



EXECUTIVE IDEA EXCHANGE

Prescribed Presence in the Workplace

July 2024

The Association of Professional Executives of the Public Service of Canada (APEX) is dedicated to understanding and amplifying the voice of executives. The *APEX: Executive Idea Exchange (EIE)* brings executives together to share successes, opportunities, aspirations, and results to improve the world of the executive leader and bring greater innovation and productivity to government operations, and program and service delivery for Canada.

In June 2024, four small groups, from EX1 to EX3, participated in a facilitated *EIE* appreciative inquiry¹ session. Through qualitative analysis, their most prominent and innovative ideas are presented here to support organizations across the federal public service and their respective hybrid journey.

Opportunities

Senior leaders across the Government of Canada have been invested since [February 2022](#) to shift the federal public service to a hybrid culture from the temporary workforce measures put in place in March 2020 in response to Covid-19.

With the [May 1st updates](#) to the [Direction on prescribed presence in the workplace](#), executives have strived to support a hybrid culture within their organizations. Given their experience, they have identified opportunities to strengthen the effectiveness in hybrid work in relation to space, communication and engagement, sense of community (personal and human connection), management and culture, and monitoring and measurement.

Space – Improving Usage

Space within workplaces is seen as a key contributor for effective and productive hybrid work environments and in building a sense of community.

Accessible and available spaces have been well established in some organizations; however, in others they have been repeatedly identified as a barrier to support executives and their employees' requiring accommodations. In some organizations, prescribed presence in the workplace has clarified the formal process or capitalized on existing efficient duty to accommodate procedures. Yet in others, executives experience long wait times leaving them unable to support employees and accommodate them accordingly. In addition, changes or construction within workplaces have had unintentional impacts on employees, especially those with visible and nonvisible disabilities, and should be considered accordingly.

Neighbourhoods are predetermined or scheduled locations associated to a branch, directorate, or team and support an increased sense of belonging when employees are in proximity to those with whom they work. Neighbourhoods ensure executives and their teams can work effectively together without being randomly distributed across multiple floors or even locations within the same geographical work area. Neighbourhoods improve executives' ability to manage and support collaboration within and amongst teams. Executives also noted the need for adequate meeting rooms for sensitive conversations as well as the use of various zones to support quiet and collaborative work. They suggested considering why certain spaces are more popular and which factors would increase use of lower occupancy areas. Executives also noted opportunities to further consider GBA+ space requirements within organizations (e.g. gender-neutral bathrooms, prayer spaces).

¹ [Appreciative inquiry is a positive approach to leadership development and organizational change.](#)



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An anchor day is a common day where team members work from the office – ideally from their designated neighbourhood location. Non-anchor days allow executives and their teams flexibility of location of work (e.g., GC coworking space or other organizational location). These anchor and flex days have been effective to empower executives to manage work schedules while building team cohesion for those on-site.

Reservation systems are implemented in many organizations and yet enhancements (e.g. reserving multiple spaces for team(s) to work in proximity during anchor days, repeat bookings) could better support executives and their team(s).

Communication and Engagement

Enhanced communications from within organizations and across government could support a more coordinated, transparent, and timely execution of the directive.

Managed change could strengthen organizational support through approaches that involve executives and employees. This may include the monitoring, implementation and evolution of the hybrid workplace through a structured engagement approach (e.g., an employee engagement committee) to strengthen and promote understanding, increase responsiveness, and lead to further organizational and government successes.

“It is important to encourage others to let go of their shyness and get in the habit of greeting people and introducing ourselves. Chances are these days you will sit next to someone new at least once every couple of weeks; by introducing ourselves and greeting people, we can lead by example and create community in our workspaces”

- Participant APEX: Executive Idea Exchange

Considerations for regional employees and employees who worked onsite throughout the pandemic are often not reflected in communications (e.g., recognition of a different experience). However, increasing inclusive language within communications could bridge this gap and clarify their role and how it contributes to the hybrid workplace.

Sense of Community - Personal and Human Connection

Intentionality is required to evolve from a world of back-to-back video meetings to a more effective hybrid approach that capitalizes on being together in person. Building a sense of community within and across teams brings opportunities for new approaches and executives need to be equipped with tools and training to foster and sustain these human connections both in-person and in conjunction with virtual team members.

Evolve work and culture to create space and connect purposefully with people to improve mindfulness and engagement with others and contribute to producing better outcomes. Executives have an opportunity to lead by example and influence the organizational climate by promoting new ways of working with broader teams and colleagues – including going back to basics, like introducing oneself to different work colleagues in different spaces upon arrival. In addition, executives have a need to clarify expectations of teams and themselves (e.g. multi-tasking, instantaneous communications, in-person meeting requirements, being always on, office expectations and etiquette). In the absence of evolving our culture, employees may continue to perpetuate the thinking that they “might as well be working remotely”.



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Create team building opportunities and connect with others. Executives see this as a priority after spending multiple years working from home without seeing colleagues in person. Given the previous remote culture, we need to reinforce the importance of and the need to consistently have personal interactions that allow us to support each other as a team and as individuals. These things can be as small as going for a coffee together on an anchor day to larger events like recognizing a project milestone.

Management and Culture

There is a need to adapt management approaches and how we work to support virtual employees and those employees on-site through intentional day-to-day approaches. Some executives feel they had more flexibility prior to the pandemic than they do today where they seemingly had more flexibility to give people the opportunity to work from home occasionally, if/as needed. Identifying opportunities to increase flexibility, autonomy and agency while adhering to prescribed presence direction will be important to evolving and meeting cultural expectations.

Take a goals approach to establishing expectations to provide executives the flexibility to work within their context (e.g. mandate, space, delivery of work, and location considerations) while supporting organizational commitments and the management of their employees. A goals approach would directly support executives' attainment and measurement of success (see Monitoring and Measurement below).

Communicate plans and including executives within approaches to strengthen their ability to support employees and teams in the understanding and achievement of organizational goals.

Change the focus from a remote work culture of multi-tasking and instantaneous communication to a productive hybrid culture that creates engagements with intention and purpose while leveraging workplace presence. In accordance with the organizational context, consider too the benefits of common time blocks to support deep focus during teleworking days and minimize scheduling competitions to empower executives with more flexibility, autonomy, and agency.

Logistical impacts for regional participation should be at the forefront of the evolution of hybrid (e.g., time zones where a 9 am EST meetings may be easier to attend at 6 am PST from home vs in office) and where possible time block meetings involving participants outside of the NCR accordingly (e.g., afternoon meetings) to allow consideration of employees from coast-to-coast.

Monitoring and Measurement

Establish a shared view of success and create the associated key performance indicators while identifying existing information sources and approaches to addressing any gaps. This will strengthen trust within the organizational climate and remove the sentiment of "being monitored" or being the monitor.

Moving Forward

Executives are committed to their organizations and teams and are engaged to support the direction of prescribed presence in the workplace. The ideas provided herein may be applicable across multiple organizations and the approaches to realize these may be at varying degrees of implementation. APEX believes by increasing the exchange of ideas amongst executives, there will be an increased attainment of the desired outcomes. If you would like to continue the conversation and share your organizational or teams' success, opportunities, aspirations or results, please reach out to us at EWHS-ETSCS@apex.gc.ca.