

Effective Leadership

Examining Return to Office Through an Inclusion Lens

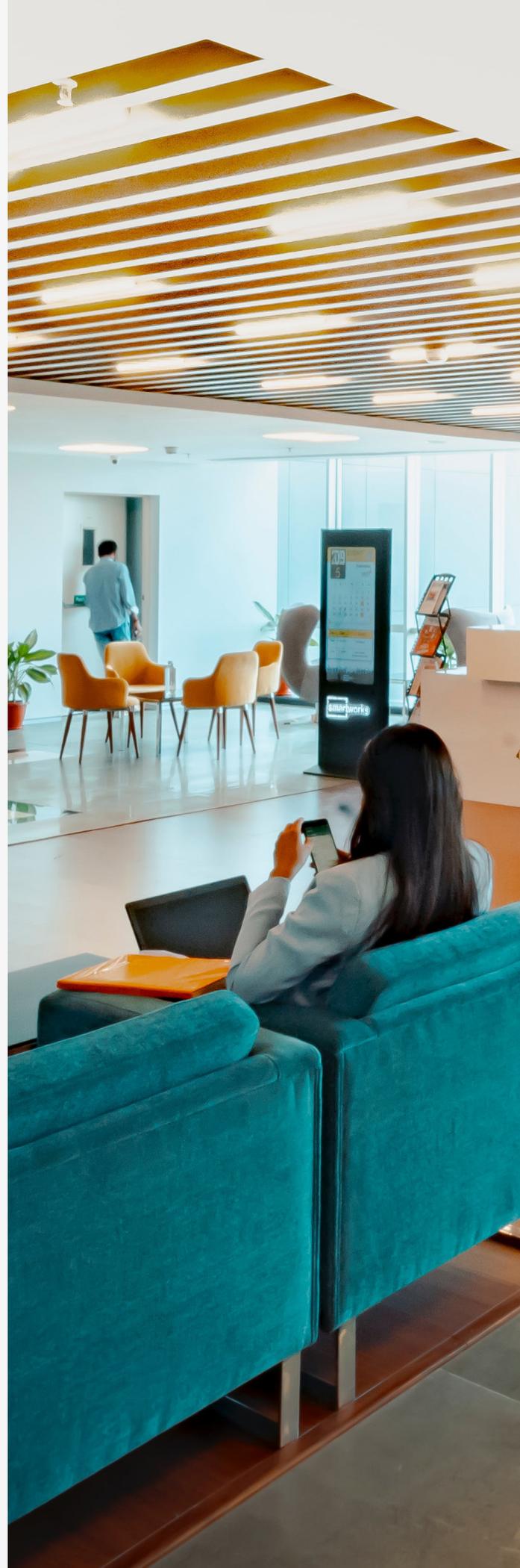
PART 2 OF 2

Team Dynamics and Tools & Resources



ASSOCIATION OF CONSULTING
ENGINEERING COMPANIES
BRITISH COLUMBIA

Partners | Experts | Innovators | Everywhere



SERIES BY:



ASSOCIATION OF CONSULTING
ENGINEERING COMPANIES
BRITISH COLUMBIA



Sharon Batchelor, CPHR

Chair, Human Resources Committee
ACEC-British Columbia
Sharon_batchelor@outlook.com



Marcie Cochrane, P.Eng., MBA

Project Leader
ACEC-British Columbia
marcie@acec-bc.ca

How do we practice inclusion with a hybrid work team that is part in-office and part remote?

“When everyone works remotely, all workplace relationships are equally distant, providing everyone with the same challenges and opportunities. When a handful of employees go back to the office it is going to take extra effort to ensure that remote employees are still included in meetings, conversations, and generally kept “in-the-know.”

- Georgene Huang, Forbes Magazine, “[Going Back to Normal When Normal No Longer Exists, A Guide to Inclusive Planning](#)” May 7, 2020

Team Dynamics

Awareness of Team Morale

Managing relationships between team members can be difficult within a shared office space or when all team members are remote, but it is even more challenging when workers are partially in the office and partially remote. With hybrid teams, managers need to identify problems between team members or with individual morale by establishing frequent one-on-one connections and watching closely for warning signs such as reduced output and reluctance to join or participate in team discussions.

Team Dynamics

While entire teams were working remotely, managers had to find ways to foster team connection and collaboration for both structured and unstructured interactions. Rather than returning to past approaches, review what has been developed to date and consider whether to continue or adapt these tools and practices to continue to foster the connection and collaboration your team needs to maintain and enhance positive team dynamics.

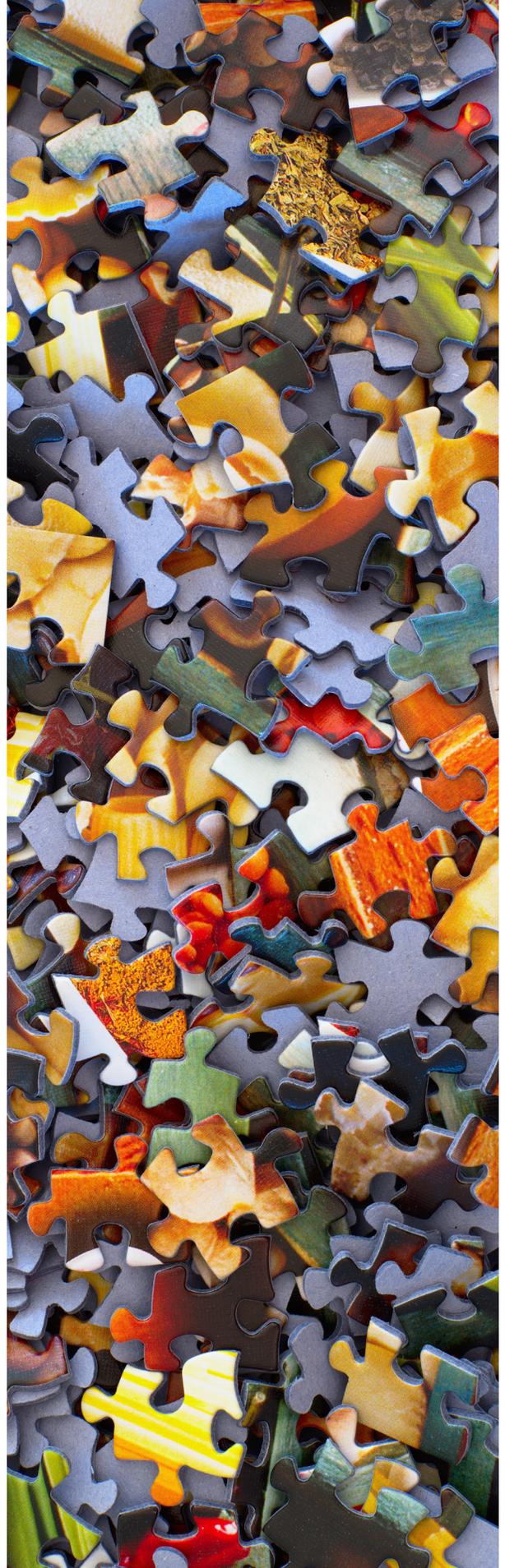
Personal Connections

If you're not sure why personal connections matter, consider this: those who feel more connected and greater sense of belonging are more committed to their work and are less likely to leave their position.

Personal connections develop more naturally and are easier to maintain when people can interact in person. Although the new return to office may not see these interactions occur with the same frequency or way as before, those in the office will still have an advantage in this respect. Even if the level of personal connection was low when your entire team was remote, at least it was even for all team members. A hybrid work environment will require intentional consideration: planning to create an environment that supports personal connections for your entire team.

A Culture of Collaboration

A culture of collaboration is one that values input and participation from all team members. When you have a strong culture of collaboration on your team, the location of individual team members will be less important.





Tools and Resources

The Importance of Feedback, Rewards, and Recognition

It goes without saying that rewards and recognition need to be fairly awarded at an appropriate value or level for the effort being applied and that the recognition needs to be delivered with thought. How and when this is done with hybrid teams requires reevaluation, considering aspects such as what attributes are being recognized, how recognition is communicated, and what processes are used to identify those that deserve recognition.

Tools and Technology

Many or all of the tools and technology we have used to support our teams and organizations over the past few months will need to remain in place as offices begin to re-open. With a hybrid team, managers and teams may need to adjust some of the practices developed over the past few months while others should be reinforced. These include both work collaboration, information sharing, and meeting tools as well as allowing for personal connection tools such as instant messaging and chat channels.

Meetings

Beyond the use of specific technology or tools, managers must consider how the structure of team meetings affects inclusion. When holding meetings with some attendees in person and others online ensure that there is appropriate technology for the remote participants to see, be seen, and interact effectively with those in the physical meeting space. This approach should also include intentional discussions and reminders of principles for inclusive meeting participation, a meeting structure that works for all, and ensuring remote team members have opportunities to participate and contribute.

Policies and Guidelines

As organizations return to office, there are requirements for plans and policies that outline health and safety

measures. As part of the organizations overall return to office plans, or as a separate guideline, consideration should be given as to how inclusion principles and approach will be documented and clearly communicated. Having the supporting policies, guidelines, or other documentation in place will improve your organizations return to office for all involved – both those returning and those who will continue to work remotely, which ultimately benefits the organization as a whole.

Not only does documentation provide clarity, the reassurance provided by putting these policies and guidelines in place can help all team members feel confident in their options for where they can work as well as the organizations commitment to inclusion.

Conclusion

Return to office will look and feel different for each organization and individual. When and how it happens will vary based on a wide range of factors. Regardless of these differences, the importance of an inclusive approach is consistent. Organizational strength in terms of employee commitment, innovation, and productivity are all positively impacted when there is a culture of inclusion and although important at the best of times, organizational strength is especially important during these times as we all continue to navigate uncertainty and drastic change.

WHAT'S NEXT?

We are hosting two webinars on Oct 7 & 14 with authors Marcie Cochrane and Sharon Batchelor on the challenges of a hybrid work environment and approaches to consider as part of an inclusive return to office plan.