



Getting to grips with the new reality of work

Insights from Smartsheet's Leadership Roundtable on adapting to the future of work in Australia

Produced in collaboration with Michael McQueen



When COVID-19 first hit, businesses were faced with an unprecedented crisis. While responses to the virus varied across the world, most organisations were forced to restructure in order to survive. Now, almost two years later, it is clear that the future of work is already here. As we move towards a reality in which we must learn to live with COVID-19, both employee and employer expectations have changed and businesses that have not adapted to the new ways of working risk being left behind.

Organisations that have successfully navigated the pandemic understand there is no 'back to normal' and have completely changed their strategic vision and objectives. Innovative leaders are leveraging the benefits of hybrid and remote working as well as empowering a productive and flexible workforce. **74% of Australians** now favour a hybrid working model, with a mix of face-to-face and remote working. Adding to this, **61% of Australians** believe this model is the most productive. To deal with this shift and ensure a smooth transition, employers are now working to establish a different set of priorities that accommodate the nature of the hybrid work space.

The biggest challenge is planning for the future in a way that allows businesses to remain competitive in their respective industries and establish long-term success. However, there is no one-size-fits-all approach. While there are clear necessities, the situation for each business is unique and those differences need to be factored in while planning for the future.

Recently, we brought together experts and business leaders in Australia and New Zealand to discuss getting to grips with the new reality of work. With keynote speaker Michael McQueen, bestselling author, presenter and TV and radio commentator, the roundtable event focused on how the pandemic accelerated certain changes that had been on the horizon for a while and how businesses can best factor this into their strategic vision. The discussion also highlighted how there's a need to rethink times of upheaval as opportunities instead of threats. This whitepaper summarises the key findings of the event.

Challenges of the hybrid model:

The pandemic has brought with it many disruptions which require organisations to rethink and restructure. According to Michael McQueen, it's these four key areas which require the most strategic vision for organisations to adapt to the 'new normal'.

Catching culture

Over the past two years, culture has been at the centre of any and every conversation about the future of the workplace. However, while it's easy for leaders to establish policies and guidelines on paper, it's the interactions, collaboration, and personalities intersecting which truly create and cement the company culture. Culture also determines many other aspects of what make an organisation successful. According to research produced by Smartsheet in collaboration with 451 Research, [41% of Australian employees](#) believe that improving culture and engagement is important to be able to innovate in the coming year. As workplaces shift to either hybrid or fully-remote, it's inevitable that organisations are left thinking about how they can build this intangible element in the new working environment. McQueen summed up the dilemma accurately during the roundtable event when he said that the main problem is that "culture is caught not taught" and that has become particularly difficult to do when teams are scattered.

Collaboration

Collaboration is the foundation for effective teamwork, management, and everything in between. It's this very element which allows members of organisations to work together to find the most innovative and effective solutions. However, the hybrid model has shed light on the fact that organisations need to greatly invest in resources and opportunities for their teams to collaborate or they will be left behind. Like all other aspects of the workplace, the pandemic has forced us to rethink how to create opportunities for greater collaboration and make sure that it happens smoothly. [79% of Australian workers](#) surveyed by Smartsheet believe greater collaboration is needed to effectively adjust to changes over the coming years. This becomes especially challenging as team members have fewer opportunities to interact with each other. Lack of familiarity with people and their personalities makes it difficult to encourage collaboration.

Attracting and retaining talent

Workforce talent is a huge determinant in innovation and the quality of service provided by an organisation. However, from the point of view of employers, there have been concerning trends in the past two years which can undermine their hiring and retaining of talent. One of them is the 'Great Resignation', which has been headlining across global and Australian news landscapes. An astounding [40% of the surveyed global workforce](#) is considering resigning due to extreme burnout. This coupled with the fact that Australia is facing a grave shortage of skilled workers creates an extremely alarming situation for employers. [43% of Australian](#) organisations indicated that they have experienced difficulty finding and retaining skilled labour. These factors are adding additional pressure to the challenges of transitioning to a hybrid model. Organisations realise that they must create a system which accommodates their employees or they risk losing valuable members.

The generational gap

When it comes to ways of working, there's often a perceived disparity between the younger and older generation. The younger generations are seen as digital natives, in sync with all the latest happenings in the world of tech, while the older generation is seen to struggle with tech advancements. So when the pandemic revealed that younger employees were finding it difficult to deal with technology during this time, it was extremely unexpected. Smartsheet research found that **61% of Generation Z** felt the amount of time spent on video calls daily made it hard to get work done. Comparatively, only 26% of Baby Boomers said the same, illustrating a gap between the older and younger segments of the workforce. This is just one aspect that sheds light on the gap between older and younger segments of the workforce, it is evident that there's an issue that must be addressed when grappling with the future of working.

Getting a grip

The pandemic has drastically changed expectations. Smartsheet's research found that **40% Australian employees** believe the strategic vision and guidance from company leadership needs to change in the coming year to better face disruptions. It's important to highlight the word 'vision', as that's precisely what will determine how new systems of work are set up and how culture and collaboration are fostered. So how can employers get to grips with the new way of working? Here are some of the solutions Michael McQueen and the Smartsheet team put forward during the event:

1

In many ways, the pandemic acted as a catalyst for changing the way we operate, allowing us to advance tremendously. One aspect of this is technological advancement. McQueen gave the example of the QR code; while always having great potential, it was during the pandemic that the usefulness of this technology was truly appreciated. This simple example underlines the idea that challenges often present opportunities for change. Once the mindset shifts from fear to optimism, it's easier to navigate the complexities and avail the chances presented for positive developments. Another important change has been how talent is found and hired. Hybrid work has transformed the traditional hiring model, where employers are no longer constrained by borders. Working with teams scattered across locations is made possible with tools like Smartsheet, which serve as a single source of truth for teams. Allowing all employees to easily access information in one place enables collaboration over distance.

2

Culture and collaboration can be built through innovative technology. **Over half (52%) of Australian businesses** surveyed said they'll increase spending on collaboration, communication, and productivity technologies. Organisations need to leverage these new technologies to establish team-building exercises which allow employees to connect at a deeper level. The idea of 'coffee roulette' has become popular, where employees are randomly matched for regular coffee meetings with all levels of people across the organisation. This provides a new space for the traditional 'water cooler' conversation and gives employees a chance to learn more about each other beyond work. Building these connections is integral to forming a culture where employees feel like they're a part of a community and are supported.

3

With hybrid working making technology essential for communication, it's important for organisations to integrate tools which make sense for this new reality. According to research by **Fast Company**, for every age bracket above 30, email was the top option for when they considered a communication tool. This changes dramatically when responses from those under 30 were received where they were more accustomed to collaboration apps and tools. This gives insight into 'generation gaps' with tech exhaustion. It's important that organisations use tools, including collaborative management platforms like Smartsheet, that offer visibility across all activities while improving workflow, communication and helping to close the generational gap.

Changing expectations



One of the sentiments that echoed during the event's question-and-answer session was the difficulty employers were facing when keeping up with employee expectations. Employers feel like they have to cater to each employee's individual needs. The pressure of doing so is exacerbated by the conversation of 'The 'Great Resignation'.

It's important to acknowledge that expectations will continue to evolve until we reach the shores of predictability. The focus right now should be on building sustainable workplace practices so that organisations are resilient in the face of future disruptions. According to Microsoft's research, 54% of workers feel overworked and 39% feel exhausted. Despite the hybrid model allowing greater flexibility, employees are spending greater amounts of time in meetings and calls compared to when working in the office pre-pandemic, resulting in tech fatigue. These are key human concerns of employees that need to be addressed in order to make sure that team members are not burnt-out, which will inevitably impact innovation and motivation in the workplace.

Using the right technology is necessary in order to match all these evolving needs. According to a study by PWC, [87% of high-performing projects use project management software](#). Leaders should choose a solution that helps coordinate efforts and best manage resources, provide visibility, offer context around goals, and serve as a single source of truth. Smartsheet is a



platform that aligns corporate performance management, project management, business intelligence, key systems of record and communications tools, and surfaces the right data to the right decision-makers in real time. It seamlessly integrates into existing systems which makes this transition into a hybrid workplace easier.

Australian businesses are transforming rapidly to restructure their workplaces into hybrid work spaces. During this transformation, it's important to keep the individuals as the focus. This means that understanding the need for community, culture, communication, and collaboration is necessary for a healthy workforce. These elements are also necessary to make sure that businesses foster creativity and innovation through their ranks to offer the best services to their customers.

It's important to acknowledge that the pandemic has been a time of many challenges. However, these challenges have presented opportunities for restructuring and growth. It's important that organisations take advantage of these opportunities to build more resilient workforces for the future.

If you're interested in finding out more about improving collaboration and building your new future of work, reach out to set up a call with the Smartsheet team.

