

Innovative Concepts for Working Together in a Post-Pandemic World



An Executive White Paper By: CEO Health + Safety Leadership Network | Written by Heather West, Fresh Communications | Fall 2023

“A lot of folks have felt that the nature of the post-COVID-19 period and economic shock mean that we can go back to the old way on the talent value proposition. I think that’s a mistake. The world is moving and adapting, and companies need to adapt with it.”

— Liz Segal Hilton
Chief Client Officer, McKinsey & Company

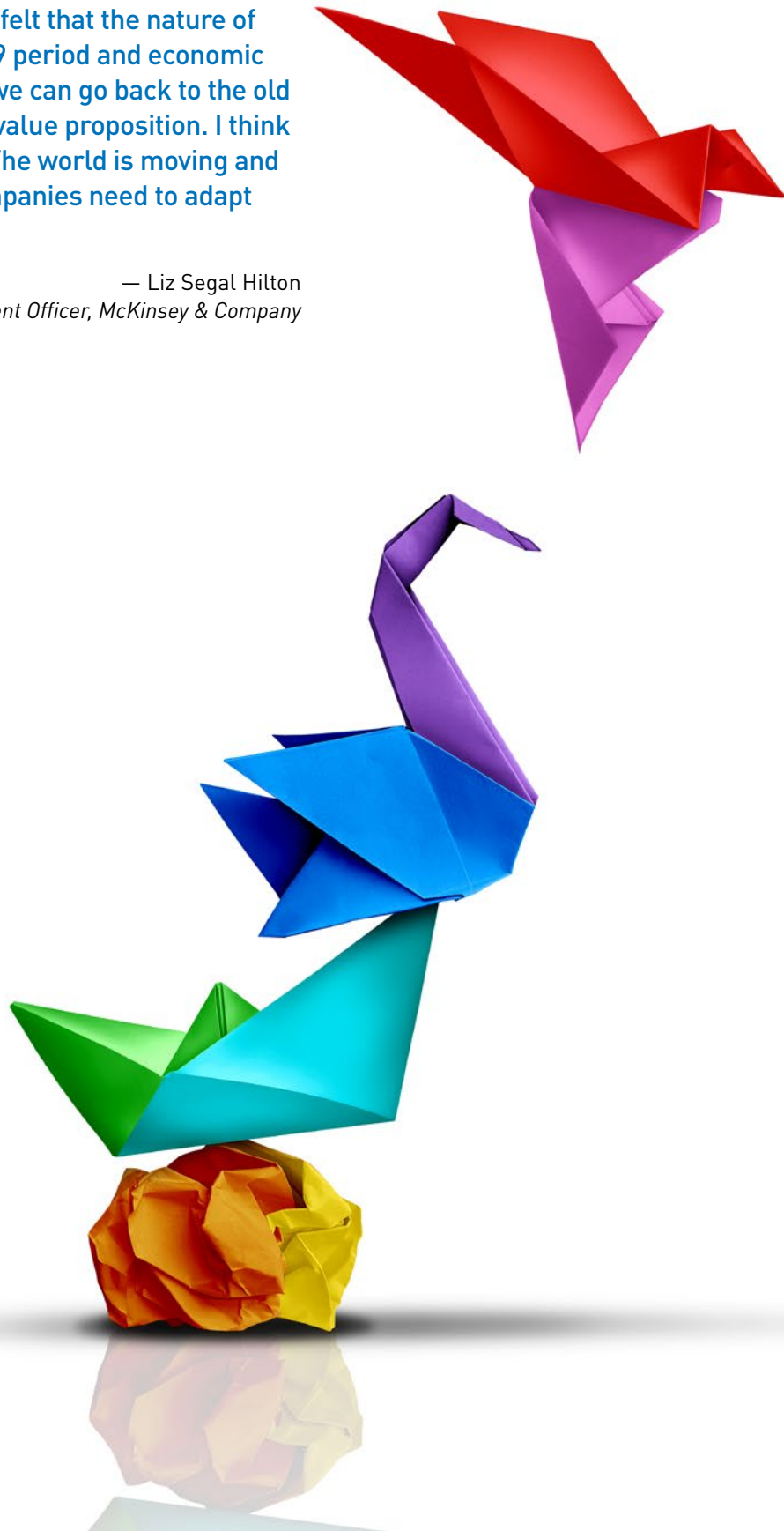




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Introduction

At the height of the pandemic, communication and connection were stifled by screens, masks and distance. When those lifelines were pinched, organizations, teams and individuals, determined to reconnect and move forward, rallied to find new ways of working together.

Now as we emerge, savvy organizations recognize they can't compete and succeed in our transformed world with outdated strategies, tactics and technologies. Working hard to maintain the momentum they gained in the last four years and invigorated by possibilities, they continue to innovate new ways of connecting, communicating and working together and understand that this is part of the new employer value proposition.

Some organizations are seeing old habits and behaviours creep back into day-to-day operations; however, this is risky. In a recent podcast, Liz Hilton Segal, Chief Client Officer at McKinsey & Company stated, "A lot of folks have felt that the nature of the post-COVID-19 period and economic shock mean that we can go back to the old way on the talent value proposition. I think that's a mistake. The world is moving and adapting, and companies need to adapt with it."¹

This reality is what brought Manisha Mistry, Senior Director, HSSE & DEI, CSA Group; Nada Vuckovic, Head, Environment Health and Safety/Sustainability Officer, Siemens Canada; Akela Peoples, President and CEO, Mental Health Research Canada (MHRC); and Maureen Juniper, Founding Partner of PRAXIS together at Innovative Concepts for Working Together in a Post-Pandemic World – a panel discussion hosted by the Workplace Safety & Prevention Services' (WSPS) CEO Health + Safety Leadership Network.

Ontario's Chief Prevention Officer Dr. Joel Moody kicked things off with opening remarks and Sandra Miller, Vice President Strategy and Governance at WSPS moderated the discussion which explored topics such as staying connected in hybrid and fully remote workplaces, workplace culture, attracting and retaining talent, and innovative approaches for working together.

Panelists spoke candidly about transformation in their workplaces, and changes they've observed in themselves as leaders. The conversation was peppered with words like courage, flexibility, support, listening and purpose. It was a rich discussion full of ideas, lessons-learned and insights.

This white paper captures the discussion at the event, as well as additional information about the innovative approaches these organizations are taking and provides practical tips that can be implemented in any workplace.

A Snapshot of the Panelists and Speakers

Each panelist brought unique insights and experiences to the discussion. They represented small, medium and large organizations from different industries. However, despite the differences in their business operations, they share a commitment to seizing opportunities and responding to new imperatives in today's world of work.

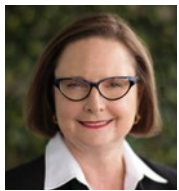


Dr. Joel Moody

Chief Prevention Officer

MLITSD – Opening Remarks

Dr. Joel Moody was appointed as Ontario's Chief Prevention Officer in 2021. Prior to his appointment, he was Chief Public Safety Officer and Senior Director Analytics of the Electrical Safety Authority (ESA). He has over 17 years of experience working in various Ontario labour organizations.



Sandra Miller

Vice President Strategy & Governance

WSPS

Sandra has extensive experience in the public sector and has dedicated the last number of years to health, safety and wellness. Throughout her career, she has led numerous transformational change initiatives, such as start-ups, mergers, amalgamations, and consultations on regulatory reform.



Maureen Juniper

Founding Partner

PRAXIS

Maureen founded PRAXIS, a marketing communications agency based in Toronto with on-the-ground support in Montreal and Los Angeles, more than 20 years ago with a vision to create a best-in-class agency that allowed for a healthy work-life balance. The award-winning and growing team at PRAXIS provides creative services to large consumer packaged goods businesses.



NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES: 27

FULLY REMOTE/4-DAY WORK WEEK



Nada Vuckovic

Head, Environment Health and Safety/Sustainability Officer
Siemens Canada Limited



Siemens is a leading technology company that works with customers around the world in industry, infrastructure and transportation. Nada joined Siemens in 2006. She has more than 24 years of experience in the manufacturing, industrial, oil and gas, electrical, construction, healthcare and service sectors. Nada is responsible for overall strategy, direction and management for environment, health, safety, and wellness program within Canada. She is a Canadian Registered Safety Professional (CRSP), Certified Quality Auditor and a recipient of the Top Women in Safety Award (2023).

NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES: 2350

HYBRID, MOBILE (EMPLOYEES CAN WORK ANYWHERE)



Manisha Mistry

Senior Director, HSSE & DEI
CSA Group



CSA Group is a leader in Standards Development, Testing, Inspection and Certification around the world, including Canada, the U.S., Europe and Asia. In her role at CSA Group, Manisha works to create a safe and inclusive environment for employees across all locations worldwide. Manisha leads a high-performing team of health and safety professionals to manage a global, multi-site HSSE management system registered to the ISO 45001 and ISO 14001 standards, while also supporting the continuous evolution of CSA Group's safety-first culture.

NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES: +/- 2000

FLEXIBLE WORK ARRANGEMENT (HYBRID)



Akela Peoples

President and CEO

Mental Health Research Canada (MHRC)

Mental Health Research Canada is a national charitable organization dedicated to improving the lives of the 1 in 5 Canadians living with mental illness, as well as their families, caregivers and communities. Akela has a distinguished track record of strategically leading and successfully growing Canadian charities. She is committed to building bridges and relationships to unify and strengthen communities and indeed Canada at large. Akela has received the WXN Top 100: Canada's Most Powerful Women Award, the YWCA Award of Distinction and the Paul Harris Award from Rotary International.

NUMBER OF TEAM MEMBERS: 18 PEOPLE

FULLY REMOTE



Photo: (From left to right) Maureen Juniper, PRAXIS; Sandra Miller, WSPS; Manisha Mistry, CSA Group; Nada Vuckovic, Siemens Canada; Akela Peoples, Mental Health Research Canada.



Highlights of Panel Discussion

Change was already afoot at MHRC before the pandemic. Peoples was hired as CEO in 2019 to lead the organization's evolution from a provincial charity with 1.5 employees to a fully staffed national organization. So far, MHRC has grown to 18 team members operating fully remotely.

PRAXIS joined a pilot project to transition to a four-day work week during the pandemic while working fully remotely. They have opted to continue with both and just signed on for another pilot period. Juniper says she doesn't know if they will formalize a permanent commitment to a four-day work week but expects they will continue indefinitely unless customer or employee satisfaction with the arrangement changes.

In 2020, Siemens decided to go mobile on a global scale. They reduced office space and made changes in all aspects of the business to accommodate this shift. While most can work from anywhere, a contingent of their team works in factories and in the field, which means they must constantly monitor and attend to the needs of a diverse and dispersed workforce.

Many employees at CSA Group had to continue testing onsite, but office employees worked remotely during the crisis. Mistry says that being a global organization required CSA Group to do a lot virtually with global teams before the pandemic, so they were fairly comfortable with going virtual. They are currently transitioning to flexible work arrangements supporting employees to meet performance goals, contribute to the culture and manage work-life demands.

While each organization moved through the pandemic differently, they've all emerged with a new perspective and have chosen to embrace the opportunities that are before them. And, as the conversation revealed, they share some fundamental beliefs.

- ① **The role of leaders has shifted from managing work to creating safe spaces.**
- ② **It is critical to have a well-defined employer brand that acknowledges and respects the whole employee.**
- ③ **Teams must be focused on results and employees should come together with purpose.**

1 The role of leaders has shifted from managing work to creating safe spaces

Peoples shared that mental illness from anxiety and depression has been the number one illness for employees since 2019 and, from MHRC’s recent data, 30% of Canadian workers indicate they would consider changing employers for better mental health support and resources.ⁱⁱ She stresses that leaders should, “Never underestimate that an employer’s value proposition is about much more than compensation.”

Mistry says that CSA Group is committed to leading with empathy and transparency and being authentic. “It’s the first time we’ve had five generations in the workforce. We had to talk to managers about differences in managing today versus 20 years ago. You are no longer just managing the work; you are creating safe spaces for your employees to thrive. That’s a big difference. It will continue to be a focus for our organization.”

Vuckovic agrees that new and young professionals expect this. “We need these bright young minds; we must create an environment where they can thrive. We need to adjust organizational and leader styles to meet this expectation.”

Siemens made several enhancements to their benefits package over the pandemic, including increasing mental health and wellness benefits by more than \$1 million. “We are making sure people and their families have the benefits they need.”

Juniper says that improving employee well-being was one of the primary reasons they opted into the four-day week trial.

“We looked at how do we get people more energized and balanced. I find our people are ready to come to work now. They are energized and excited because of that additional rest time and the refreshed perspective it brings. I do believe we all work too much and it’s not good for our mental health.”

The following image from the 2023 CEO Health & Safety Leadership Surveyⁱⁱⁱ illustrates the importance of creating safe spaces and focusing on employee well-being and reveals that many employers are missing the mark.





Equipping Managers to Create Safe Spaces

At CSA Group, keeping people safe is about so much more than physical safety. It's about creating a work environment where people feel safe to be who they are. Mistry says, "We've trained our entire workforce on mental health awareness – from both the employee and manager/leader perspective. We also have a key performance standard focused on safety."

CSA Group wants to break down any barriers that might get in the way of managers creating stronger, healthier teams, so they help ensure leaders understand unconscious bias and know how to create inclusive spaces. "We want them to create spaces where employees feel a sense of belonging and part of the organization, which connects to mental health and DEI. Being a manager today is so different than it was 20 years ago. The skillset required is larger, and the scope is much broader."

2 Create a Well-Defined Employer Brand that Respects the Whole Employee

At CSA Group, Mistry says listening, flexibility and respect are essential. “We have to be flexible to accommodate people’s working and personal requirements. During the pandemic, we checked in a lot with surveys and conversations to find out how people were doing, what challenges they were facing and to assess their level of confidence. The key is listening and giving the team feedback and respect.”

She also notes that they have observed greater interest in the organization’s purpose, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI), and Environmental Sustainability and Governance (ESG) in interviews. People want to know what the total package looks like. “This current workforce is much more informed and interested in the work of our organization, not just what their salary will be. We are amping up how we present ourselves – looking at what we reflect on our website and asking questions like, “Does it show our commitment to DEI?” and “What first impression does it make?”

Siemens has a multi-generational workforce with many family members joining the team. However, they had an awakening when they learned that university students and new graduates did not know much about the organization and the work it does. Vuckovic says, “I was on a panel for interns, and they pitched us on how we could market ourselves better because we weren’t doing a very good job. We weren’t telling our own story in recruitment about DEI and ESG and this is important to them. Students had to do a deep dive to get this information, so many weren’t looking at us for co-op opportunities and were going to other organizations that were doing a better job.” She says they are paying more attention to their employer brand. They emphasize the benefits of working for Siemens, what the organization stands for, and how they transform everyday for society.

Peoples says that, as a charity, MHRC can’t match corporate salaries, so they differentiate themselves in other ways to be an attractive employer and desirable place to work. “There are always job opportunities for all of us for better pay so flight risks are real, especially in post pandemic job markets. so creating a workplace culture that is flexible, supportive and mentally healthy is beneficial. Charities offer work that is meaningful and working in a sector with passionate people. But being a flexible, adaptive, empathetic employer and offering remote work has added to that.”

“People have to be able to bring their authentic selves to work. They’ve got to be comfortable sharing how we can best set them up for success. As leaders we need to learn to be flexible and empathetic – and we practiced that during the pandemic when everyone was at home. There was no choice. I can’t relate directly to my employees who are working from home and managing a family with small children, but I must lead with empathy to understand what those employees’ lives are like and how MHRC can support their schedules.”

To gain a better line of sight and capture employees’ ideas, Peoples initiated stay interviews based on a recommendation from her HR consultant. “We do exit interviews and onboarding interviews – why not stay interviews? It was scary at the beginning. I just figured everyone was going to ask for a raise as the way they could be best supported – but not one person mentioned compensation.”

“Charities offer work that is meaningful and working in a sector with passionate people. But being a flexible, adaptive, empathetic employer and offering remote work has added to that.”

— Akela Peoples
President and CEO
Mental Health Research
Canada (MHRC)





Don't wait until it's too late. Start conducting stay interviews

Mira Persaud, Senior Advisor, Talent at Mental Health Research Canada says stay interviews can make the difference between valued employees staying or leaving. "It's better to have these conversations early. Seeing them as proactive conversations that direct reports will appreciate can help reframe what might seem like an uncomfortable feedback session. At their essence, stay interviews allow you to have a dialogue about how they're doing and what's important to them at that moment in time."

Persaud also says it is important to articulate the objective of these conversations, clarify how and when the information will be used, and communicate your commitment to maintain confidentiality. When done properly, these touchpoints can go a long way in creating an open and supportive workplace culture. Below are her tips for getting started.

- ✔ Make sure it is a structured, but flexible conversation and there is an overarching purpose.
- ✔ Use prompts, but allow the employee to lead the conversation.
- ✔ Avoid HR jargon and ensure questions are clear and easy to understand.
- ✔ Share with employees how the information will be used, and collect aggregate data to identify trends.
- ✔ When possible, schedule interviews regularly so you capture snapshots at particular points in time. Ideally, you should repeat every three to six months. The conversation might be very different in a few months.
- ✔ Be flexible in scheduling to allow for employee work commitments and deliverables.
- ✔ Be prepared to consider and act on feedback received. This demonstrates that you respect the time of everyone who shared their insights, ensures credibility of the process and reinforces the purpose of the conversation.
- ✔ Debrief and commit to a share with employees as soon as possible. "Even if you don't have all the plans in place. People are hopeful and invested. Be realistic and let them know you might not be able to act on everything, but everything will be considered."
- ✔ Ensure that employees have an open line of communication after the interviews, for any questions or additional insights.

Persaud suggests that those conducting interviews should take care to "engender trust and understand how to make people feel comfortable with the set up and close of the conversation. It's important to create an inclusive and respectful environment."



3 Teams must be focused on results and employees should come together with purpose

The team at PRAXIS was polled about a year and a half into the pandemic to assess their preferences with respect to remaining remote or moving to a hybrid structure. The team supported remote work but still gets together regularly. “We have quarterly collaboration days and managers and individual employees have budgets for co-working so they can plan team meetings of their own,” says Juniper.

At Siemens, flexibility and empowerment are critical to operating as a mobile workforce. “We were a telecommuting workforce before the pandemic. We had to figure out how to do the work and manage workload. We have tried to educate people, to listen and understand their unique needs. This is how a dynamic team works. We empower and trust the team. We clarify deliverables and give people the flexibility to manage how they get it done,” says Vuckovic.

“Employees can work anywhere as long as they are able to deliver on results.” She also notes that when they do meet in person, they come together with a purpose; they aren’t just bringing people in for the sake of having them in the office.

Peoples says her leadership style has changed over the last few years. “Personally, I lead differently now than I did before. Employees’ family and work lives are integrated. We have people in different parts of the country in different time zones, so flexibility and trust are critically important from my perspective. I feel now that if I don’t trust an employee to do their work and meet deliverables, I’m not sure they should be with us. I have no idea when they are at their desks and when they leave. I am leading and managing based on deliverables, not time in the seat.”

Mistry says CSA Group is working closely with employees as they figure out how to move forward with a flexible work arrangement. They are thinking strategically about meeting employee needs and marrying the goals of the organization with individual needs and the way work gets done. “There are so many nuances we’re not aware of until we actually talk to employees and they’re happy to help us understand what they’re dealing with. Personally, I’m able to manage life much easier today than I could five years ago and that takes away a lot of anxiety.”

She says, “If the pandemic had happened fifteen years earlier, we wouldn’t have had technology like Teams and Zoom that made it possible to bring teams together.”

Peoples agrees. “Digital advancement was a silver lining of the pandemic. My national Board of Directors never met virtually before the pandemic and now we are able to spend less and increase efficiency with virtual Board and committee meetings.”

Given that Siemens is a technology company, it’s not surprising that they had already developed a lot of tools and software that enabled them to shift a workforce of 140,000 people to working globally mobile pretty quickly – the systems and networks were already in place. They also used virtual reality to complete certifications and audits during lockdown and they’re continuing to do this today to save costs.

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— Manisha Mistry
Senior Director, HSSE & DEI
CSA Group

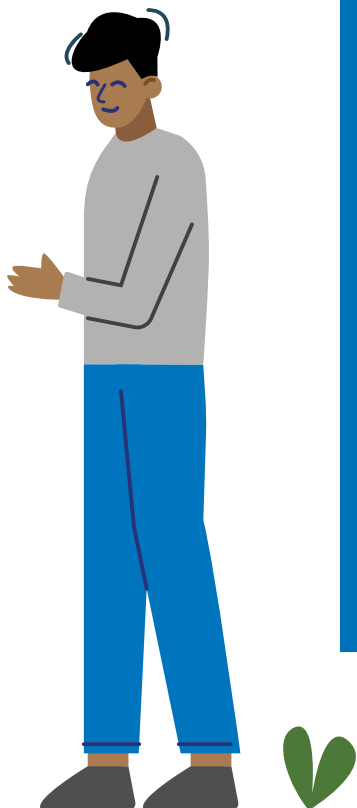


Becoming a Global Mobile Workforce

Siemens Canada may be 110 years old, but when it comes to embracing change and seizing new opportunities, the organization has the energy of a 20-something just starting their career. In the first year of the pandemic, when many organizations were just trying to figure out how to weather the storm, Siemens seized the opportunity to transform from a telecommuting organization to a global mobile workforce. Vuckovic points out, "Many of us started our careers working from nine to five in cubicles, but things are much different now. There's no rigidity and this allows for creativity and connection."

Being mobile at Siemens isn't just about removing boundaries in terms of where you work, it is also about eliminating boundaries in systems and processes. Vuckovic says, "We have an open culture where we encourage people to speak up. There are no good or bad ideas. Our performance management is also different, we do it in a future-focused collaborative way through Growth Talks. We don't set targets for the year as they may change through the year. It's a fast-paced world, and you have to adapt. We use performance-based outcomes. This is how you are held accountable. If you run into an obstacle, you ask for help, clear it, and move on. This is how we empower, show trust and allow for growth. There are no boundaries."

There's also a sense of mobility when it comes to career opportunities. "If I wanted to change into a different role, I could. We are open that way. You wouldn't be denied an opportunity if you haven't done it before. If you can show that you are agile and open-minded, the doors are open."



Building Culture and Creating Mentally Healthy Workplaces from Afar

In interviews after the session, each of the panelists shared additional experiences, tips and insights. Below are some of the highlights from those discussions.

Q: How do you build culture from afar?

PRAXIS – Create a fun, collaborative experience

Culture matters more today than perhaps ever before. We have to provide for ourselves and our families but there is so much more that goes into the work experience. Being fully remote and working four days, we are particularly aware of this challenge. We bring people together quarterly for face-to-face connection and collaboration but it's mostly about the social aspect. When we first started to do this, people were used to their routines of staying at home and they were exhausted when they got to the location. Now, I feel people are really energized by coming together.

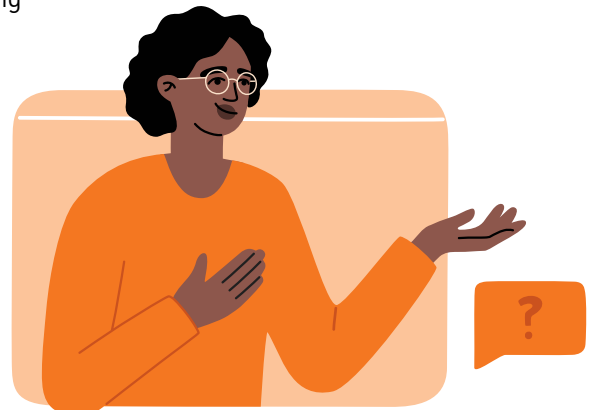
We encourage directors to use their budgets for co-working space and employees who are closer geographically to do the same. We are really urging people to get together for work and socializing.

When I was a young employee, my work experience was fun. We had a baseball team and we went out together for lunch or after work. I feel the younger generation is missing out on this. That's what drives me to ensure people are connected and having fun as part of their work experience.

CSA Group – Balance technology and in-person opportunities

During the pandemic, we wanted to make sure we maintained high quality onboarding and training. We saw we could connect with employees globally on a virtual platform in a collaborative and interactive way. People have gotten used to virtual meetings and break out rooms. We've upskilled our employees to some degree.

Now as we make our way back, we are restarting onsite tours, training and team meetings. We had new employees join the organization during the pandemic who don't work in the lab. They had no idea what their site looks like. Now we can show them what we do and how we do it, in person. They can see the test labs and understand the full scope of our organization.

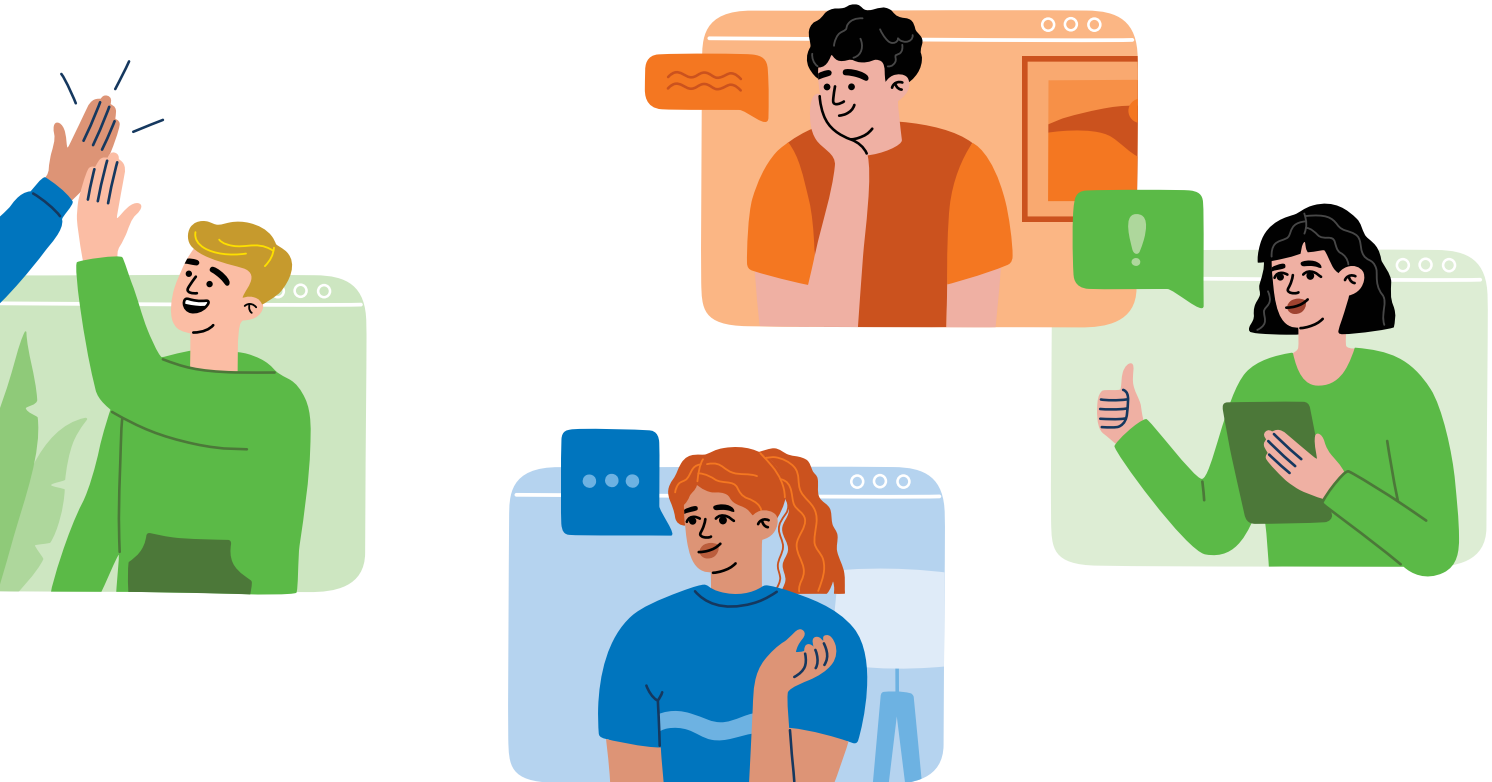




Siemens Canada – Build culture and comfort

It is hard to connect new people to the culture without a lot of effort. When we were fully remote, we did a lot of webinars, coffee chats, cooking classes, trivia games, wellness challenges, cultural celebrations, volunteering, etc. We want new hires to fit in and have a sense of belonging. We still do a lot of team building activities such as axe throwing, boat cruises, and last year new hires were given a ticket to TIFF. We do fun activities where people feel relaxed and get to know each other on a personal level to build culture and comfort. Understanding who people are, how they fit and how we all fit together is key. Our workforce is a crucial component of our success, therefore we have developed a wellness strategy with the needs of our employees in mind. This strategy encompasses the physical, mental and financial health of our workforce.

Our EHS motto is “One World – One Life – We Care.” We do this by empowering people, ensuring supportive working conditions, caring for mental and physical well-being, and enhancing competencies. By fostering the well-being of our people and a safe and healthy work environment, we contribute to and improve organizational resilience.



MHRC – Define the culture you want

We were maybe better positioned than others because we are in our formative years compared to an established organization that has been operating a certain way. We created an HR and Organizational Culture Committee because we felt it was important to talk about the key elements of the culture we wanted to develop and nurture. We wanted our culture to include responsible risk taking – we felt it was important that we take reasonable and strategic risks to establish ourselves in a busy sector on a crowded national stage. Collaboration, flexibility and support have also been a big part of who we are from day one.

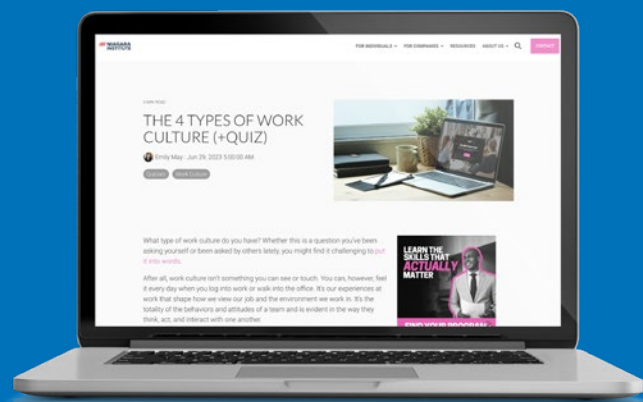


Now on days I'm in the office, I enter it in my calendar in advance, and I tag everyone as an optional attendee. Some come in every week, others once a month, but it's optional, for the most part. Not all our team members are in Toronto (some are in other provinces) so we are cautious about lunches and after work gatherings in relation to an "us" and "them" optic where geographically close colleagues have a different experience. This can be a challenge. But we now bring people together from across Canada more regularly for "all hands" meetings to facilitate important relationship building. Since the start of the pandemic, I have asked staff to hold one-on-one "coffee meetings" with each other and the only rule is you can't talk about work. This helps build social connections. We have continued these now that we are remote, and we also plan other engagement activities such as lunch time trivia sessions. Building a sense of team is different in a remote workplace but even more important as natural socialization does not occur through a screen.

I am not saying we're doing enough, but this is clearly in our line of sight. This needs regular monitoring and reassessment as the team grows and evolves. Needs change and we need to adapt and evolve our cultures accordingly.

What type of culture do you have?

This article by the **Niagara Institute** outlines the four main workplace cultures that exist today and offers a quiz that you can take to assess which one best describes your organizational culture.^{iv}



Q: How are you managing mental health in remote and hybrid workplaces

MHRC – Evolve and involve employees

I think leaders are trying different strategies to advance mental wellness in the workplace and that's a positive thing. There is no "one size fits all" and you never "arrive" at the perfect program or supports. It needs continual focus by forward-looking leaders. I want to evolve and adjust as needed, and want to involve our team in that. This was a topic at our in-person staff meeting. We asked employees how we can support each other's mental health. Creating space for open discussion is important.

We are exploring some unique ideas for employee retention relating to workplace wellness. An example is a paid sabbatical after five years of service. Workplace flexibility, remote working and opportunities such as a sabbatical can set us apart as an employer of choice.

Also, rather than prescribing personal time off beyond vacation, we have grouped all days (illness, mental health, religious holidays, bereavement, etc.) into personal days and all team members have ten personal days. I think we are a leader in that in our sector.

I operate with an enormous amount of flexibility, and I didn't used to do that. Every person has different needs and family contexts. Every team is different. Every organization is different. One size doesn't fit all. We continue to evolve and walk the talk.

Siemens Canada - Transparency and vulnerability go a long way

We have always been focused on wellness. We have had Wellness Wednesdays for the past four years where we post social media messages and physical posters in our offices and factories. We also share one minute wellness videos from the CEO and me with a focus on mindfulness, and physical and mental health.

We have regular meetings with our managers and provide them with wellness and mental health information. We encourage them to have open conversations and to show empathy and vulnerability with their teams. We continuously need to make an extra effort to stay in touch with the team members as we are not in the office all the time, "asking people personally how things are going at that moment, encouraging, and inviting employees to speak up about issues, feelings, and ideas.

We brought the focus to wellness by promoting mental health initiatives, engaging employees in activities dedicated to self-care and breaking the stigma around the topic through the conversation and personal perspective sharing.

Our CEO is very supportive of EHS. He continues to share his vulnerable stories with staff. He is open-minded and makes people feel comfortable.



Even our Global board members share personal stories. Like our CEO, when they visit, they walk around and talk to people. You don't get that everywhere. That is our culture. Showing personal vulnerability and sharing struggles shows empathy and allows others to be more comfortable to share.

At the beginning of the pandemic, Siemens executive management messaged: "We are in this together. We will come out of this together." We need to collectively work on adjusting our work style, environment, and expectations to create our new normal, and accept that it may look different for each one of us.

PRAXIS – Support the way people want to live

We used to have the standard benefits package, providing \$300 for mental health appointments which is pretty limited. That's only going to get you one maybe two appointments. We increased the annual amount to \$1500. I wasn't sure how employees would react. When I started to release the information at a Town Hall Meeting, I didn't even fully get it out and everyone erupted into applause. I realized people really need this and they were appreciative.

We also allow people to work from other locations (with some time zone restrictions) which contributes to mental well-being.

With the four-day week, our staff have reported significant improvement in doing things that matter most. We created a Slack channel called "Rest Day Wins." We encourage everyone to share what they do with this time. It's heartwarming. People are volunteering, spending time with elderly parents, or just getting things like groceries done. We want to support them and the way they want to live as much as we can.



CSA Group – Empower employees to help one another

During the pandemic, we invited a cohort of employees to do Mental Health First Aid training and then we thought, okay, now what? How confident will they feel to address a situation when it happens? So, we invited them to participate in our Mental Health Ambassador Program (aka MAP).

To date, we have trained 70 ambassadors from around the world to help colleagues navigate issues and access resources. They are also out there talking about mental health in general. We launched the program in October 2022 in conjunction with Global Mental Health Day and it has had a very positive start.

We also recently started guided meditations and the uptake has been positive. Employees don't have to be on camera, and they can learn to meditate (via the Calm app subscription available to all employees), which is a very valuable skillset to have.

We have empowered employees with tools, but in times of need they aren't always obvious and unfortunately stigma around mental health still exists. People wonder who they should call and worry that they might be asked why they need the help. We want them to feel safe and be fully aware of the resources that are available.



Sometimes Less is More: Moving to a Four-Day Work Week

In the fall of 2022, PRAXIS made the decision to enter a trial to see if a four-day week was feasible for their organization. The trial ended in March and the data revealed that it was a success, so they extended it for another six months.

CEO Maureen Juniper says she was surprised that some people were hesitant. “You’d think people would be super excited when you’re offering four days at the same pay, but some were worried about it. They weren’t sure how it would work and how it would impact them.”

PRAXIS took training with 4 Day Week Global who advised them to make sure the program was employee driven. A working group representing all levels of the organization helped determine how they would serve clients and how they would structure the extra day off. “We decided on a model that has half of our employees off on Mondays and the other half off on Fridays so that we can cover for each other and ensure the highest level of customer service.”

Another organization going through the trial recommended that PRAXIS hold a pain point session. Juniper says it was instrumental in moving forward. A facilitator led the entire team through a frank discussion about any barriers that would prevent them from being as productive and efficient as possible. “We set an ambitious goal to get those things fixed and we’ve just done another session because we’ve been in it for six months.”

One of the easiest and first things they did was to cut down on meeting time. “We record our day on a timesheet, so we know exactly what we’re doing and when. We saw we were spending a lot of time in meetings and had a lot of people in those meetings. We created a challenge called the 500 Challenge in November to get down under 500 hours in meetings. It sounds like a lot, and it is. We reached the goal and we’ve been keeping the time even lower than that.”

Employees created their own productivity plans. They had the flexibility to choose which productivity tools would work best for them. Their personalized productivity plan was included in the contract they signed indicating their agreement with the terms of the four-day week. “I was so impressed. They learned a lot through the training we provided and had a lot of ideas about how they were going to improve their day.”

Juniper says clients are fully supportive and love it, with the caveat, of course, that there is no impact on the quality of service.

She says, right now, employees are taking 65% of rest days and her goal is to get as close to 100% as soon as possible. They’re also looking at ongoing training for existing employees and orientation for those who join the organization. “New employees will come with just five-day work week experience. Jumping into four days without training or orientation is very challenging.”





Conclusion

The panel discussion was proof positive that there was some good that came out of the pandemic. In these organizations, it catalyzed a movement toward working smarter, innovating and adapting to create happier, healthier and more productive workplaces.

Instead of slipping into old ways of thinking and working, these leaders and organizations have embraced our new world of work and are anticipating and seizing opportunities to create exceptional work experiences while optimizing business success.

The key takeaways for the audience were:

- Prioritize well-being and mental health.
- Give people the tools to be healthy and show them that you see them as whole people with unique needs and lifestyles who have good days and not so good days, and that's okay.
- Practice active listening and be flexible.
- Explore what is possible and be open-minded toward opportunities to allow employees to find better balance.
- Engage employees in planning and design conversations.
- Don't avoid authentic conversations for fear of what you might hear. Be open to the opportunity to learn and evolve.
- Don't lose momentum gained during the pandemic. Continue to leverage technology to increase efficiency, improve connection and reduce costs.
- Continue to facilitate and forge social connections and, if possible, give employees the authority and budget to plan their own in-person work sessions and opportunities for connection.
- Check in with employees regularly to see what is working well and what isn't.
- Define the culture you want to create and take the necessary steps to bring your vision to fruition.

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“ We need to collectively work
on adjusting our work style,
environment, and expectations
to create our new normal, and
accept that it may look different
for each one of us.”

— Nada Vuckovic
*Head, Environment Health and Safety/
Sustainability Officer
Siemens Canada*





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CEOHSNetwork@WSPS.ca



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CONNECT
WITH US



5110 Creekbank Road
Mississauga, ON L4W 0A1
1 877 494 WSPS (9777)
T 905 614 1400 | F 905 614 1414
E customercare@wspss.ca
WSPS.CA

