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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

S K Cheong
President
Asian Association of Management Organizations

This issue presents two sides of the same critical coin: how we adapt our people and leadership strategies for a transformed world.

Our first piece by Prof Dr Tunza Mohd Riduan on **"The Future of Work: Leading in a Hybrid and Digital World"**, focussing on the Malaysian context, explores the great digital shift to hybrid work. It rightly identifies this model as the future, but also warns of its hidden perils—from technological hurdles to employee burnout and managerial bias. The promise is immense, but the pitfalls are real.

Which leads us directly to our second article by our AAMO member, Mr Sam Bell at the Institute of Managers and Leaders Australia and New Zealand (IML ANZ) on **"How Strong Leadership Improves Workplace Productivity"**. It posits that Australia's productivity crisis is, at its heart, a leadership crisis. As the author compellingly argues, we are working more hours but not smarter, and the missing link is capable leadership. This is the crucial lens through which we must view the challenges of the hybrid model. The "managerial direction" and "bias" warned of in the first article are the very symptoms of the leadership gap described in the second.

Together, these pieces make a powerful case: the new world of work demands a new calibre of leadership. Technology provides the platform, but it is leaders who build the culture of clarity, trust, and accountability that allows teams—whether in-office, remote, or hybrid—to truly thrive.

As this concludes my final issue as President of AAMO coming from The Hong Kong Management Association, I wish to express my profound gratitude. Serving AAMO for these past three years has been an immense privilege. Thank you to our dedicated readers for your ongoing engagement, and to the brilliant authors and contributors whose insights, like those in this issue, continually enrich our discourse. I have every confidence that under the incoming leadership of Mr Raymond Bao from the Macau Management Association, AAMO will reach even greater heights. I pass the baton with my fullest support and extend my warmest wishes for their success.

Happy reading!

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Malaysia
Malaysian Institute of Management

THE FUTURE OF WORK: LEADING IN A HYBRID AND DIGITAL WORLD

BY PROF DR TUNZA MOHD RIDUAN
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Abstract:
In response to the epidemic, the business landscape is shifting towards digital transformation, and this shift has an effect on organisations. As a result, HR professionals, who play a crucial role in this shift, are under constant pressure to virtualise project completion, maximise efficiency in the workplace, and implement creative solutions to stay ahead of the competition. A result of this is the idea of a hybrid workforce, whose members split their time between working in an office setting and doing remote work. Because it allows employees more control over their schedules while also boosting productivity for companies, the hybrid workforce model is quickly becoming the preferred choice of both employees and company executives. From the point of view of Malaysian organisations, digital transformation is the bedrock of the new hybrid work model, which places a heavy emphasis on cutting operational costs, fostering collaboration, providing employees with new technology training, constantly connecting with remote employees virtually, and monitoring their work from both the office and their homes. However, there are a number of downsides to the hybrid model that should be considered. These include, but are not limited to, the following: inadequate managerial direction; manager bias towards office-based personnel; cyber security; technological hurdles; and employee burnout. This research seeks to comprehend the hybrid work model as a contemporary digital transition in relation to the efficient management of an organization's personnel. The researchers have set out to shed light on the hybrid workforce model and how it is being used effectively by organisations worldwide, taking into account the rapid development and widespread adoption of the model. Additionally, the study implies that this model is highly useful in the modern workplace and will likely find widespread use in the not-too-distant future, provided that Malaysian organisations prioritise developing a suitable leadership culture and holding on to their top personnel.

Keywords: Digital transformation, Hybrid workforce, Productivity, Employee satisfaction, Collaboration, Retention, Advanced tools, COVID-19.

Introduction:

As the economy begins to recover, competition is heating up, and the global epidemic has ushered in new possibilities and difficulties for nearly every sector. The winning teams will be the ones that work together to define the problem, brainstorm potential solutions, build a prototype, test and refine their ideas, and eventually launch their products. Only when employees collaborate in today's workplaces will such actions be taken. The corporations were compelled to reconsider their long-term business plans and reorganise their priorities in order to adapt to the new way of working a few months into the pandemic. With more employees working remotely than ever before, cutting-edge technologies were used to keep operations running smoothly. Organisations are embracing hybrid work models, which provide employees more flexibility in dividing their time between remote work and office collaboration, in order to thrive in the post-pandemic environment. A concept that dates back to the industrial revolution is the idea of a workplace, where employees congregate to execute their tasks. Staff morale rises when they are given more leeway to set their own schedules, which means they aren't tied to 9 to 5. Productivity increased by 36% of employees whose work-from-home time had grown since January 2020, according to organisations' 2021 digital employee experience survey.

The biggest impact that hybrid work arrangements could have on Malaysian output would be on the employees themselves. Furthermore, effective teams rely on collaboration, which might be affected when one or more team members work remotely. Improving one's digital competence is crucial for increasing one's distant productivity. Continual lateral mentoring and training between personnel to make sure that no one falls behind when it comes to technology expertise. Organisations recently reported that while 30% of staff were working remotely before the COVID-19 pandemic, business leaders anticipated that number to increase to 50% following the outbreak. But, 78% of employees would be open to working remotely, even if it's just part-time. According to Microsoft's latest Work Trend Index survey, more than 40% of the world's workforce is contemplating leaving their positions this year. A hybrid work environment, according to the same survey, will be the silver lining; this model is becoming more important for recruiting and retaining employees, particularly those from varied backgrounds. The Importance of Researching Hybrid Workforces It has been called "The world's largest work from home experiment," and it took place in 2020, when a worldwide pandemic began, forcing many knowledge employees to go digital.

As digital technology became the major means by which a large number of employees could stay connected and productive, the slow transition to remote work systems picked up speed. Working remotely, or more likely a combination of remote and office work, is not going anywhere, at least not anytime soon. Hybrid work arrangements will facilitate greater job satisfaction, the adoption of new work models, and productivity in Malaysian organisations as a whole, thanks to the pandemic's acceleration of digital transformation. In order to accommodate a more dispersed workforce, accommodate new employee expectations, implement flexible work practices, and equip employees to address business challenges through collaboration, creativity,

and innovation, companies are rewiring their processes to accommodate hybrid workforces. Employee engagement is enhanced as a result of all of these elements, which contribute to increased productivity and flexibility for employees. Nearly nine out of ten executives in Western European companies (88%) want to use a hybrid approach to work in the future. Organisations in Malaysia can incorporate any of the three most consistent approaches into their work culture: the remote-first model, the occasional-office model, and the office-preferred remote-allowed model.

Literature review:

[In] The future of work: the hybrid workplace - Kanwar Sergey Yevgenievich Barykin, Farooq Khalid, and Muhammad Javed Iqbal (July 2021), there was a fair amount of crisis for organisations with the entrance of COVID-19. Stakeholders restructured the work system, and new policies and standards were adopted regarding social distancing and lockdowns. As a result, many businesses have begun to embrace the remote work paradigm, which combines traditional office hours with online resources. As a precaution against a pandemic, the hybrid approach gained widespread support. Most companies across the globe have embraced the hybrid workplace model, which has gained popularity as a result of technological advancements. Benefiting both the company and its employees, the hybrid work structure allows for more leeway in how and when employees complete tasks, which boosts morale and, in turn, production and innovation. What employees like Andrea Alexander, Aaron De Smet, Meredith Langstaff, and Dan Ravid have to say regarding the future of remote work (April 2021) In light of the substantial productivity gains experienced during the epidemic, many companies are preparing for the future by implementing a hybrid virtual model.

The remote work system has enhanced productivity, but it has also caused anxiety, worry, and burnout among many employees. Employees are worried because their employers have made plans for their employment after COVID-19 without providing them with clear information about what they may expect and how to handle certain situations. worry reduces workplace happiness, decreases work efficiency and performance, and hampers interpersonal ties with coemployees. Unless leaders address the origins of employee worry, pandemic-style productivity improvements will prove unsustainable in the future. Even if the plans are still in the early stages of development, the report recommends that employers keep their employees informed through more frequent communication. Mitrofanova, EA, Konovalova, VG, and Mitrofanova, AE (2018) discuss the pros, cons, and opportunities of HRMs going digital. Implications of AI and other digital technologies for human resource management are the primary foci of the research. The digital workforce refers to the adoption of new management techniques and practical skills that help establish new network organisations; the digital workplace refers to the redesign of the workplace that leads to the use of modern communication tools and improved performance; and digital HR management refers to the use of digital tools and applications for experimentation and innovative solutions. The study found that the complexity of digitising HR management operations, the existence of constraints on digitisation, and the lack of preparation for HR personnel to use

digital technologies in practice are the main issues with applying digital technologies in domestic practice. According to the research, achieving digital transformation in HR management requires societal shifts.

Research methodology:
Given the descriptive character of the research, a quantitative methodology based on survey questionnaires and a perspective on Malaysian random sampling will be employed. This essay aims to examine the growing trend of hybrid work systems in Malaysian organisations and determine the actual efficacy of digital transformation in this context. In an effort to shed light on the emergent practice of hybrid models, it seeks to show how organisations are actively working to implement them. Employees' and management's perspectives on the hybrid work model are also briefly discussed. Additionally, it delves into the pros and cons of the model in relation to Malaysian organisations and their personnel.

Results and discussion:
Keep in mind that this change in thinking has been simmering for quite some time. The epidemic hastened the digital change that has been laying the groundwork for a technologically superior future. A gradual shift towards a hybrid future is one such metamorphosis. With the impending arrival of the hybrid workmodel upon us, the question arises: "how can one optimise their technology stack to facilitate the future of hybrid work?" The requirements of on-site, remote, and hybrid employees should be reassessed as more and more businesses reopen their doors to the public. In order to integrate new digital solutions into a digital workplace that is always evolving, organisations need to assess their current technology stack and identify any gaps. Modern solutions, such as essential tools for distant communication, collaboration, and technology, are required for the future of work. "Bricks, bytes and behaviours" are the first two components of a new workplace paradigm. Bytes outlines a digital workplace that aligns with connecting people and behaviour, simplifies the top-down flow of important information, and takes the physical workplace into account as part of any strategy to reinvent the digital workplace.

Physical Return to Work Reimagined (PRWR) found that three quarters of businesses are planning to update their digital tools for the workplace either significantly or somewhat. Designing the digital workplace around the needs of the end user is essential for producing high-quality digital experiences. Additionally, in light of the increasing number of cyber security incidents, it is critical to construct a safe digital workplace. Machines equipped with intelligence that is particularly "humane" will soon be able to handle problems and find solutions more efficiently while humans focus on more meaningful work. Work and organisations are undergoing profound changes due to the fast development of digital technologies such smart technology, automation, cloud computing, internet of things (IoT), artificial intelligence (AI), and smart technology. People are worried about how new technologies may affect workplaces or even replace people completely due to the rapid
and massive technological development that is currently taking place, which is referred to as the fourth industrial revolution or Industry 4.0.

Table 1 : Benefits and Ill Effects of Model in Context with Organization and Employees	
Pros	**Cons**
• Increased productivity and engaged employees	• Harder to collaborate with remote employees
• Minimized operations cost	• Faster employee burnout
• Improved retention rates, bigger talent pools	• Cyber and operational security
• Improved company culture, more efficient workplaces and transparency	• Difficulty in maintaining organizational culture due to remoteworking

Hybrid workplaces require new guiding principles—"The Convenient, enjoyable and meaningful"—to direct all employees. Wages aren't everything today; if companies want to entice and keep the best employees, they need to provide perks. Facilitate a better work-life balance for your employees by making them more adaptable. The new normal is a combination of cubicle and round-the-corner conference infrastructure, which avoids slowing down. Having said that, with the correct management technology—like video conferencing, texting, and collaboration apps— anything is possible. Hybrid work software has helped many companies fix problems that were preventing employees from being productive and has opened up new avenues of communication among employees. For a workforce to be productive, work coordination is key. Management is equipped with the necessary instruments to enhance organisational productivity through hybrid work software. This hybrid work model and some HR management software: Human resources professionals can use employee performance management software, which includes tools for setting and monitoring objectives and important results, to keep tabs on employees' progress towards goals, provide feedback on how they're doing, and ultimately, boost productivity. • Smart sheets encourage teamwork by centralising tasks and organising employees' work around them. Intranet programs like Powell Software make it easier for staff members to communicate and collaborate remotely. • Digital adoption platforms like Walkme and other training software like ezTalks Cloud meeting help teach staff members new skills or conduct lessons. Even though just 25% of corporate meetings will still be held in person by 2024, the video footprint will continue to grow in every company as employees become accustomed to using it.

Companies and organisations can improve productivity by changing the structure of their personnel. When a leader inspires their team to match their expertise with the right resources, productivity soars. Employee happiness and adaptability are the two main drivers of hybrid work structure benefits. Nevertheless, in order for team members to be successful with the model, workforces need encourage appropriate management, communication, and collaboration. A digital employee experience survey conducted by the organisation in 2021 indicated that productivity increased by 36% among employees whose work-from-home had been boosted since January 2020. In working hours, the top mentioned element enabling increased productivity, according to Whit Andrews, distinguished research vice-president at Organisations (43% of respondents). Andrews elaborates by saying that a lot of people have experienced the freedom that comes with working remotely, thus it will play a significant role in recruiting new talent. Indeed, among Malaysian SMEs, 69% of employees indicated they would be open to exploring a new position that permits them to work remotely, and 64% indicated they would be interested in a position that allows for flexible hours.

Almost half of all working people are open to trading some of their income for more leeway in how and when they get their jobs done (Mom Corps). Furthermore, 82% of business owners intend to permit remote work from time to time (Organisations). The study also revealed that a significant portion of Generation Z is leaning towards a hybrid work style, with 74% of this generation expressing a preference for either working remotely or combining their home and work responsibilities (Salesforce). Organisations among Malaysian employees of small and medium- sized enterprises (SMEs) found that, when implemented correctly, hybrid work programs reduced weariness by 44%, increased intent to stay by 45%, and improved performance by 28%.

Conclusion:

The results of the aforementioned research indicate that the hybrid workforce model will be around for a while. Employees in a hybrid workplace may be required to do some or all of their job from the comfort of their own homes. The capabilities of an office setting can only be fully realised if employees have access to top-notch collaboration tools. Changing from a standard work system to a hybrid work model relies heavily on retaining adaptable talent, which is difficult to come by. Employees count on their supervisors to supply them with the necessary resources. In conclusion, when it comes to hybrid work policies, the following must be prioritised: create a design that is centred around people, adapt to the specifics of the task at hand, and use deliberate planning to influence teamwork. On the flip side, you should stay away from things like: making judgements without data, thinking innovation can only happen in cubicles, and applying blanket regulations that don't take into account the specifics of each given project.

About the Author:

Prof Dr Tunza Mohd Riduan is a Malaysian and International academic lecturer who is recognized for his extensive efforts in human capital development, especially with vulnerable and underserved populations. He is also known for his dedication to community, social, and welfare.

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India
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HOW STRONG LEADERSHIP IMPROVES WORKPLACE PRODUCTIVITY

BY MR SAM BELL CPMGR FIML CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, INSTITUTE OF MANAGERS AND LEADERS AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND

People don't leave organisations – they leave managers. But the inverse is also true. That is, people stay, grow and perform when they're led well. A good leader is an invaluable asset to an organisation.

In fact, it's the relationship between leadership and performance that sits at the heart of Australia's broader productivity problem.

Productivity is falling, despite longer hours

The latest figures from the Australian Bureau of Statistics confirm what many of us already know: productivity growth has stalled. In fact, it's been in steady decline since 2017.

This is no small issue. Productivity is what drives national prosperity. When productivity rises, so do wages, economic output and living standards. When it falls, as it has in recent years, we see rising inequality, fiscal pressures on government and greater strain on households – all hallmarks of the cost of living crisis we're now living through. Some might assume this productivity drop is due to Australians working fewer hours. But this isn't the case. According to the Productivity Commission, Australians are working 6.9% more hours than before, yet productivity has dropped by 3.7%. We're working harder, but not smarter.

The missing link: leadership capability

From my perspective, the overlooked answer is leadership. Leadership is the engine of sustained performance and continuous improvement. And right now, too many engines are stalling.

Let me be clear: this isn't just a corporate problem. It's a national one. Australia's economic future depends on reversing the productivity slump – and leadership capability is one of the most effective levers we can pull.

In the workplace, it's not a ping pong table or a kombucha tap that inspires high performance – it's clarity, motivation, trust and accountability. These are all outcomes of good leadership. If people know what's expected of them, feel supported by their manager and see how their work contributes to something bigger, they're more likely to bring their best to the table.

On the flipside, poor leadership can erode engagement and stunt productivity. This is especially true in today's hybrid work environment. During COVID, many leaders were thrown into managing remote teams without any preparation. The watercooler conversations were gone, replaced by days filled with video calls and emails. Without the right leadership tools – clear communication, structured delegation, mutual accountability – the cracks showed. Productivity has been the victim of this.

We can't assume someone who excels in their technical role will automatically make a great leader. Yet too often, that's exactly what we do. We promote the high-performing accountant or engineer into a management role and only realise later that they're sinking under the weight of the task of managing and leading their team.

Hybrid isn't the problem

There's been a lot of noise about whether hybrid work is to blame. With strong leadership, hybrid teams can be just as productive – in some cases, more so. The Productivity Commission has recently released research supporting this claim. In their analysis of productivity before and after the COVID pandemic, they found that hybrid work arrangements offer elements that may help to boost productivity. These elements include minimising distractions, reducing sick days and increasing worker satisfaction.

This is not to say that hybrid work is the answer to productivity. Successful hybrid working arrangements rely on strong leaders. So too does productivity.

Sustained performance and continuous improvement

When we invest in leadership – early and intentionally – we build capability before the moment of need. We prepare people for the challenges ahead, not just react to crises as they unfold. This is how we build strong benches of future leaders. And this is how we lift productivity – by creating conditions where sustained performance and continuous improvement are possible.

It's worth noting that the skills most in demand in today's organisations – strategic thinking, clear communication, delegation, accountability – are fundamentally human and deeply rooted in leadership. They're not skills that AI will replace any time soon. But they are skills that require cultivation.

Are we investing enough in leadership?

At the Institute of Managers and Leaders, we are still seeing a strong investment in leadership. But this investment is not growing sufficiently to match the scale of today's leadership challenges. Many businesses continue to prioritise technical skills, but without the leadership layer, even the most technically brilliant teams will underperform. Worse, poor leadership leads to attrition – often of your best people.

The NSW Productivity Commissioner, Peter Achterstraat AM FIML, is a strong advocate of what he calls "leveraged productivity".

"By increasing the skills of one technician, a business might be able to increase that person's output by 10 percent," he explains. "But by increasing the skills of that technician's manager, a business might be able to increase the firm's output by 100 percent".

And this matters. Because the impact of good leadership isn't just felt within teams or businesses. It ripples outward. Engaged, motivated workers contribute to stronger organisations. Stronger organisations drive economic growth. And economic growth lifts the standard of living for all Australians.

"A highly effective manager can build a culture and environment where all staff, even the most productive workers, can achieve even more and can experience greater fulfilment in doing so," adds Achterstraat.

Leadership is a national productivity issue

We need to elevate this conversation beyond HR and L&D. Leadership capability is not a nice-to-have. It's a national imperative.

Let's stop thinking of leadership development as a perk or a soft skill. It's one of the most powerful tools we have to revive productivity, re-engage our workforce and rebuild a stronger, more equitable economy. And it starts not with another day of technical training, but with a clear-eyed commitment to investing in the people who lead.

Ready to lead the productivity shift?
At the Institute of Managers and Leaders, we believe leadership is the lever that drives real change. If you're ready to build stronger, more capable managers in your organisation or develop your leadership skills, explore our range of practical, high-impact leadership courses today.
View our leading management and leadership courses here.

About the Author:
Mr Sam Bell is a seasoned management professional with more than 15 years of leadership experience across the financial services, education, and professional association sectors. He holds an undergraduate degree in economics and postgraduate qualifications, including a Master of Business Administration (MBA) and a Master of Public Policy.

Sam is the Chief Executive Officer and Executive Director of the Institute of Managers and Leaders Australia and New Zealand (IML ANZ), where he has led the organisation's strategic direction and operations as part of the executive team for the past three years. He is a Certified Practising Manager (CPMgr) with IML ANZ and a Graduate of the Australian Institute of Company Directors (GAICD).

Throughout his career, Sam has demonstrated a strong commitment to leadership and capability development. He is passionate about the role that effective management and leadership play in delivering positive outcomes for individuals, organisations, and broader communities. His work is underpinned by a belief in the importance of continuous improvement and lifelong learning.

Mr Sam Bell CPMgr FIML Chief Executive Officer and Executive Director, Institute of Managers and Leaders Australia and New Zealand (IML ANZ)

About AAMO:
AAMO is a partnership of National Management Organisations (NMO) whose purpose is to share and actively leverage resources to enhance the achievement of their respective missions. AAMO is an independent, nonpolitical and not-for-profit Association of NMOs, which promotes, facilitates and supports the development of professional management in the Asia Pacific Region.

The current 8 members of AAMO are Australia and New Zealand, Hong Kong, India, Macau, Malaysia, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

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