



## OVERCOME THE MYTH OF THE LOSS OF 5 Cs BY BUILDING THE RIGHT FLEX INFRASTRUCTURE

There is little doubt that flex is here to stay post-pandemic, given employees' strong desire for it to continue, along with the business benefits of flex, including employee productivity/engagement, business continuity and retention/recruiting which became even more apparent during COVID-19. Our [Pulse Poll: Future of Work](#) shows that more than two-thirds of respondents plan on creating/updating their remote work policies post-pandemic.

Despite the fact that more organizations will be expanding flexible work, we have heard resistance to flex from a number of leaders through our conversations, insight interviews and focus groups with many organizations. Interestingly, the opposition to flex can be summed up as the fear of the loss of 5 Cs - loss of control, culture, collaboration, contribution and connection. While the loss of the 5 Cs can most certainly occur without proper flex infrastructure and support, organizations can prevent the loss of the 5Cs and also counter arguments against flex by building proper structures and processes. For flex to be successful, we need to gain leadership support, and we can win leaders over by pointing to infrastructure that prevents the loss of the 5 Cs.

We will go through each of the 5 Cs and what types of structures/processes can help prevent their loss:

1. **Loss of Control.** How will we prevent employees from taking things too far, like never coming into the office, doing meetings from home that should be done in-person, or being too distracted at home to fully focus? Leaders have voiced this concern many times. First, the Alliance recommends that all organizations have a written flex policy, with explicit parameters, limits and guidelines. Organizations should clearly communicate what types of flexibility are offered (remote working, reduced hours, asynchronous schedules, job sharing or compressed work weeks) and establish a standard process for approving flexible working proposals. We also urge all organizations to create trainings around individual strategies for flex success and ways to manage flexible teams – this way, you can reinforce parameters/limits, and provide specific ways to succeed in a flexible work environment. We also suggest putting a system in place to monitor your flex program by checking-in with flex employees and supervisors at the one month, three month and six month mark in the first year, and then annually thereafter – this way, you can address situations in which flex arrangements are not working well.

2. **Loss of Culture.** How will comradery and culture continue in a virtual environment? We have heard this concern from many executives. While coworkers may not see each other every day in a hybrid or virtual working environment, it is possible to maintain culture through a combination of virtual and in-person gatherings. The Alliance recommends that firms and companies begin by defining what culture means to their individual organization and then develop creative solutions to maintaining that culture. Many organizations have been able to maintain culture during the pandemic by leveraging virtual experiences, like virtual meetings, town halls, team-building exercises and social functions. It's important to take this opportunity to be creative and design and implement flexibility that enriches an organization's culture.
  
3. **Loss of Collaboration.** How will employees and teams work together effectively if they are not physically together? The key to maintaining collaboration is consistent communication. It's important that those working in the office are held to the same standards as those working remotely to avoid any kind of flex stigma. Collaborating virtually is certainly a skill, but it is a necessary one to master as a professional. In fact, clients and team members have not always been in the same room when working together even before the pandemic. We recommend offering virtual collaboration tools – i.e. availability trackers; virtual white boarding applications, and virtual meeting applications. Some leaders have incorporated virtual office hours to encourage more frequent collaboration. These tools can help you work together effectively in a virtual or hybrid environment. In addition, we suggest training employees on these virtual collaboration tools so they can leverage them as much as possible.
  
4. **Loss of Contribution.** How will we know if our employees are really working if we cannot see them? We have heard this concern voiced many times from leaders. The reality is that we do not know if our employees are working simply by them being in the office. We recommend instituting a project management system, through which team members can update project deadlines, deliverables and progress – by tracking projects, supervisors can assign/shift work, as needed. Additionally, organizations need to create a feedback system through which immediate feedback can be collected on employees – this way, any individual performance issue can be addressed immediately. It's important to evaluate employees by the quality of their work as defined by performance objectives rather than the number of hours they spend in the office.
  
5. **Loss of Connection.** How will employees connect with each other and build relationships in a virtual environment? The concern of lost “water-cooler moments” has been raised by many executives. While we need to be more intentional about connecting virtually, it can be done and it can be done well. In fact, a number of

leaders commented how they have been able to connect with clients more through video meetings during the pandemic compared to phone calls before. We recommend creating mentoring/integration programs that connect virtually (i.e. budgets for virtual lunches/coffees; on-line programming) and instituting regular department meetings via video to foster connections. In addition, we recommend that organizations intentionally create in-person connections through regular (i.e. monthly or quarterly) in-person office/group meetings, large conference space to foster in-person meetings when employees are in the office, and intentional scheduling of in-person days (i.e. rotating schedule; certain departments have designated days to come into the office, etc.).

The Alliance is here to help you build flex infrastructure to support your flex program and counter resistance to flex. Members have access to several Alliance resources as part of their benefits: the [Resource Library](#), [Strategy Calls](#), [Policy Reviews](#), [Advisory Hours](#) and [Signature Seminars](#). Take a look at our action step, [Leverage Alliance Benefits](#), which discusses ways to partner with us and most effectively utilize your benefits. To discuss specific strategic advice/resources regarding your flexible work policy post-pandemic, contact [Manar Morales](#).