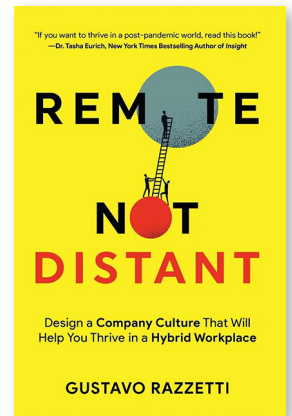


Remote Not Distant

Design a Company Culture That Will Help You Thrive in a Hybrid Workplace

by **Gustavo Razzetti**



Contents

What is Culture and Why Does it Matter Anyway?

Page 2

Reset Your Culture

Page 2

Reimagine a Shared Future

Page 4

Reignite Belonging

Page 4

Rethink Collaboration

Page 5

Release Agility

Page 6

THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

Welcome to the beginning of the end of the workplace as we know it. Normal is gone. The culture that got you here won't get you there. The problem is that most organizations were forced to switch to a work-from-home model and failed to change their way of thinking. CEOs still believe that company culture is only achieved when people are together. But it doesn't have to be that way. You can work remotely and still be connected. You don't need an office to feel like you're part of a team.

As companies are once again postponing returning to the office, there is a unique opportunity to reset the culture and leverage the best of both worlds: in-person and remote. Now more than ever, a strong culture is crucial for driving positive results. In *Remote Not Distant: Design a Company Culture That Will Help You Thrive in a Hybrid Workplace*, author Gustavo Razzetti will help you build an anywhere/anytime culture to adapt and succeed in a hybrid workplace.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- What company culture is and why it matters.
- Five mindset shifts required to succeed in a hybrid workplace.
- Six modes of collaboration for distributed teams.
- Five hybrid work models that release agility.

Foundation: What is Culture and Why Does it Matter Anyway?

The pandemic has put “the way we do things around here” to the test, and culture matters now more than ever. But before we talk about how to upgrade your workplace culture and thrive in a hybrid workplace, let’s discuss the concept of culture and why you should care.

Many people think culture is about perks such as ping-pong tables, free beer, and fancy food. Free yoga sessions and sushi are nice. However culture is much more than that; it’s the environment that helps people do their best work.

Intentionally designed cultures not only increase employee engagement but also produce stronger business results. Both science and common sense tell you that a positive workplace culture creates a positive business impact.

What Culture Does

While people still tend to think in terms of what culture looks like, it’s more helpful to think in terms of what culture *accomplishes*. A strong culture produces the following five effects:

- 1. Culture supports results:** According to the Organizational Health Index, companies with the strongest culture can perform 200% higher than those in the bottom quartile.
- 2. Culture creates teams:** Culture creates a shared identity that generates both attraction and rejection. It is the glue that brings people together.
- 3. Culture gives employees meaning:** Culture provides not only a shared view of “what is,” but also of “why.”
- 4. Healthy cultures adapt better to change:** Research by McKinsey shows that 70% of organizational transformations fail because of culture-related issues.
- 5. Culture boosts (or destroys) employee motivation:** When people’s values or purpose align with those of an organization, they are more likely to enjoy working there.

Clearly, a healthy culture makes a difference. Moreover, culture can be deliberately shaped to serve your company, much as a fruit tree is pruned to keep it healthy and productive. Every company has a culture by chance or by choice, but successful cultures are the result of intentional design.

The following principles are recommended when approaching culture design.

- **Human-centric:** starts with the employee in mind and how they perceive their organization’s culture and what is or isn’t working
- **Systemic:** every organization has a system that shapes the behavior of its employees
- **Co-created:** Smart leaders tap into the collective wisdom to find solutions that will help improve culture.
- **Experimental and iterative:** Culture design is not a one-time activity. Being prepared to adapt is even more critical in a hybrid environment.
- **Evolving:** Think in terms of building on what’s working while improving or eliminating what’s not.

To apply these principles to build culture remotely, you must design an “Anywhere/Anytime Culture” that connects people and helps them do their best work, regardless of when and from where they work. To start, you need to reset and evolve your culture.

Step 1: Reset Your Culture

This step addresses the five mindset shifts required to succeed in a hybrid workplace and how you can build a strong remote culture, regardless of where you team members work from.

The hybrid workplace is here to stay. But, as a whole, hybrid is difficult to do right. You need to be intentional about revisiting almost everything about your culture. Seize this unique chance to consciously design a successful hybrid workplace that bridges the gap between what employees want and what leaders demand.

It’s time for a reset.

To thrive in a hybrid workplace, your organization needs to adopt five key mindset shifts that form the basis of much of the culture design work to be done.

From Culture by Chance to Culture by Design

It’s true that, left to its own devices, company culture is organic; it will happen naturally and emerge freely. However, in a hybrid environment, you need to be more intentional.

Company culture design should be treated just as intentionally as designing a new product. It should start and end

Accepting the increasingly fluid boundaries between work and personal life, rather than building higher, stronger walls between them, will create a more humane and flexible workplace.

with the user in mind, turning it into a co-creation process. Successful remote-first organizations co-design their cultures with their employees.

From Input to Impact

Historically, organizations have rewarded input—visibility, effort, presenteeism, etc.—over outcome. Organizations can benefit enormously by shifting their focus away from traditional input measures and focus on impact. People want to be part of something bigger than themselves. If you want engaged and productive employees, focus on the impact you want to create and they will follow.

From Work-Life Im/balance to Work-Life Integration

For most of us, the more we try to pursue “work-life balance,” the harder it becomes to achieve. Working from home has created a more human connection to work. Accepting the increasingly fluid boundaries between work and personal life, rather than building higher, stronger walls between them, will create a more humane and flexible workplace.

From Synchronous to Asynchronous Collaboration

Traditional workplaces were filled with synchronous communications. Meetings required everyone to show up, and people were expected to take calls and respond to emails immediately, regardless of what else was going on. Experts agree that whether your team is fully remote or hybrid, it should adopt an async-first approach. Asynchronous collaboration creates a different, more flexible set of rules.

From One-Size-Fits-All to Flexibility

A common denominator of successful remote companies is that teams have a say in how things get done, from shaping the remote work corporate policy to having the flexibility to adapt them to their own needs. Managing the complexities of scheduling, integrating individual and collective needs, and overseeing people who work from different locations isn't easy; having a centralized, top-down approach won't work. Team members can make better decisions when given freedom and authority.

Reset Culture: Where to Start

Leaders of hybrid teams will have to do what regional and global leaders have always done: work hard to create connections between on-site and remote employees. Managing remotely is not the same thing as managing in the office. Unlearn what used to work.

Here are some of the most significant adjustments you can make to build on your efforts:

- **Let Go of Control; Become a Facilitator:** Facilitate better conversations, encourage people to ask better questions, let them find answers, and listen. Leading as a facilitator means letting go of the desire to be in charge and in control.
- **The Office is the New Offsite:** The truth is that the office isn't necessarily a great place to get work done. It's time to rethink the office as the new offsite. It will become a space for special occasions, such as brainstorming, launching a new team, celebrating a new win, or running design sprints.
- **Supercharge the Trust Battery:** Working in a hybrid environment requires trusting employees more than ever. This is critical for success. The trust battery is slow to charge yet quick to drain.
- **Virtual Friction is Healthy:** Teams that embrace tension, rather than run from it, are more successful. This is even truer in a remote environment. Promote transparency and encourage people to address conflict in the open.
- **Obsess Over Communication:** Employees usually do a lousy job of communicating in a physical space. Provide a well-written handbook that documents everything, providing a *single source of truth*. Instead of coming up with answers, look for answers in the system itself, saving time, neutralizing emotions, and reducing conflict.
- **Leave No One Behind:** Those who work remotely cannot be left out of crucial conversations. A hybrid work environment requires being more intentional about inclusion and equal participation.

Step 2: Reimagine a Shared Future

This step challenges the idea of alignment. Rather than having a vision imposed on them, team members want to be part of the process. Review how to reimagine a shared future with a team purpose to define clear priorities and expected behaviors.

Normally, we associate successful organizations with a strong product, technology, or leader, but it's the organizations with a strong sense of purpose—the ones that have created a shared future that includes everyone—that usually end up leading in their industries. In hybrid work, a clear purpose serves as a kind of North Star that keeps employees aligned in the service of a shared future, regardless of how distant they are from each other.

Priorities: Good > Good

Leadership is the art of making decisions. Saying “yes” is easy, but what we say “no” to defines our success, especially when we have to choose between two good things. Great leaders know when to make sacrifices to stay focused. Prioritization is all about making tough calls, especially when it requires favoring one good thing over another good thing.

And it is not limited to strategic business decisions, such as the product innovation pipeline. What you choose—or don't—is crucial to designing your workplace culture, too. Thriving workplace cultures have clear priorities. Successful company cultures are crystal clear about what's important to them; they know what to say “no” to. Prioritization is more than just focusing; it's about staying true to what an organization stands for.

Priorities in a Hybrid World

A hybrid working environment creates additional tensions between what individuals want and what's possible. Defining priorities in advance can help minimize conflict and simplify decision-making. Here are some examples of priorities that address common tensions affecting hybrid teams:

- Outcome, even over effort
- Personal needs, even over team preferences
- Team members' well-being, even over productivity

Step 3: Reignite Belonging

This step focuses on belonging; ensuring that team members feel safe enough to bring their full selves

to work, challenge the status quo, and come up with innovative ideas.

Belonging is a fundamental part of being human; we are social animals who need to be connected to others to thrive. Connection makes us feel safe, trusting, and collaborative. Leaders tend to underestimate the power of belonging. However, we know that strong personal connections build healthy teams. A strong organization is built on a foundation of human connection. People don't just want to be part of a team—they want to belong. Creating an environment that honors humanity, not just high performance, is vital for workplace success. This is even more important when employees are working remotely and can't rely on physical proximity to help them bond.

Am I Connected?

When you belong, you don't need to be a different person at work. You can speak freely without fearing retribution. You actually enjoy working with your colleagues. Work is not just a job, but an enjoyable experience. Intimacy, vulnerability, and contribution create belonging. Fortunately, belonging doesn't require physical proximity, just a different mindset. You can cultivate a sense of belonging that helps bridge the gap and bring people together despite the distance.

Psychological Safety Matters More than Ever

Psychological safety means that people can bring their full selves to work, speak out, and challenge the status quo without fear of retaliation. Simply put, it is the difference between silence and participation.

Unfortunately, according to Gallup, only 30% of employees strongly feel that their opinions count at work. This is bad news, not just for workers who don't feel comfortable expressing themselves, but for organizations that may not be making the most of their employees' talents.

Safety is not the opposite of risk-taking; it's a conduit to experimentation. A safe environment isn't simply about being “nice.” Diversity of perspectives, disagreement, and debate are key drivers of innovation. A safe culture makes it easier for quiet voices to speak up, increasing participation of introverts, women, and minority groups—the people who are interrupted or ignored the most.

Rituals Change Behavior (Really)

Rituals do more than create belonging. They are powerful because they create awareness of the mindset and behaviors that we want to change. Here are five key areas of opportu-

The key to building a thriving culture of collaboration is knowing when collaboration isn't necessary.

nities for developing team rituals:

1. **Get to Know Your Team Members:** build cohorts, ask each other questions, meet each other's loved ones.
2. **Celebrate Your Culture:** Recognize team members and strengthen bonds.
3. **Reinforce Positive Behaviors:** Acknowledge and reward employees for their work and efforts.
4. **Increase Belonging:** Do things together in particular ways such as building playlists, having contests, holding a virtual bonfire.
5. **Improve Virtual Collaboration:** Call out interrupters or intentionally design for work times that ban distractions, such as Slack or email.

Rituals are symbolic shared experiences that strengthen connections, communication, and a sense of belonging. Through repetition, they help reinforce desired beliefs and behaviors.

Step 4: Rethink Collaboration

This step is a deep dive into the six models of collaboration in a hybrid workplace. Review the different types, which to use when, and why teams must default to asynchronous communication.

For decades, business experts have glorified “collaboration” as a way for organizations to be more productive and innovative. However, there was never a lot of evidence that collaboration was the key to either innovation or productivity—and now there's even less. The push for hyper collaboration drains people. It creates collaboration burnout and may be just as likely to undermine performance as to enhance it.

The key to building a thriving culture of collaboration is knowing when collaboration isn't necessary. The traditional approach to collaboration is broken. We've been sold on the idea that collaboration is all or nothing and we've been programmed to think that collaboration only happens in real-time. There are many ways of working that don't require

collaborating with others synchronously or, for that matter, collaborating at all. To thrive in the new reality of work, you must rethink collaboration.

The Problem with Real-Time

Collaboration burnout was already a problem long before the pandemic started. The globalization and digitalization of the economy were forcing people to collaborate more, even outside their organizations, increasing the number of meetings, calls, emails, Slack messages—you name it. The result was collaboration overload.

The lack of clear boundaries to the day, like commuting to and from work, has made it more difficult to switch off. Prioritizing input over outcome is not helping either. When presenteeism and workload are success metrics, employees are afraid to step away. But just because you *can* always be on doesn't mean you *should* be. If you never take time to wind down, motivation, productivity, and creativity suffer.

Resolving the disconnect between employer expectations and worker needs, between the demands of the workplace and the realities of our personal lives, requires rethinking how teams collaborate and communicate in a hybrid workplace.

Balancing Synchronous and Asynchronous Work

Collaboration is what we want to *achieve* together—it unites us around a shared future—but it doesn't require that team members *work* together. Dividing and conquering a project is also a form of collaboration. Asynchronous communication adapts best to flexible schedules and relieves the pressure from having to respond immediately. Instead, people can respond at their own pace without interrupting their flow, creating a better collaboration across different time zones.

Six Modes of Collaboration for Distributed Teams

This framework unlocks the possibilities of a hybrid, non office-centric workplace and is based on two different axes:

- “Me Time” versus “We Time”—activities we do at our own pace and time versus those that we do together.

- “Deep Work” versus “Casual Work”—activities that require more concentration, quality time, and focus versus those that require less.

Work Mode 1: Focus Work

Status: Unavailable and unreachable

This is deep, heads-down work. Focus work encompasses tasks such as strategizing, planning, research, idea generation, or content creation. To produce the best work you’re capable of, commit to focus and do your job without distractions. The majority of your time should be allocated to doing deep work.

Work Mode 2: Deep Collaboration

Status: Unavailable and unreachable except for those who are part of the experience

This is similar to focus work but in a team setting. Unlike most meetings and team interactions, there’s no room for distractions and multitasking. Deep collaboration is vital to advance new ideas and projects—it’s the most complex, yet rewarding, type of collaboration.

The benefits of deep collaboration include fostering creativity, aligning team members, accelerating decision-making, increasing big-picture thinking, and integrating diverse perspectives. This type of collaboration works best in the same physical space.

Work Mode 3: Regular Collaboration

Status: Available at your own pace/discretion or within shared collaboration time.

Regular collaboration mode includes regular meetings, team huddles, and process and response—the work generated by work. In this mode, you are in continuous interaction with others, which drives the work forward. Regular collaboration is necessary, but if not carefully monitored, it can bog your team down in busywork.

This is an excellent opportunity to default to asynchronous collaboration. Let people respond at their own pace but set clear rules of engagement. Tell staff what the best medium is for which type of issue and the expected response time of each. One good option is to block out a standard time for collaboration, making it easier to prevent interruptions.

Work Mode 4: Learning

Status: Always open to learning; formal training must be scheduled.

This work mode is about acquiring new knowledge or skills via education, experience, or observation and may include mentorship, show and tell, experimentation, book clubs, and role-switching. It is vital for acquiring, transferring, and applying new ideas. Companies need to make space to encourage and reward learning, which can happen at both an individual and collective level.

Work Mode 5: Casual Collaboration

Status: Spontaneous availability—make it optional for people to participate.

This mode of work includes small, impromptu interactions that help build interpersonal relationships and spark new ideas. The benefits of serendipitous encounters are exaggerated—there is no evidence that they boost innovation. However, casual encounters play a significant role in most teams by strengthening bonds and shared values that enable trust and teamwork.

Work Mode 6: Unplugged

Status: Unavailable and unreachable

This mode of work is when your mind, brain, and body take a break. Working remotely has added to our anxieties, stresses, and workload, with burnout the frequent result. Relaxing, reflecting, and recharging are vital for creating the energy that allows us to tackle focus work and deep collaboration. Unplugging doesn’t just mean taking a break from work but making sure you’re disconnected from distractions such as email, chat, or social media.

Step 5: Release Agility

This step covers how to increase speed, adaptability, and decision-making. Examine how your team makes decisions, revisit norms and rules, and explore how to release agility.

Engagement alone doesn’t guarantee exceptional work—autonomy is actually more effective for driving innovative, groundbreaking behavior. Location of work is not the reason why people produce better results—choice is. Hybrid appears to be the model of choice. Not only do people report better results than in-office-only workers, but it also provides flexibility.

The benefit of schedule flexibility results in better life balance, reduced stress, and more convenience for caregivers. To succeed in a hybrid workplace, you need a culture of freedom and accountability. Creating this culture requires

getting rid of limiting rules and rethinking how decisions are made so teams can act faster and smarter.

Define Your Hybrid Work Model

There are five basic types of hybrid and remote work models. Each comes with its own pros and cons and there are implications when subscribing to a particular model.

1. **Remote-Friendly or “Office First”:** In an “office first” model, there may be some flexibility around working remotely, but employees are expected to spend most of their work time in the office. There are rules for which employees can work remotely on which days.
2. **Fixed Hybrid or “Buckets”:** The organization determines a set of categories in this scenario, and employees work according to the one they fall in. Leadership usually defines these buckets with little or no input from employees. The downside of this model is that some people have a lot of freedom and flexibility while others have none.
3. **Partly Remote or “Collaboration Days”:** In this setup, employees are expected to work on site the majority of the time but have the flexibility to work remotely a few days each week. Unlike the remote-friendly model, team members can choose the days they work remotely. The problem with this model is that it’s still office-centric. Although it provides more flexibility to teams, it’s based on the assumption that people need to be together to do great work. Most importantly, collaboration is structured around a schedule rather than a project or different modes of work.
4. **Flexible Hybrid or Flexible Schedule:** Employees can choose both their working hours and location in this model. It provides agency for teams to organize around work, integrating individual and collective preferences.
5. **Remote-First or Virtual-First:** In this model, remote work is the default mode for all employees. The company may retain office space for special occasions, such as events or design sprints, but all employees are expected to work remotely most of the time—and the leaders are, too.

The culture that got you here won’t get you into the future. Creating a strong workplace culture is not office-dependent. Your workplace culture is a collection of choices.

Make sure your decisions consider gains as well as pains. Include people in the process. Understand their expectations and needs, inviting them to come up with new ideas and solutions. Most importantly, remember that the more agency you give people, the more accountable they become.

Whatever model you end up choosing, keep one thing in mind: don’t erase all the progress made when your team was forced to work from home. Avoid the temptation to go back to normal simply for its own sake.



Gustavo Razzetti is the CEO and founder of Fearless Culture, a culture design consultancy that helps teams do the best work of their lives. For more than 20 years, Razzetti has helped leaders from Fortune 500s, startups, non-profits, and everything in between on every continent but Antarctica. Gustavo is also the creator of the Culture Design Canvas, a framework used by thousands of teams and organizations across the world to map, assess, and design their culture. In addition to his consulting work with clients, Gustavo regularly speaks with leaders and teams about culture change, teamwork, and hybrid workplaces.

Remote Not Distant: Design a Company Culture That Will Help You Thrive in a Hybrid Workplace by Gustavo Razzetti. Copyright © 2022 by Gustavo Razzetti. Summarized by permission of the author, Gustavo Razzetti. ISBN 978-0999097380. Published by Soundview Executive Book Summaries®. Copyright © 2022 by Soundview, Inc. All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or in part is prohibited. 4423