

# Transitioning through COVID: an HR professional's toolkit

45-minute presentation with 15 minutes of Q&A

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CEO & Founder, Howatt HR

# Dr. Bill Howatt Ph.D., ED.d., Post Doc UCLA



## 30+ Years of experience



Co-creator Mental Fitness Index (MFI)



Co-creator Psychologically Health and Safe Facilitator Certification



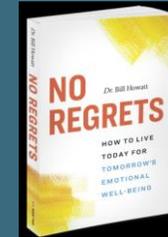
Contributor



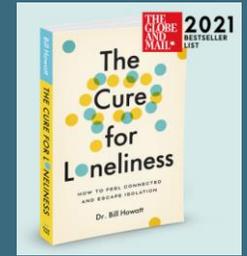
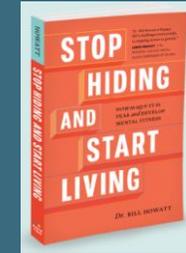
Certificate Psychologically Safe Leadership

Certified Management Essentials (CME)

Mental Fitness and Pathway to Coping



Coming soon



Author of over 500 articles and over 50 books  
Audiobook: The Cure for Loneliness

### Founder and CEO

Howatt HR

[www.howatthr.com](http://www.howatthr.com)

[www.billhowatt.com](http://www.billhowatt.com)

#### Roles:

- CSA OHS Standards Steering Committee Member
- Chair of CSA Standard Z1008: Management of Substance Related Impairment in the Workplace.
- Co-creator Psychologically Safe Workplace Awards
- Former Chief Research Workforce Productivity, CBOC
- Former Chief of Research and Development, Life Works
- Co-creator Globe and Mail Employee Recommended Workplace Award

#### Workplace Research:

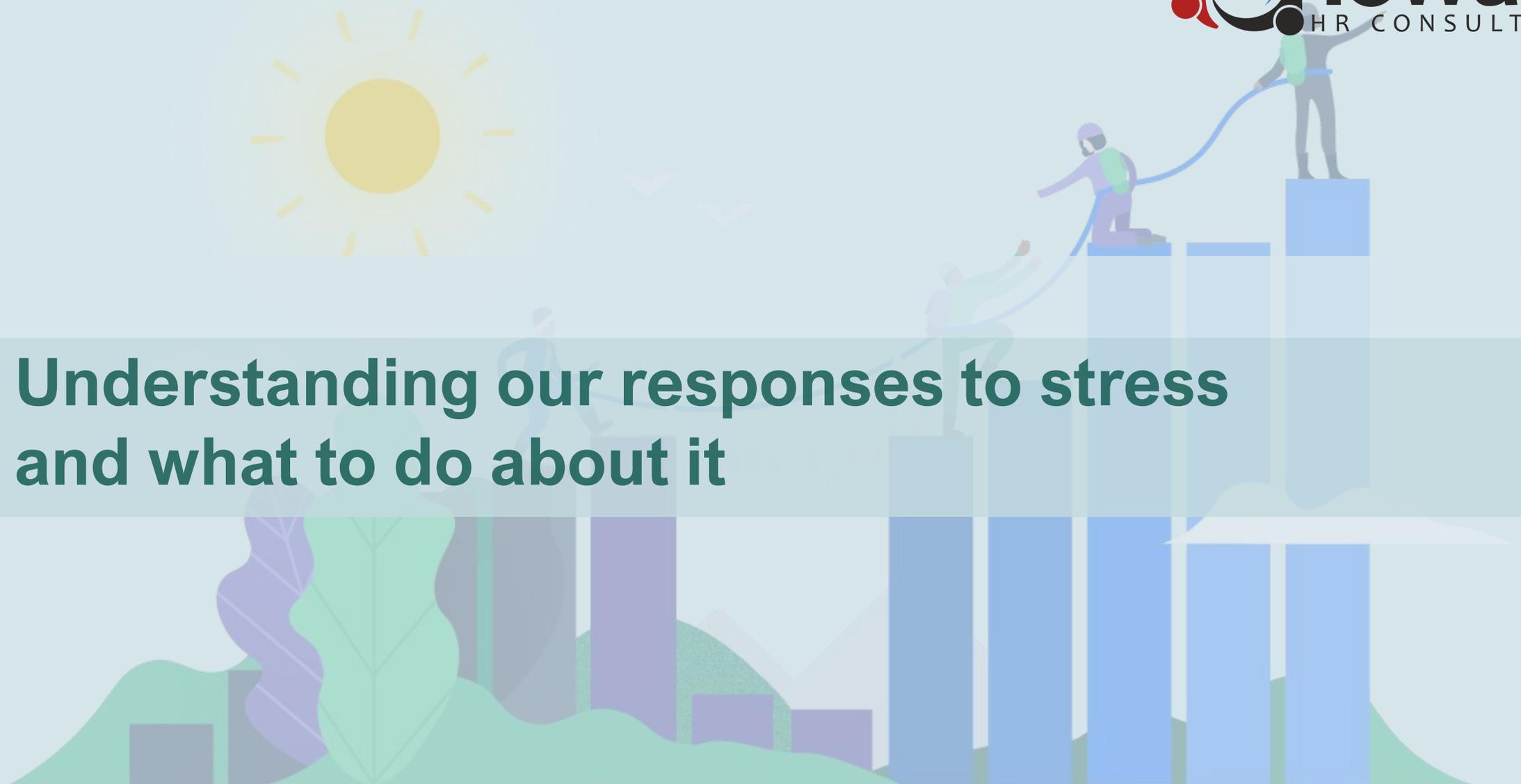
- Canada Pandemic Pulse Check: COVID-19's Impact on Canadians' Mental Health with the Mental Health Commission of Canada
- Moving to Action: Implementing the Workplace Safety & Prevention Services' Mental Harm Prevention Roadmap
- Canada Standards Association Investigating employers' practices in response to COVID-19 for safeguarding employees' psychological health and safety in the workplace.

# Learning Objectives

- ❑ **Insights** – Providing insights into how we respond under stress.
- ❑ **Understanding** – How we can recharge to support ourselves and others.
- ❑ **Managing** – Managing burnout and instilling hope for the future
- ❑ **Supporting** – Assisting leaders with difficult conversations



**Goal:** Provide insights on the brain, how we respond and how to recharge. While also showcasing what the future world of work will look like and what steps should be taken to succeed.

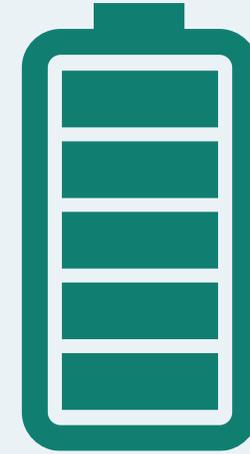
The background illustration depicts a series of blue vertical bars of increasing height from left to right, resembling a bar chart. Several stylized human figures are shown climbing these bars, with ropes connecting them, symbolizing teamwork and overcoming challenges. In the upper left, there is a bright yellow sun with rays and two white birds in flight. The bottom of the image features a stylized landscape with green hills, purple and green trees, and a white umbrella on the right side.

# Understanding our responses to stress and what to do about it

# Caveman brain vs. executive brain



- Paleomammalian brain
- Built for survival
- Functions automatically and unconsciously

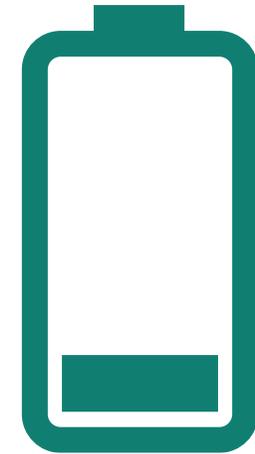


- Frontal lobe
- Controls behavior
- Like a battery

# Our brains dealing with COVID-19



Our caveman brain's  
are on fire.



Our frontal lobe  
battery is empty.

# “Pandemic brain” is a real thing

 **Concentration**

 **Memory**

 **Attention**

 **Problem solving**

 **Decision making**

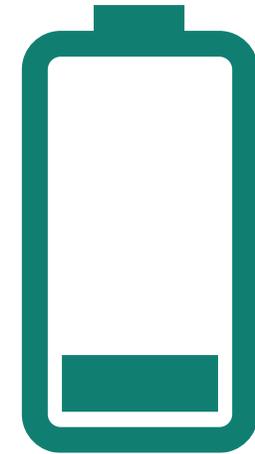


Stress impairs

# Return to office anxiety



Caveman brain's don't forget threats.



"I know" vs "I still feel"

# Recharging activities



Individual differences  
Notice what makes you smile.

# Charge your battery first!



Put on your own  
oxygen mask  
before helping  
those around you.

The background illustration depicts a series of blue vertical bars of increasing height, resembling a bar chart. Several stylized human figures are shown climbing the bars, connected by a blue rope. One figure is at the top of the tallest bar, another is on the second tallest, and others are on the lower bars. The scene is set against a light blue sky with a bright yellow sun and two white birds. The foreground shows green hills and stylized trees in shades of green and purple.

# Managing burnout and instilling hope for the future

# Languishing

**sense of stagnation and  
emptiness**

**joyless, aimless**

**stuck**



# Burnout

**Emotional exhaustion**

**Cynicism**

**Reduced efficacy**



**The antidote to  
burnout isn't rest.**

# The antidote to burnout isn't rest.

Re-igniting a sense of meaning and purpose.

Reconnecting

Re-integrating our experiences

Recharge



# Re-igniting Meaning and Purpose - Values



**What is your heart's deepest desire for how you want to behave as a human being?**



**What kind of person do you want to be?**



**What or who really matters?**

# Exploring your values during the crisis

What do I want to stand for during this crisis?

What kind of leader do I want to be?

How do I want to look after my physical and emotional health?

How would I want to be remembered after this crisis is over?



# Values become our compass

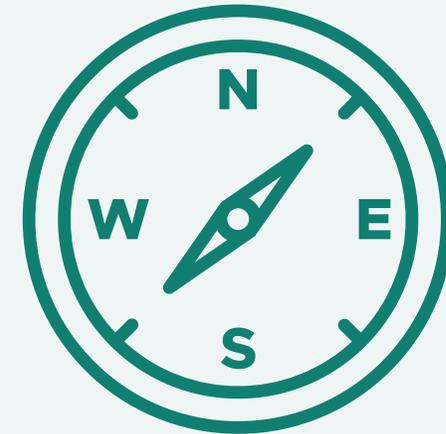


In uncertainty, we can use values to guide our decisions.

Life decisions

Pandemic decisions

Motivate difficult behaviours  
(return to office)



# Values are expressed through behaviour



# Integrating our experiences

Living through this will impact us,  
what do you want to take from it?

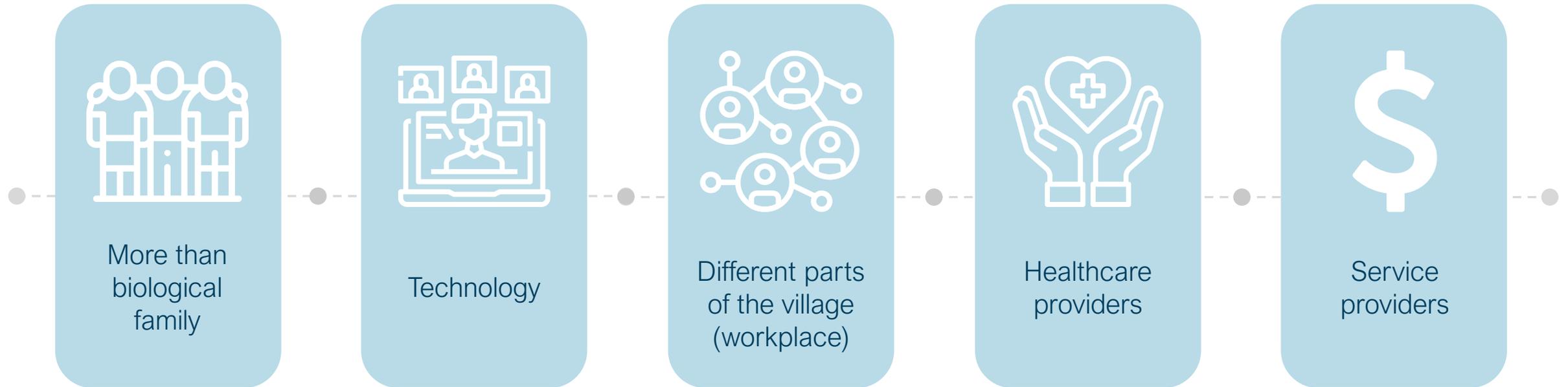
Plan for a future (values not goals).

What has the pandemic taught you  
is really important?

Recognize values expression might  
“look” different.



# Reconnecting: invest in your village



Don't solve problems alone: Use your village

The background is a light blue isometric illustration of a modern office. It features several white floating platforms on a grid floor. On the left, a grey building with a white antenna on top is visible. Various office scenes are depicted: a person standing at a desk with a monitor, a person sitting at a desk with a laptop, a person standing by a desk with a laptop and a tablet, a person sitting at a desk with a laptop, a person sitting at a desk with a laptop, and a person sitting on a chair with a small table and a potted plant. The overall aesthetic is clean and professional.

# Supporting leaders: Having difficult conversations

# Organizational causes of burnout

- Unsustainable workloads
- Perceived lack of control (employees feel like they are stuck in their roles; or that they have no input into the company's deadlines, strategic goals, or project timelines)
- Insufficient rewards for effort
- Lack of a supporting community
- Lack of fairness (for example, systemic inequities affecting women and racial minorities)
- Mismatched values and skills (i.e. overqualified workers who feel lucky to have a job at all during the economic recession linked to the pandemic)

# Google's Aristotle Project

This research project examined what makes effective teams

Team effectiveness was measured by

- Executive evaluation
- Team leader evaluation
- Team member evaluation
- Sales performance against quarterly quota

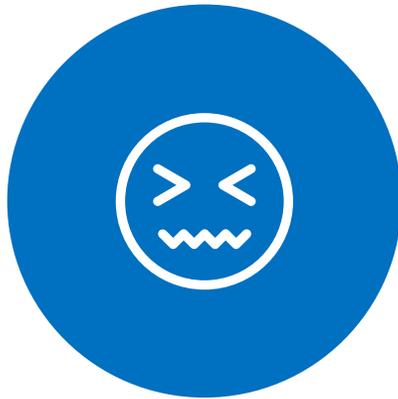


The key finding was it is less about who is on the team and more about how the team works together.

## Five Factors that most influenced team effectiveness



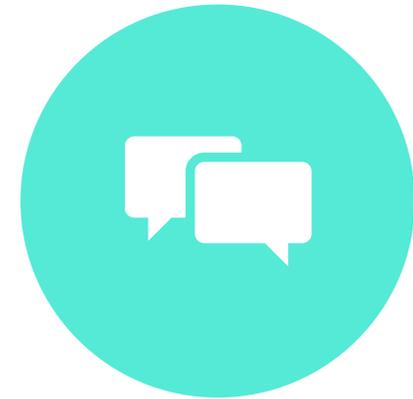
# Psychological safety



**IT'S OKAY TO NOT  
BE OKAY**

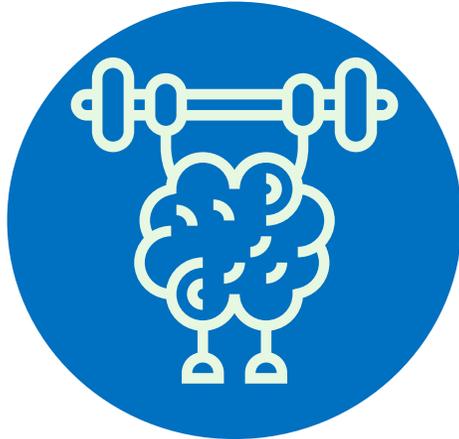


**IT'S OKAY TO MAKE  
MISTAKES**



**IT'S OKAY TO SPEAK  
UP/DISAGREE**

# Role as a people leader



Role Model  
Behaviours

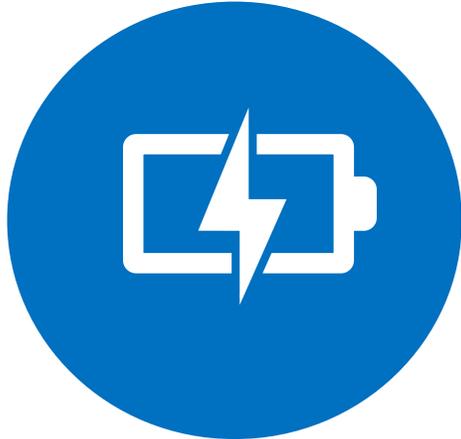


Recognize Signs



Duty to Inquire

# Role model behaviours



Charge your  
battery first



Share your  
common humanity  
(e.g., if the decision  
is above you)



Listen rather than  
problem solve

# Recognize the signs

## Intrapersonal Signs

- Isolation from others
- Absent or late more frequently
- Conflict with coworkers
- Missed deadlines
- Loss of confidence
- Feelings of being overwhelmed
- Reduced ability to concentrate

## Interpersonal Signs

- Avoidance
- Uncharacteristic behaviours
- Irritability
- Pessimism
- Withdrawal or reduced participation
- Difficulty making decisions



**Focus on CHANGE in BEHAVIOURS**

# Duty to Inquire



Normalize the discussion



Know your role



Validate. Period.



Empower employees

# How can we apply this to managing hybrid workforce



The hybrid working model is a location-flexible arrangement, allowing employees to combine onsite and offsite work as they and their employers see fit.



The four basic variants of a hybrid arrangement are:

At-will

Split-week

Shift work

Week by week

# Current trends in employees working remotely and in hybrid models

- ▶ 26 million Americans – 16% of **total workforce** now work remotely
- ▶ 42% of 1,000 UK-based employees are working according to a **hybrid** framework
- ▶ 63% of Canadians are **enjoying** their current work-from-home arrangement
- ▶ 48% of those working from **home only** felt they were productive.\*



# Benefits of hybrid models

Hybrid work arrangements increased **job satisfaction**, **performance**, and **feelings of commitment** to an organization. Employees also felt **less work stress** or exhaustion.



# Risks of hybrid models

Those working remotely also faced **social isolation**, fewer opportunities for information sharing and **blurred lines** between work and personal life.



# Hybrid model



Normalize the discussion



Build a village



Fairness in opportunity (work processes at any locations)



Empower employees





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*Thank you!*