maybe slightly later start, later finish, but actually taking more breaks during the day, (I call it time confetti), because generally, you're juggling other things.

At an extreme, obviously, the not normal remote working when home schooling was happening. And I think that's one thing that is not going to be as difficult when the kids are not running riot around you when you're trying to work.

So, but often, we are juggling a lot of responsibilities. And that's probably one of the reasons why remote working is so attractive. But I think the challenges for the line manager then is, 'when do you get together to work?' And I think a lot of what we've seen from remote organisations, prior to the pandemic, I think we can bring into hybrid organisations after the pandemic, which is a lot to do with synchronous versus asynchronous communication.

So, typically, a lot of the remote organisations do a lot more asynchronously. So, a lot more of a written culture, a lot more comms going out, and a lot more communication, that isn't real time. When they get together for synchronous stuff, is when it really matters. And again, that could be physically that could be digitally, it's probably increasingly going to be digitally.

So, I think you've got a lot of challenges around how you define a work window, if you like, that's mutually agreed to everyone, that isn't a nine-to-five but isn't time confetti. So let's free a few hours. Because I think that that's essential where we can have meetings.

But I think the other thing is probably, we need to question meetings. I think one of the problems, particularly being a manager, is that you end up, particularly in the digital space, very scheduled, with your 30 to 60 minute constant chunks of meeting. I always say I get up with an 'overwhelming sense of Zoom' every morning. So, the problem, and I think one of the things we do need to really question is, 'could this meeting be an email?' 'Could this meeting be a phone call?' 'Does it need to be 30 to 60 minute chunks?'

And as you get into hybrid, I'm starting to get physical appointments in my diary, and I'm looking at my 30 to 60 minute chunks and going, 'Oh, god, I'm gonna have to factor in travel now as well. How am I going to do this?'

So, I think we do need to maybe rethink some of the things because it's so frictionless in the digital space. When we introduce hybrid, there's friction. And that can be good friction as well. It gives us a break, but that means that we can't necessarily do the constantly scheduled demands of video meetings.

Kate Went

I think you're absolutely right. When we think about these back-to-back scheduled Zooms, and you think of somebody in a position line managing a team, doing one-to-ones, having development with them, their days are just absolutely filled with these scheduled appointments.

And the fatigue can't be understated, I think, that comes with sitting in front of a screen. It's not got the same energy that you get from sitting and having that conversation in person. Time will tell what the long-term impacts of that are on us. But it's something to build into our wellbeing

I'm going to throw our third and final poll up on the screen and see what everyone has to say about this. So, I'm just going to ask you: 'Do you plan to adjust leadership development resources to reflect long term flexible working in your organisation?'

Oh, yeah, 85% 'Yes'. 10% 'undecided'. But yes, again, another overwhelming vote towards a yes, which I think is encouraging to see. What do you guys think?

Daniel Lambie

It's not my area of specialty. But I think that, leading on from Nichola's point, I think businesses need to look at the entire approach to professional development and how we modernize, to cope with this new era of flexible working, and take some of the burden off line managers.

There are different levels of reporting and let people get on with the ownership of their own professional development. And there are tools and platforms that I think people need to be looking at, that move some of that manual, heavy lifting away from the line management population, and give people responsibility for that themselves.

Kate Went

We've got a bunch of questions and comments so I'm going to go through some of these. None of them are specific to anyone particularly on the panel. So, if something speaks to you, do feel free to jump in and answer and add your thoughts.

So I'm going to start with Jenny asking; 'Is there a danger that organisations try to over-engineer future ways of working by trying to define ways of working through policies and guidance, rather than experimenting and learning through experience?'

Nicola, I can see you nodding. Any thoughts on that one?

Nicola Millard

I'm a big fan of experimentation. We've always taken that kind of approach at BT. Let's try something new and see how it goes. And, actually, sometimes it fails. But I think if you've got an experimentation mindset, you learn: 'your hypothesis was not proved.'

So, I think yeah, I think experimentation, particularly when you're going into new ways of working, My anxiety is that we don't want the elastic band effect. So, we don't want it to snap back to 'normal'. Because I don't think work was working terribly well, prior to the pandemic, to be perfectly honest. The levels of disengagement, exhaustion, all of that kind of stuff was not necessarily working for people. I think the problem is often that if you just dictate how people work, maybe they don't buy into it. And also, sometimes you don't get the creativity. People who do the jobs, know their job better than anyone else. So, putting a policy in that dictates how you work, misses a trick largely, because know their job and they can find far more effective ways of working for themselves. So again, allowing them to experiment, I think in my past five to six years' worth of

doing 'future work' stuff ,I've been experimenting on myself to start with. 'Let's see how this goes'. And if it works with me, we try bigger experiments and then gradually, hopefully as experiments get bigger and bigger, they become the normal way of working, hopefully when people do buy into them. But I do think you need that kind of creative, innovative mindset. To Brett's point, it's also you know, ask people, include them, don't just super impose a policy that's top down. Let's look at bottom-up stuff because again, people are very creative if you allow them to be.

Kate Went

Absolutely. This is an interesting one from Peri asking: 'How can we tackle the issues that we have with remote working around training school leavers and graduates? All our professionals can work remote and are in no rush to return. We've developed our leaders and managing established people has been developed, but our learning culture and development of people new to the workplace or our industry has been negatively impacted.'

Brett, do you have any thoughts on this one?

Brett Skinner

Yeah, it's a really interesting question. So, I was actually talking to one of my colleagues who works in the learning space. And she has a son who's at University at the moment. And I know there's a lot of stuff in the press, and we've seen university lenrollment go down. But actually, I think this generation might be one of the most adaptable and set up for the future of work, having gone through that experience. So, it's almost like, as part of their education, was learning how to work in different ways, rather than traditional University setups.

I think the challenge for a lot of organisation is building relationships like onboarding, making sure that people feel welcome. It's the point that was raised earlier around how we ensure people really feel immersed in the culture, they feel valued, they can build those connections with the team. So, there's something for me about redefining the thinking about what the workplace is really for now.

And I think there's some things around, being able to come together for creativity and collaboration, and celebration, as well. So, recognition for people, and also making people feel welcome. Actually bringing them into their own experience. And that is really, really important. Again, I guess it comes down to that question about being location agnostic, though. It also comes up to a wider talent that perhaps wouldn't have relocated 200 miles to come and work in the city that you're based in now. You can get access to those people. So, it's kind of a negotiation.

Kate Went

Absolutely. And here's a question from Angela: 'What does the panel think about the increased need for targeted rather than sheep dip communications?'

Daniel Lambie

It's twofold. As Brett said, when you're in a time of crisis, there's no such thing as too much communication. But we don't want to distract people doing their job by creating a huge amount of noise. And again, I come back to the line manager as the pivot of success here. That line managers should be able to channel the messages that

people need to get through that local filter, rather than a deluge from a corporate headquarter with old company emails.

One of my colleagues did some research recently that estimates that when you get a distraction, a digital notification, it can take up to 23 minutes for you to get back into the mindset that you were in before that distraction. So imagine your team's 10,000 people, every old company email that somebody receives, that's costing that business a huge amount of time in terms of productivity.

So targeting is critical. But that targeting, I think, needs to be via the line manager. So, the line manager knows how to interpret and filter communications and make sure people get the stuff that they need to do their job and feel involved, without overwhelming them with details that are abstract or obscure to them.

Kate Went

There's a theme coming in from three of the questions from Andrew, Fiona and Joe, around the broader theme of 'trust'.

So, Andrew is asking: 'Are you seeing more productivity surveillance from IT coming in for workers who aren't in the office?' which is a very juicy topic

Fiona asks: 'How do we tackle homeworking presenteeism?' And Joe asks, 'What would you say to a smaller organisation worried about the productivity of staff working from home? I'm a big believer in trusting people, but at some point, will there be a need to measure people's contribution?'

Any thoughts?

Nicola Millard

I have many actually. I'd like to turn one of the questions around and ask: 'how do you prevent office presenteeism?' Because I think that's a bigger problem than at home.

To be perfectly frank and honest, I think the whole notion of productivity is a really juicy one to get into. And I don't necessarily have a huge number of answers. But I think one of the problems is that a lot of the ways that we work now are rooted in the industrial age.

So, the ways that we tend to measure productivity are really derived from factory-era measures. Everything from clocking-on to clocking-off to presence at work. I think when you translate that into a hybrid digital workplace, a lot of the remote workers and knowledge workers are really difficult to measure.

My definition of hybrid is the irrelevance of time and place. And those are the two proxies we tend to use for productivity: 'I can see you in the office, you work eight hours a day.' None of that's relevant in a hybrid workplace. So, I think one of the biggest questions that we've got, and we work with the likes of MIT and Cambridge University on some of this stuff, because it's big stuff, is 'what do we need to measure?' What is productivity in a digital and hybrid workplace, because it's probably not the number of hours, and it's probably

not me being in an office. It's what I output. But, it's really difficult to measure outputs. Productivity tools, for example, that Microsoft had put in, have allowed me to know how many meetings I have, and who those meetings are with, but it doesn't tell me what the outcomes of those meetings are.

So we get into big discussions. Certainly, MIT have this idea of 'return on ideas'. If I'm a knowledge worker, my output is based on ideas. Where do those ideas go? What happens to those ideas? Do they become concrete? How do they permeate around the organisation? They often permeate in the same way as a virus – to be perfectly honest! How do we actually start to use the data that we have in our networks and technologies to figure out how that is, rather than to monitor just the number of hours I sit in front of my laptop.

Ok, I'm sitting in front of my laptop – does that make me productive as a knowledge worker? Not necessarily. In fact, it might make me particularly unproductive and unhealthy, because I'm not stretching, taking a break or going for a coffee, or even going to the toilet. All of which make us more productive. We're natural human beings. We only work in chunks of time, so if we don't take breaks or work long, long hours. That's a real problem.

So yeah, I think, how we redefine productivity, how we define effective working is a very big one for the hybrid workplace. So yeah, big challenge and we don't have all the answers.

Daniel Lambie

Can I add my thinking there? And again, I'll come back to the link between productivity and engagement. I think we would be better to focus our attention on engaging our workforce. And by creating that engagement, they will increase their productivity. And they will naturally be better at their job. So, you know, rather than big brother spying on them, why don't we create that environment where they feel engaged and motivated by the purpose of that job. And then they will do the job to the best of their ability.

Kate Went

Absolutely. I'm conscious of time, I think that's a really good place to stop for this session.

We've had so many questions - thank you so much. I think we covered a lot of ground in this session. So, thank you so much. And thank you to everybody who's attended and for all your questions and participating in the polls. It's been really interesting to see your thoughts and your answers to the questions.

We will share the recording of the session afterwards. And I'll put the timestamps in the transcript up for you as well. Thank you so much Nicola, Brett and Daniel for all your insights and the experiences that you shared with us. See you at another session.