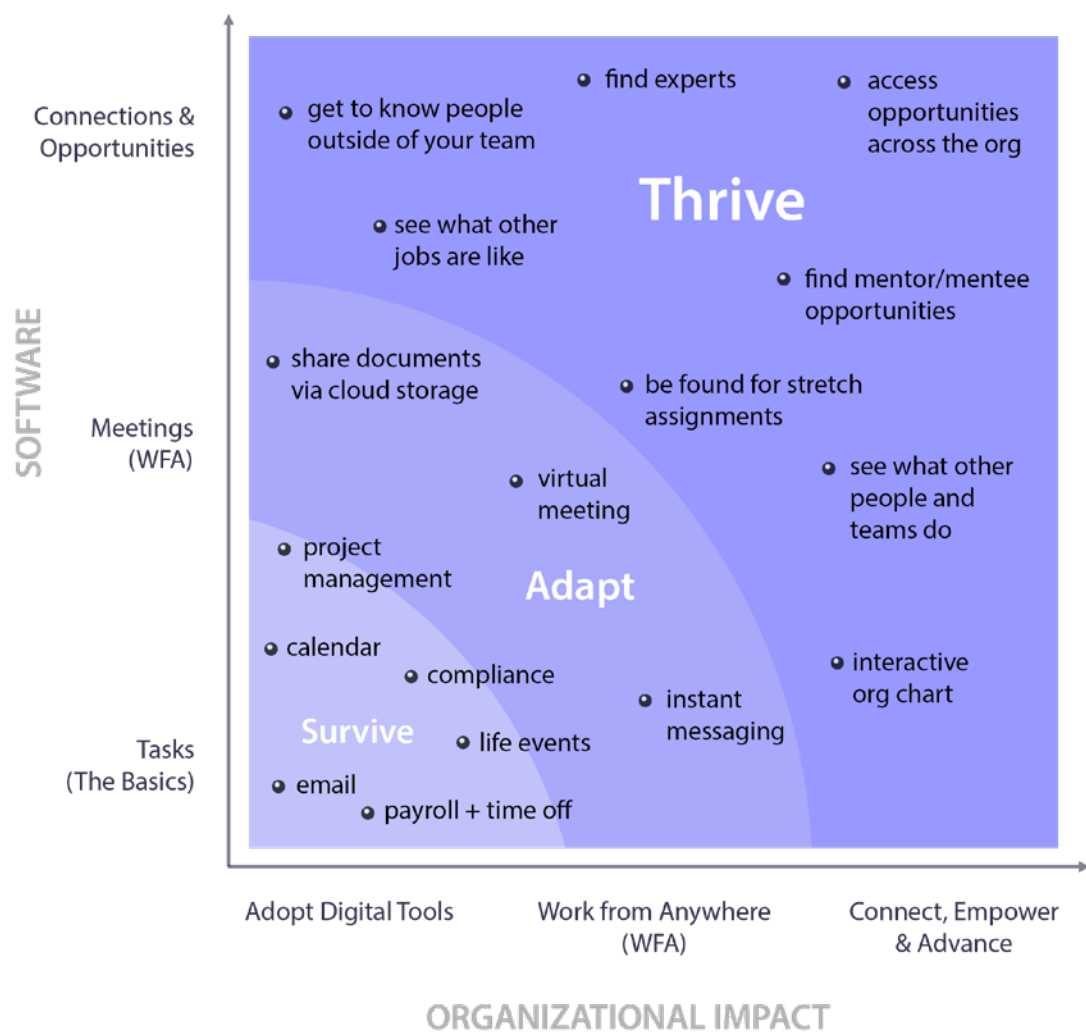# A Guide to Helping Employees Thrive in Hybrid Work

How People Software Can Help
Organizations Move From *Survive* to *Thrive*
in the Post-Pandemic Workplace

SOFTWARE

Connections & Opportunities

- find experts
- get to know people outside of your team
- access opportunities across the org

Thrive

- see what other jobs are like
- find mentor/mentee opportunities

Meetings (WFA)

- share documents via cloud storage
- be found for stretch assignments
- virtual meeting
- see what other people and teams do
- project management

Adapt

- calendar
- interactive org chart
- compliance
- instant messaging

Survive

Tasks (The Basics)

- life events
- email
- payroll + time off

Adopt Digital Tools | Work from Anywhere (WFA) | Connect, Empower & Advance

ORGANIZATIONAL IMPACT

Structural®

Contents

40% of the global workforce is planning to find a new job within the next year.

You've likely seen the headlines: Prepare for the "Great Resignation." Over and over again, the data is distressing: Microsoft's Work Trend Index for 2021 found that 40% of employees in 31 countries are considering leaving their current employer. A study from Prudential highlighted that over a quarter of US employees are considering leaving. And a survey from Achievers asserted that over 50% of employees are considering a new role.

But why the mass exodus?

As always, there are the common concerns around compensation and direct supervisor. What's surprising, though, are the trends around **connection and opportunity:**

01. During the pandemic and now in hybrid work environments, employees feel extremely connected to their core teams, but 45% feel disconnected from the broader organization. They are missing out on the experience of meeting people outside of their direct teams and feel less emotionally attached to the company.

02. 42% of workers planning to leave their employer give a grade of "C" or below on their employer's ability to maintain employee connectedness and culture during the pandemic.

03. Employees planning to leave feel stagnant or "languishing" from a lack of opportunity and growth. 26% of them want to try something new.

How you transition to hybrid work could have a profound impact on your organization: how will you create an environment where employees enjoy their work, feel valued and connected, see that they have real growth opportunities, and feel positive affinity to your organization?

That is to say, how will you create and sustain an environment in which employees, teams, and your culture will thrive?

Helping employees thrive in hybrid work

Here are three key areas to consider in your hybrid work environment:

01. The needs of the employee and the needs of the employer

02. Where your organization is on the people-technology maturity curve

03. The steps you will take to help employees and you (employer) thrive

How will you make a great place to work when the work environment is hybrid?

Transitioning to hybrid work, and retaining your high value employees, is a complex set of work that involves policies, physical office design, leadership involvement, and people software.

This guide focuses on *people software.*

Specifically, how can software help your organization keep up with the day-to-day needs of employees, empower them to do great work, and foster transparency and fairness in all the opportunities that are available to them?

The needs of the employee and the needs of the employer

A thriving work environment is a mix of activities and practices--no single initiative will scale to help employees enthusiastically engage with their work. Even substantial components, say having above-market pay or working for a great supervisor, are valuable to employees, but not enough on their own.

Instead, thriving requires a mix of mindsets, activities, and relationships that combine together to create a great place to work. Think about building "win-win" alignment that ties the needs of individual employees to the needs of the organization:

Creating win-win alignment between employee needs and employer needs

NEEDS OF THE EMPLOYEE	NEEDS OF THE EMPLOYER
Clear expectations and ability to be successful with daily responsibilities	Execution and financial results
Flexibility and autonomy	Physical and digital spaces that engage & promote productivity
Build genuine transparency and access to opportunities	Innovation and diversity of input
Connection and relationships	Employee agility and flexibility
Opportunities to grow	Retention and successful internal promotion

Thriving comes from an amalgam of factors. The Harvard Human Flourishing Program, an organization that studies and promotes human flourishing, finds that thriving comes more readily when "enough" in all of the critical life domains, rather than exceptional in some and deficient in others.

Similarly, organizations who want to attract and retain the best employees, and support thoughtful, enthusiastic productivity and value from those employees, must address all of the key employee needs listed above. Excluding any of these needs diminishes an employee's ability to thrive.
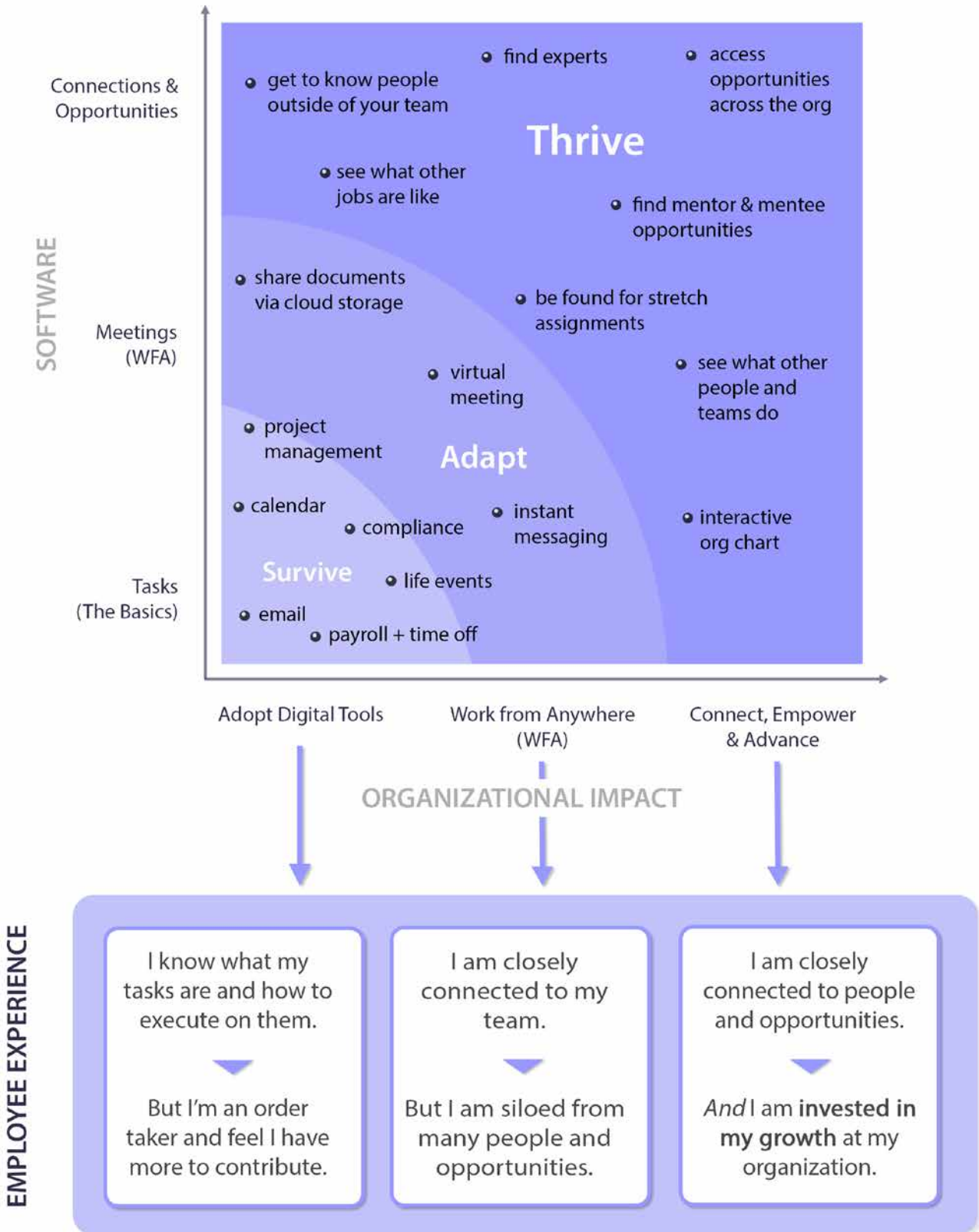
SECTION 2

Where is your organization on the people-tech maturity model?

We've seen employers mature through three phases in their people technology:

01. **SURVIVE:** Help employees know and complete their tasks

02. **ADAPT:** Enable employees to easily communicate and collaborate with colleagues.

03. **THRIVE:** Empower employees to expand relationships across the organization, grow their careers, and foster transparency and fairness in opportunities

The following maturity model tracks the progression from moving employees from "surviving" to "thriving."

What thriving looks and feels like for an employee in the maturity curve

Justina is a UX designer who was heavily recruited by multiple firms. She has a strong portfolio and gets an email from a recruiter most weeks. Let's see what her experience feels like in each phase:

Justina Harris
UX Designer

Survive

"I start the work day by checking emails. I know my tasks for the day and I know what I need to do. I mostly work with the same people. Sometimes, I feel like I'm just an order taker."

Adapt

"I have tons of meetings, I mostly work with the same people and we're connected all the time--we meet, we message each other throughout the day. I like my colleagues a lot and I love the collaboration. But, we feel like we are cogs in this giant company."

Thrive

"I feel like I'm part of something bigger. I enjoy my day-to-day work. I get to meet interesting people in other areas of the company. They are doing work that I've never even thought about. I see so much opportunity to grow here. On my at-home workdays, I like to answer questions about design for teams all over the world. I just started a jogging group with some of the people I've met, and I have a wonderful mentor who is helping me work on my influence skills."

Steps to create a thriving hybrid workplace

As you build more of the practices of thriving, you have three focus areas to consider:

NEW FOCUS AREAS	KEY QUESTIONS
Connect people and build relationships, across your organization	How will you help people broaden their networks inside your organization?
Build genuine transparency and access to opportunities.	How will you systematically, and fairly, broaden transparency and access to opportunities?
Be more proactive about the day-to-day mindsets and actions that define your cultural values	How will you foster and sustain the day-to-day mindsets and actions for a thriving hybrid work environment?

Connect people and build relationships across your organization

Building strong relationships across the organization helps drive innovation and diversity of thinking. As the Microsoft People Report says: *"Shrinking networks are endangering innovation."*

Employees have developed closer relationships with their direct colleagues, but the relationships with their broader network (say, people in other departments or business units) have languished. The people we spend most of our time with have similar information and often have similar perspectives informed by that shared information. A broader network of "second and third tier" colleagues help us see more opportunities, expand our perspectives, and think more innovatively.

Additionally, having broader relationships outside of your typical colleagues ("weak ties" as it's called in social psychology) "boosts happiness, knowledge, and sense of belonging". We feel less lonely, are less likely to languish, and have a broader set of perspectives when we regularly interface with people outside of our core teams.

These broader networks are the fuel for cross-pollinating ideas, driving innovation, and building more diverse organizations. Strong internal networks create a stronger loyalty and affinity to the employer.

How will you help people expand their networks inside your organization?

Consider two aspects here:

01. Help employees expand their internal networks based on common skills and interests. These are networks around professional practices, hobbies, causes, and groups for fun activities.

02. Help employees expand their internal networks through work collaboration and problem solving. These are related to finding experts (say expertise in specific skills or institutional knowledge) or working on organizational initiatives (say shared engineering resources).

Also consider *how* employees will build a broader internal network in a hybrid environment: Do employees have the ability to "self-serve" when they are looking for specific background or experience? Can employees be quickly and easily found for their expertise and skills? Do employees have access to information about colleagues' work and interests?

Finally, and this may be the most fundamental, how can you scale cross-organizational relationships in a way that is fair and inclusive, without creating a new burden of managing data and profiles for you or your employees? What can be automated or system-driven, on your organization's behalf?

How can you scale cross-organizational relationships in a way that is fair and inclusive, without creating a new burden of managing data and profiles for you or your employees?

Build genuine transparency and access to opportunities

Two of the biggest challenges to equity and human capital management are *transparency and access.*

Historically, access to networks and opportunities has centered around the people we spend most of our time with--these networks are inherently "exclusive" rather than "inclusive." The people we spend time with are key sources of information. This opaque "who you know" model exacerbates the lack of diversity in growth or leadership opportunities.

Organizations that actively promote transparency around work, opportunities, and information, create a more fair environment for everyone. This is critical to creating a sense of belonging for all employees.

Also consider what an "opportunity" means, beyond a new role or a stretch assignment. Plan for opportunities that build skills and cross-organizational relationships, beyond a person's day-to-day work responsibilities. It's especially helpful to include experiences enabling employees to partner, learn, and grow together.

Opportunities at work can be big or small

Opportunities can be as big as a new role:

01. Finding the next "level up" position or assignment

02. Finding lateral roles, or transitioning to a new functional area

They can last for a few weeks or a few months, such as:

01. Work groups to solve cross-organizational challenges, like creating a more inclusive onboarding process.

02. Targeted learning opportunities, like group coaching for new managers

03. Mentoring opportunities

And they can be include short and quick activities, like:

01. Asking for dry-run reviewers of a presentation

02. Looking for other UX designers to brainstorm in a co-design session

03. Requesting input for a technology architecture plan

04. Giving input on the brand voice for a new product line

Those smaller activities create a sense of agency and stretch in a person's everyday work experience, give employees working activities to build relationships across the organization, and build familiarity with more of the business.

How will you systematically, and fairly, broaden transparency and access to opportunities?

How will you bring more tangible inclusivity into professional growth at work?

Here are a few items to consider:

01. Ideally, you'll find a model to effectively scale opportunities so that the opportunities find people. That is, rather than who you know or who happens to be in the room at the time, instead, the opportunities proactively find employees who have the skills and interests to take on new challenges.

02. Don't limit "opportunity" management to only new roles or stretch assignments. Ensure that your definition of opportunity is broad enough to include small, helpful tasks (for example, "Looking for reviewers to give me feedback on my upcoming talk"), ad hoc working groups ("Want to help us identify digital transformation best practices?"), and information sharing ("Looking for guidance on developing a brand voice.").

03. And finally, include the types of opportunities that help employees bring a more authentic and fuller version of themselves to work, say volunteer events ("Sign up for a reading slot for International Literacy Day") or fundraising activities ("Let's get a group together for next month's 5K").

Be more proactive about the day-to-day mindsets and actions that define your cultural values

Although this is a longstanding challenge, it will become even more challenging with hybrid work. Which brings two additional considerations:

First, the risk of a two-tier status, where remote employees have less exposure because they are "out of sight, out of mind." Some of your best employees may be remote--either full-time or a few days a week. Their immediate teams see their contributions, but these employees have fewer chances for broader organizational exposure and advancement.

Secondly, organizational cultures risk shifting to "micro-climates" of culture. There are fewer opportunities to cross-pollinate the social norms of "what good looks like." The values most core to cultures, say empathy, bravery, and accountability, are left to individual teams. Additionally, toxicity can be more localized and less visible.

How will you foster and sustain the day-to-day mindsets and actions for a thriving hybrid work environment?

How will people see other teams *demonstrating*, in day-to-day actions, the company values and "what good looks like"?

As you evaluate your response, consider the following:

01. Creating shared moments and celebrations for milestones

02. Highlighting *daily* successes and progress, including kudos and "shout outs." Celebrating "small wins" is key to sustaining momentum and intrinsic motivation.

03. Encourage employees to highlight their peers' successes. There's a difference here between *highlighting others' successes* (cultivating the comradery that comes from recognizing and spotlighting a colleague's work) and *highlighting my own successes* (which leans toward self-promotion). Both are important, but you want to deliberately encourage the norm of spotlighting others.

04. Making these moments of gratitude and celebration a normal, regular part of people's work days.

You want to deliberately encourage the norm of spotlighting others and highlighting their successes.

Where to go from here

We've found that, over the last 18 months, most organizations successfully adapted to the everyone-at-home work environment. Teams found a way to actively collaborate with each other and support high levels of productivity. That's good. But in that shift, teams also became more isolated. Employees lost the chance-encounters that created new workplace connections and built strong organizational networks. They also lost the chance to learn about opportunities from their networks.

In parallel, the job market has shifted: Employees have more choice about where they work, and what they do, than they've had in decades. Knowledge workers know they are in a high-demand market. Their expectations are high.

What you do next matters.

The good news is that organizations have a window of time to get ahead of the impending "Great Resignation." A thriving work culture takes, well, work. In large organizations, where scale matters, it can be supported by tools that foster the norms you want to see in your new normal.

As you consider software that helps your organization build a thriving hybrid work environment, at scale, keep in mind the idea of addressing all the key employee needs, rather than excelling at some, and not addressing others.

Making hybrid work, successful, may be one of the biggest challenges of your organization's history. And of your career. We hope this guide has clarified some of the key needs to promote workplace thriving.

ABOUT STRUCTURAL

Structural is trusted by enterprises to automatically create and maintain data rich employee profiles for everyone in an organization. These profiles are the foundation of an opportunity marketplace where people can make connections to colleagues and to opportunities to contribute, learn, and advance where they work. Organizations using Structural improve productivity and reduce turnover by breaking down silos, promoting inclusivity, unlocking opportunity and making work better for everyone.
Learn more at: **www.structural.com**