Trish 0:00

You're listening to the HR Happy Hour network sponsored by work. Human by some estimates, over 80% of AI projects fail because of bad data. But here's some good news for HR. When AI leverages the rich authentic data of employee recognition, you get something truly unique, human intelligence from work, human creators of the world's number one recognition platform. Human Intelligence unlocks insights into performance and skills, culture and engagement, and it helps surface feel good stories that illustrate the best of your company's culture. To learn more about human intelligence, go to work human.com that's W, O, R, K, h, u, M, a, n.com. You

Speaker 1 0:40

welcome

Speaker 2 0:47

to at work in America, the podcast that leads the conversation on the future of work, proudly sponsored by Paychex and work human we go beyond the headlines to uncover bold ideas, fresh perspectives and the real stories of people shaping workplaces for the better. And now here are your hosts, Steve Bose and Trish Steed, bringing you the insights and trends that will inspire what's next in the world of work.

Steve 1:21

Hey, welcome to the at work in America show. My name is Steve Bose, and I'm with Trish. Steed Trish, how are you?

Trish 1:28

I'm great. How are you today, Steve,

Steve 1:31

I am fantastic. I'm really excited for today's show. I We it's a topic we love. We have a great guest. She's with us now. Let's Should we just welcome her right away? Get, get, bring her. Get rid of all the pleasantries. All right, we have Kelly. We have Callie Williams Yost here. She's the CEO and founder of the flex Strategy Group. Callie has been in the workplace design, workplace flexibility space, way before it was cool, way before the pandemic forced us all to think about the design of work, and really one of the pioneers in this space, we're so happy to have you here, Callie, welcome to the show.

Unknown Speaker 2:07

Oh, I'm thrilled to be here. Thank you for having me.

Steve 2:11

It is our pleasure. And Callie, like we feel like sometimes, you know, talking about the design of work, the organization of work, whether or not folks should be in the office or working remotely, or something in between. I can feel like we're getting a little tired of the conversation, but I feel like, on the other hand, we haven't talked about it enough. I'd love you to give us maybe your maybe 30,000 feet perspective on sort of the design of work and work flexibility. Where we stand, say, middle of 2025 and we'll go from there.

Speaker 2 2:45

So where we are in 2025 is we're coming to almost reckoning with the fact that the flexibility we've had for the last five years since the pandemic was executed under crisis circumstances. So it wasn't intentional. And there were things that were not going well, things that got lost in the sauce, if you will. And we have to go back now, because we're not going to go back to the way things were in 2019 but now we have to intentionally come together and say, All right, based on the work that we do, how, when and where does that work happen best and in organizations that can't be done with a one size fits all policy, unfortunately, because there's just too many different ways work is happening. There is a consistent process you can follow to think through what are the parameters of our flexible work model. But you can't just look to another organization and say, Oh, that's what this organization did. Okay, so it'll work for my organization. It really is a change process that you have to walk the entire organization through. And what's interesting is now that we have the sort of, you know, avalanche of AI coming at organizations, it's almost the same thing, right? It's another vector, if you will, of asking us to reimagine work. And so what I hope people start to do is to say, this is the moment where maybe with remote work, we could say, All right, we're not going to deal with it. Now, AI is coming in, and it's like, okay, that's the how we're working. And let's pull it all together and say, All right, based upon, again, the work we do, how, when and where does that work happen best, and what does that mean for the way we have to organize our teams, but also how we have to manage and how we have to prepare our people to be effective in that new reality. So again, it's all part of a whole, and I think it's an exciting time, but it's a time where we have to really come to terms with the fact that we can't go back to the way things were, and we have to move forward.

Trish 4:48

I'm glad you mentioned it that way, because for me, having been in leadership roles before working with Steve, I feel like sometimes, as people, we tend. Who want to hang on to those things and let go? So whether it was, you know, back in the days where performance reviews were given on paper and people didn't want to have them, you know, use technology at all. And now here we are with sort of this hybrid versus in person versus, you know, completely remote work. How do we get past as leaders talking to other leaders in our organization, how do we begin to get past the ideas that this isn't the pandemic? I'm so just intrigued on the fact that you mentioned we did it during crisis. How do we shift gears? Or how can we mentally get others to shift gears with us? So

Speaker 2 5:37

what I have found is that you make the case, right? I think with HR leaders, there have been, there's been success in getting senior leaders to understand, first of all, the talent market has changed, and you really have, you know, the three legged stool, right? People obviously want compensation, but they also want development, development, and they want flexibility. And that just doesn't mean people who can work remotely. It's people like manufacturing. People are saying, I want flexibility. So making that talent case and helping leaders understand that talent is not the way it was in 1990 Okay, there are different things that they expect. So from there also then bring in some of these other transformations that are happening, and say you're interested in getting people to adopt AI, it does require us for all to step back and say, what is the work that we're doing, and how can aspects of our work be done just as well when we are remotely What aspects do benefit from being On site, in person, and how do we need to adapt the way we work to the technology that we have available to us now? And interestingly enough, it's not just AI, it's also just the communication and collaboration technology that we've all adopted under this kind of crisis circumstance that we need to be intentional about and take all those things together and say, what is the operating model for us? What are the parameters of this flexible operating model that would work in our part of the business? Because this is the other opportunity, slash challenge. What's going to work in, let's say, the HR team, where maybe you can do aspects of your work much more remotely than, say, somebody in the manufacturing group. How do you take a consistent process and then guide those leaders through a through that process to say, experiment in your in your department, in your functional area, and let's allocate a period of time where we are just all stepping back and rethinking the way we work and come out the other side of what did we learn? So I do find, if leaders are able to have the case made, why do we need to do this? It's clear to them there is a process they can follow. There is usually an openness to engage in that process and experiment. You're not getting married. It's not you know, that's true, like, if you can have that period of you know, let's just try it and see what happens. The other part of this that's so cool. We have such a challenge with engagement. People are not engaged. It is magic that happens when you engage your people in this process. When leaders go to their teams, prepare their managers to say, we're supporting you, to think through the way work can be done across these different dimensions in your business, employees come to the table, they do engage in that process in good faith, and you get so much more engagement out of them from just asking them to be part of the solution. So that's another win, I think, for everybody that we tend to not think about too.

Steve 8:52

Yeah. Kelly, one of the things that's kind of bothered me, I'll say, for lack of a better word, throughout these last couple of years, as you know, as we follow what's happening in the world of work. And so many of the you know just how it is, right? The high profile organizations, the high profile CEOs, get a lot of coverage. Maybe, you know, disproportionately high coverage for their actual impact on the world of work. But they do right? And so so many of them and gets kind of breathlessly echoed in certain media chambers have called for an end of remote, or an end of hybrid, or it's, it's wrong, or it's, you know, I showed up at the office every day for 27 years, and now I'm the CEO. So that's the way it must work, right? If you want to be successful, and we want to have a successful company, and I feel like it's so much just that's, it's it's a it's a gut feeling, or it's intuition, or it's just based on, let's go back to the old ways, because the old ways were working fine, and I don't need to think about new ways. I'd love for you to comment a little bit about that issue, and then also, what are the ways? Is that if you're an HR or an operations leader, whatever your case may be, you're interested in in a more nuanced approach to these questions. What? What are the questions to ask? What's the data to call on? If you're saying, Hey, Mr. CEO, and I'm saying Mr. Because it's usually Mr. Quite frankly, Mr. CEO, you know you're just saying this because it makes you feel good to look out your office and see all these ads. I want to have a more data driven conversation. What would be some of the ways to begin that conversation?

Speaker 2 10:32

Well, the first way is what I've mentioned before, but I can't mention enough, which is, I think HR leaders can come to the table with all of the data showing that employees expect, require, whatever the word is, the flexibility to fit their work and life together. And that's just true. And in many cases, I'll use JPMorgan Chase as an example, because it's it mystifies me. It's a case study that I don't understand, because JPMorgan Chase last year recorded its historically highest level of revenue and highest level of earnings ever. And during that time, they had quote RTO policy where people should be in the office three days a week, okay? And Jamie Dimon said, we're going back full time because there were various things he felt were not happening. He felt people weren't being developed. He said people weren't showing up to meetings on Fridays. He felt that, you know, people weren't paying attention during meetings. All valid. That is, that is not untrue, however, to just say to solve that, we're going to go back to the office full time, doesn't it disempowers this workforce that obviously has performed for you working flexibly, and it actually doesn't get at the problem. You're not solving for the underlying issue, and you're just again, disengaging your workforce. And there is actually, there are memos coming out now. They're showing their workforce is disengaged, and they're now having to come back at it. So what I would say to these work these leaders, look at the data around what your workforce wants, and even if it's not the way you worked, engage them in the process of fixing the things you're seeing are broken. Don't just throw it out with the bath water. Look at how people are performing, and you can there has been a historically high level of performance in a lot of these organizations, and so help them come from the place of outcomes and output, and not necessarily at the number of days and the way people are working. As I always say, don't start with the where, start with the what, then from the what, go to the where, when and the how, yeah. And so, from a data driven standpoint, some of my favorite pieces of data that I continue to bring forward, and this is not one that's standard, but I find it very powerful. There is a finance professor from London School of Economics named Alex Edmonds, and 15 years ago, he came out with a study that looked at the great places to work, portfolio of companies versus normal portfolio. Have you heard of this research? Okay, and he found there is a significantly increased differential performance from the great places to work portfolio, and the key factor that he isolated as being the most relevant is employee satisfaction. Okay, so employee satisfaction has and that study has been replicated, replicated, replicated. So it holds true. And if you look at the you know Fortune list from this year, flexibility is one of the top aspects of employee satisfaction that does then lead to financial return. So that's a piece of data that I follow as well. If you look in the Gallup there's a Gallup study that looked at and it was kind of buried in this study. But what they found were employees, when they were involved in defining the hybrid model, there was an incredibly, sort of significantly higher level of engagement for those employees versus the ones who just sort of top down mandated. So again, there's enough data out there to get your leaders to say, hopefully, have the awareness that there's a different approach. The next step is not just getting them to be open to it. The next step is saying there's a process to get there, because policy doesn't do it. It really is process. And if you can say to them, okay, if you're open, here's where we're going to start. We're going to start with the work. Then we're going to have functional areas and different teams begin to look at what aspects of the work can be done. Well, when we are remote, what aspects need to be done in person? What are some of the things that are not working? What are the things that are working that we can build upon and then putting in? Place a period of experimentation and learning from that. And this is where you start to add things in, like, AI, same thing. It can be part of the same process.

Trish 15:08

Yeah, I love all those examples you're giving, because I think number one, they're actionable, which is great. I mean, that's what people listening to the show are going to want. My question, though, for you will be around when you're talking about whether it's how work gets done and the outcomes, we've talked about outcomes already, as when you're sitting in HR, a lot of what comes at you from your fellow C suite tends to be around productivity. Oh, yeah. And yet, you were using all of the words that spoke to my heart as an HR leader, which are satisfaction of our employees and engagement. And so I wonder how you feel about maybe the disconnect that remains there. Because even in AI, we're saying that the main goal of AI is productivity. And I learned with someone this morning about all the other wonderful aspects. Yes, AI can make connections and engage, right? So I guess my question is this, knowing that HR does still have a little bit of our own language when it comes to what's important to lead to better business outcomes, such as engagement, how do we break through the data? Is part of it. I know that. But how, yeah, to maybe our CFO or CIO, right? Because this is yes challenge comes in absolutely make it to where engagement becomes equally important as productivity. I

Speaker 2 16:38

you know, yeah, you're so right. You know what's so interesting to me? And you know this, like, there is data that shows engagement leads directly to performance. Like, that's what I don't where I don't see. I always am like, I don't know what you're not. I feel like

Steve 16:51

there's 30 years of data around that, yeah. So it's like,

Speaker 2 16:55

okay, because engagement means they are engaged, so they are being productive. Like, it's, it seems like there's a direct line of sight there, but you're right. They don't. There doesn't seem to be knowledge. Okay, so here's what I would say, is, you are inevitably going to get a reflection of how you can be more productive when you engage people and answering the question based on what we do, how, when and where do we do it best? So that is when they are going to start to say, You know what? Actually, why are we doing this report like we only need to do two reports, and now that we have AI, maybe we don't even need to do these reports at all. Maybe we can have that be done by AI. That's productivity, right? Or we aren't coordinating across time zones with our team in another country. Maybe we could move some of this work into async and do a shared document where we aren't all you know? I mean, these are the kind of things I have seen over and over and over again. Okay, let's just talk about the crazy meeting culture we have right now. Step back, why is our default meeting? Why are they an hour? Could we do it in 25 minutes? Could we have an agenda? Could we have like, action items at the end of this meeting? Right there, you have cut down a half an hour. Okay,

Trish 18:17

Kelly, you're gonna be my new friend. You're speaking my heart, you

Speaker 2 18:22

know what? I mean. It's like the but that has to come from the teams, and that has Okay, so I'll use another one of my favorite examples. So I worked in with a group of manufacturers, like a manufacturing online, like line teams, and this one supervisor, he actually let his team start to plan their shift schedule, and because they were involved in planning their shift schedule, they ended up reducing the amount of accidents, and people were not calling out as much, and they had people were not quitting as much. I mean, right there, you're going to get productivity from that. And so again, it's engaging in this process of reimagining work. And I think that's why this is such an amazing moment, right? AI is opening the door to say, You know what? We get to rethink things, being able to think about the type aspects of work that can be done well remotely, and maybe better remotely, but also what you want to prioritize when you are together. So you were developing people who need to keep being developed in the AI world, like we can't just offload all tasks to AI and not be developing the next generation. And so this is, this is the opportunity we're in right now, if we would just engage in something where we give people permission to step back and say, how could we do this better and smarter? And that will inevitably give you productivity. Yeah, you can't help

Trish 19:54

but do that. That's right. Yeah, I think we're thinking about it as productivity is sort of. A means, but really it's the end, right? The end, pull and push these other levers, putting someone in a seat physically for all time that there have been workers. I mean, then they're trying to figure out how to take a longer lunch, how to take a longer break, go to the bathroom longer right? So you're just because you're physically putting someone does not mean they are more productive. Oh,

Speaker 2 20:24

Trish, can I tell you my favorite truly, yes, my favorite stories. So this is before COVID, because you guys both know how long. Okay, so, I mean, yeah, so before COVID, I used to have managers come up to me, we present, like, how to rethink work in the process and the whole thing. And they'd come up and they'd be like, Well, how do I know they're working if I can't see them, I'm like, Okay, well, well, how that's easy, actually. How do you know they're working now? Like, how are you measuring that? Blank, okay, blank, okay, so all of a sudden, just having to lead people who are working across different dimensions just forces you to actually start to think about what they're doing to begin with. And then they would inevitably say, oh my gosh, it's like the ocean went out, right? Like, you know how you the ocean goes out, and all of a sudden, you see all the shells and all this stuff. And next thing, you know, they're like, Oh, I thought so. And so was like, killing it and rocking it. They're actually not that great. Like, right? And then the person who has this flexibility has to be super intentional about what they're doing when they're on site, and what they're doing when they're not, and how they're engaging. They're on fire, okay? And they are produce. So, you know, it really, it you begin to have to start to measure what matters, rather than having people just sitting there. Oh, people would put would tell me they put jackets on the back of their chair so they were there and Oh, my goodness. So you can't just rely on the fact that people are in the office to think they're working. And the other piece, I will say, is, from productivity standpoint, there's this fantasy that if we just have everybody come into the office, everybody's going to start to collaborate and coordinate and talk to each other and all the things, right? No, they sit on their computers and do emails and

Steve 22:08

do zooms and wear headphones like me, right? So, yeah,

Speaker 2 22:13

right. So again, it's from a productivity standpoint. You can't just rely on that to give you what it is you're trying to to accomplish, you have to really start with that problem or that outcome you are trying to achieve, and then work backwards into Okay, so what is the model that's going to get you there?

Trish 22:31

Yeah, because just going back gives you a lot of unintended consequences, which a leader may not be thinking about right. From an HR standpoint, if everybody's back in the office, your employee relations issues will likely increase drama, increases pettiness, increases theft, increase like there's just so many things, right? So you have to be looking at the big picture. And I think many of us in our in our silos, and we're just with these blinders. I'm like, if we do this thing, this is going to work so,

Speaker 2 23:01

and I also think leaders kind of want to not talk about it anymore. Do you know what I mean? They're just kind of like, okay, can we just move on to the business of the business, right? But it's kind of like, this is the business of the business, okay? So if you were to actually do this, your business would be better. I have never, ever, ever seen teams walk through this process and not innovate. Never. Can you imagine

Trish 23:26

textbook, this is the business.

Unknown Speaker 23:30

This is the business,

Steve 23:32

right? When you look at it as so many of the types of industries that we're talking about, right, the types of industries where lots of people could work flexibly or remotely, tend to have their single greatest line item cost to be the labor cost, right? Their sizes and benefits of their labor. And it's so funny you say that, like, you know, I'm tired of talking about this, or I'm tired of thinking about it, but like, I don't know. Like, Boeing doesn't ever say, you know, boy, I'm tired of talking about the factory and everything we've got to do to keep that factory running properly, and all the, you know, all the equipment, Let's just not talk about that anymore. Yeah, like you would never say that, right? No, so no, yeah, wouldn't. But, but an accounting firm might be tired of talking about issues that are directly related to the, you know, the engagement, the well being, the happiness and the productivity of their single biggest line item. It seems crazy that you want to say, I can't. I don't want to talk about that anymore.

Speaker 2 24:25

Okay, so I have a client who's an accounting firm that I can tell you they do, and they have benefited from talking about, we can talk about that in a minute. I'm sorry. Trisha, I interrupted you.

Trish 24:33

Oh no. I was just gonna say, I think too before I also come from Big Four public accounting for a good chunk of my career, and I think we we don't normalize. What is a good productivity rate or an engagement rate? Everyone think that, well, it should be 100% No, right? No. As people, we cannot be 100% engaged all the time. We cannot be 100% productive all the time. So think too, depending on your industry, there needs to be some. Normalization and talking about what, what is a good utilization, what is, yeah, what, what's a good productivity level for our type of business, or this type of worker and and how much downtime do they need to have time to think, to be creative, right? Jobs, right? So, exactly, yeah,

Speaker 2 25:19

sample. Well, you know, it's interesting. And I, you know, obviously I can't name names, because I'm, you know, but I will say they made the best companies to work for lists for the first time this year because of everything they've done. And it was, it has been very intentional, and they have engaged in the this deliberate process for the last four years, so they've taken a lot of time, because change takes time, right? And that's the other piece of this. Is you can't just do it and be on to the next thing. You really have to let the process play out. But what I will say is they started with the work, right? And they were intentionally just more broadly looking at, okay, so what are we going to do when? Who's doing what pieces of the work? And to your point, Trish, what is the productivity around these different aspects of our work across different phases of an engagement and the different levels? Okay, what? What is each level doing? Then they added in the where? Right? It's not just what work we're doing when we're doing it. Who's doing it? But where is that work happening most effectively? If we need to be developing somebody, if we need to be coordinating with somebody who is in a totally different country, doing a support service, how do we coordinate with them and use the technology that's available to its highest and best use and consistently and so as a result of that holistic approach to the way they were thinking about their work, not just, you know, productivity and utilization, it was more, not just the outcome, but how are we going to get there most effectively that ultimately led to what we're seeing in terms of, you know, how people reported, and ultimately got them into that best companies to work for? List,

Steve 27:02

yeah. Kelly, who, who would been involved in, say, this example, like, or an example like, like, who would be the key team members, you know, internally, who are getting together to go through those questions and do that analysis? Is it a cross functional team across the organization? Is that how it's working? Okay, so

Speaker 2 27:20

I'm going to tell you in this particular instance, I give credit to first the CEO and the chief people officer, as I like to say, they held the space okay? Because, as you can imagine, over the last four years, there was, you know, not everybody was on the same page and on at different levels of leadership about engaging in a process. I think there was, there was an interest on the part of some to just make a mandate and be done with it. Okay, but this CEO and the chief people officer knew we have too many different variables across different client engagements, across different teams, that we can't just do a one size fits all. Fits all. We have to engage in this process. Then each level of leadership down, they had to engage and and champion this, and they had to adapt the process, because the process was consistent to their particular business line, right? So, like the audit engagement line is going to is good. Engagement is sorry. The audit side is going to have a different approach to this process and the things they're going to consider than, say, the tax and advisory right? And then you have the functional areas like, you know, HR, like technology, and even just the national practices that are fully distributed and don't really necessarily have to be in one place. They went through it too. So again, it's sharing the process, rolling it out, getting alignment across the different levels of leadership who have to then advocate for it, and then again, roll it out across their different groups in a way that works for their business line. And that's why I said it takes four years, right? Like, you know, they really had to do this step by step by step, and I have to tell you when I saw them make the list. And here's what was really cool. We rolled this out in May of 2021, and the the way it was described, the outcome that we were going for it was echoed in how employees were talking about it in 2025 Wow. So you can see how the change carried all the way, all the way all the way all the way through, in terms of how they were talking about it, looking at it, thinking about their work. And that, to me, indicates the change was successful because there's alignment. Now they're not done. That's the other piece of this. They're not done. They continue to, you know, adapt it and improve it. And that's the other piece of this puzzle. With flexible work, you're never done, you're never ever done. And that's something the business line can own and continue to follow. That process now to engage on AI, you know, what do we need to do and how, when and where do we use AI most effectively? And that's what I think the ultimate benefit is, to everybody.

Trish 30:12

Yeah, what a great example. I think you use design thinking and some of those principles, it really does change how you're how you're approaching the work versus the culture that maybe already exists, that could be a little toxic or a little unproductive or less productive. Steve, I know when you asked the question, I was thinking back to another way I've seen it be successful is when I was working in healthcare at St Louis Children's. I'll give them a shout out. One of the things we did was over 26 departments of every aspect of hospital and what runs it, and all the people it takes, we had one representative from each group. So whether you were a floor finisher or an HR or marketing or you were a nurse, whatever, right? And those 26 people we worked every month, we would meet and we would try to solve for an issue or opportunity in a specific department, so that you were getting thinking outside of your department too, and it gave again. You said, Change takes time. I love that, because I think it does take time to build things like trust and resilience, and to know that you're not picking on someone just to pick apart how they're doing something, we always use the words. It would be even better if, yeah, right. So a lot of it has to do with the language and how we interact with people and how we ask questions. I think is another absolutely that, you know, we were able to, if you weren't, you know, maybe we were working on the landscaping crew had an issue of, how could we make Children's Garden better, right? Well, with with perspectives coming from everything from it to accounting to HR, like you're getting a different look at how to solve for that. Yep, then we all felt really good, because then, and then we'd go back and tell our teams, and then they felt good. So I think there's a little bit of kind of building your own buzz that needs to go into these changes 100% Hold on for a longer time.

Speaker 2 32:15

Now, what I love about that example, Trish, is that's a how like you the example you just gave with the landscape, you could add a win in that too, which is the landscapers when it's when it's hot outside, maybe they could shift their hours, right, so they're not com right, so they're starting earlier and they're ending earlier before the heat, or there's a break in the day where they come in, they're a little bit earlier, and then they leave and they come back, and it's a little cooler. Like, that's where that holistic kind of reimagining of work, you're not just talking about how they're doing the actual, you know, maintenance of the garden. It's more holistic. Like, when are you working? Where are you working? How could you use technology? And that's when you begin to build what I like to call the parameters of your work model. Yeah, I love this.

Steve 33:07

Kelly, there was one other thing I wanted just to quickly ask about or talk about briefly, and a couple and I don't know how much you get into this yourself, but I think an underrated aspect of that that doesn't get talked about enough in these conversations is like physical space, the design of space, the capability of space, the functionality of space. A couple years ago, I got to go to an event called neocon. I don't know if you've ever heard of this, but neocon is the biggest event every year for commercial design and commercial like commercial furniture and flooring and everything else. All the things that go into an office or go into a workplace, there's a giant trade show for that kind of stuff. And I was blown away when I went to it, because the people who would get up there and talk about their their their chairs and their desks, there's a lot of desks there and things like that. But the things that they would talk about are the very same things we're talking about. They would talk about employee engagement, employee satisfaction, productivity, you know, creativity, innovation and but they were talking about it in the context of, you know, flooring or sound deadening, you know, tiles that you put on the wall. I'd love for you to talk about that you're working with companies who are really rethinking the operating model of work. How much or little is physical space in reimagining it potentially coming into into play here?

Speaker 2 34:33

So what's interesting is, over the years, a lot of my projects have been initiated by organizations changing their space. So even before COVID, there were organizations that recognized we aren't actually using all of our space because there was flexibility before COVID, there was and so the average we don't hear about this, we need to talk about it more is the average occupancy rate before COVID ranged anywhere between 55 and maybe. 65% office occupancy. And there were a lot of organizations that were already saying, Okay, I'm not really using all this space like I need to rethink it. What I am seeing is, when we come at it is again, we start with the work, okay, and then we think about, okay, how, when and where is it done, and then how can the space enable the work when we are in person together? This is the work that we have identified benefits from being in person and how we're going to prioritize that. What kind of space do we need to support that? And then that is what the space is built to align with. So we don't in the work that I see most effective, the space doesn't lead. The work leads, and the flexibility leads. And then the space is configured to support that those activities when it's when it is in person, or even when you're trying to be effective with people who are not in the same space with you. Like, what technology is required? What are the spaces that you need to meet? You know, again, it's it's how you come at it, it's what you lead with. That I think, is really the differentiator. And I could give you one quick example that I love. I recently was on a panel with the guy who is the Global Head of workplace strategy for LinkedIn, and it was this really fun panel of just like people on different, you know, phases of the continuum of execution, like one person who's like, I can't even get my CEO to not even want to have everybody back all the time, to this person who is at LinkedIn, who is going to, like, cutting edge of workspace. And he was talking about the fact that in terms of how they now measure utilization, they don't even count Monday and Friday anymore. They've taken it out of the calculation. So as I keep saying to people, we need new math around utilization and around occupancy. Because he said, You know what, we've decided it's worth it to hold that space on Mondays and Fridays. So it's enabling the work we seem to be doing mostly on site when we're together on Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday. Okay, that's a new way of thinking about space, right? And he was talking about the space they would need to support programmers with AI agents, and what does that look like? And he said, I'm starting to talk to them about when you're on site, because they are on site these programmers a couple days a week. What do you need? How do you interact with your agent and the other programmers and their agents? Like, what is that configuration? So we optimize that in person time. So do you see where he's coming he's coming at it from the work and the way the work is going to be done best to optimize that moment when they're in person. So again, this is sort of the RE orienting ourselves to how we think about things. In other words, space and workplace is not at the center. It is an enablement of the work, and, you know, optimizing what's happening when you're in person together. Yeah,

Trish 38:04

I love it. Love that I would, I would say to Kelly, I think as you're describing that, I was thinking it's an enabler and a reinforcer totally, because that all ties back to how engaged someone is approaching it from the work standpoint, and you're asking their opinion, and their whether or not you totally opinion, they've able to give it and and again, that's tying them into the purpose of why we're here. Why is why are we here physically right? Why are we not physically here? I had an example back back to the hospital thing, when I worked there, one of the things they did, now, this was only for managers and above, but you got to it was like, when it was like building your own house. When you go, get to go and pick out all the colors you want and the textures, whatever you could pick that for your office. You got the paint color within, like, three or four colors, right? And then every the furniture, light, dark, whatever. And it really, it made you want to stay longer. They were giving you some input into your space. Now, the space, yeah, right, but you felt like so much more important, like you were really tied to the mission more and you're tied to being there. More people were listening to what you wanted. I think again, these are, it doesn't have to be something as drastic as what paint color, but even in your example of asking them, how are you working with your colleagues? How, what does that look like, physically? Man, that would be so impactful, I would imagine.

Speaker 2 39:32

And the AI, like, that's an AI that was, I thought that was so like, yes. And then, wow, I didn't even think about as this. These programmers use these agents to actually do the programming. It really is about, how are you capturing what the instructions are to these agents as you're talking to it's just a whole other level, right? But they were engaged to your point in figuring out what this looks like. And everybody just is a. Lot happier with the outcome. And I am always shocked at the amount of money that is invested in space without this part of the process. It's almost like you make the space and then shoehorn the people in, right? Yeah, it's like just, I feel like people. Feel like it takes longer to engage people in the process. But what always fascinates me, it ends up taking longer if you don't and sort of, how do you again? It's just reorienting some of our beliefs and the way we approach things.

Trish 40:31

I think those of us of a certain age on this call though, I think we, we were probably raised in business where it was all about, here's the bus. Where's your seat? Yeah, some of that sticks were a little bit brainwashed. So I love that you're giving us some more creative ways to be thinking and approaching work and those that we work with, so that we're not just thinking about we have this bus put people right.

Steve 41:00

Yeah, yeah. I think, I think that's sort of like one of the takeaways to think about it, for me, is just, I know we're a couple years out of it, but, but the pandemic disrupted real, literally, every workplace, yeah, and just the great opportunity coming out of that, that it presented many organizations with a chance to question everything, yeah, reimagine everything and re architect everything. And a lot of that went on. It went on for a while, like went on during the pandemic. It held on fairly and now I feel just like, I don't know, and again, maybe it's partly because I get sucked in by the headlines to some extent, right? You mentioned JP Morgan, that guy's been in the news every other day, right? Moaning about, you know, people not being in the office. And you think, Wow, so many organizations are not taking advantage of those opportunities, and perhaps are squandering them, and it's going to hurt them in the long run. Kelly, 100%

Speaker 2 41:55

Yeah, yeah. And, you know, I will say, Here's my theory that we're having a clash of contexts right now, a lot of the senior leaders still have a context like you said, Trish, you know, here's the bus you get on, right? They didn't change. They're trying to go back right to the context that they know. And there's a lot of, you know, we're under a lot of pressure. I mean, really, there is a lot of there's a lot of uncertainty in the world. So I get it. You go back to what you know, I think on the other side, though, people also are trying to hold on to the flexibility they had. They're afraid that if they let go and say, okay, you know what I do see, I've need to meet you in the middle. And we do need to think about this. And I maybe I do need to come on site more. And here's why, I think there's two sides to this standoff, right? And I think that, for me, there's an opportunity for HR leaders to bring people together. So here's the process we're going to work through. We're going to look at what's working, but and keep it but we're also going to look at what's not working, and let's together come up with a solution in this new way of working. And I do find if there is that process and there is this sense, we're going to experiment, we're not getting married. This isn't, you know, and you layer on some of these other things, like, AI, like workspace, like, there is an openness that happens that really, yeah, magic, as I said, yeah and yeah. And we

Steve 43:16

didn't even, and I'm not going to ask about it, we didn't get a chance to talk about some other things. We're gonna have to have you back, Kelly, because we Kelly, because we didn't, we didn't talk about culture really much. Oh, yeah, because that's another whole subtext of this, right? When the leaders talk about, hey, we our organizational culture can't be built. You know, over zoom, right? That's something we could circle back on. And then the other thing we didn't mention, I had it in my notes, I didn't get to it was some notion of responsibility for Sustainability, Environment, taking care of our our Earth and our mounted resources, right? And so this idea of, I want to put 100,000 butts in cars and make them drive to offices all over the country every day, because it makes me feel better. Do we do corporations or organizations? Or organizations, oh, anything to considerations around climate and things like that. But that's those are bigger questions too. We could, we could probably take on some other time, but, yeah, that's why this. Other reasons why this is such an interesting issue. And I love how you're so like, you've been doing this a really long time, Kelly, but you're still really fired up about it, which I love, which is inspiring, quite frankly, though, to me, because

Speaker 2 44:22

I live for The Spark. This is what I tell leaders. Okay, people say, How can you keep doing because it happens every single time you engage people in this process, you will inevitably see the spark of innovation, engagement, productivity, but also well being people feeling like they have the ability to fit their work in life together in a way that allows them to be their best. And that's a win. That is a win. So yes, you can see that in me. Steve, I love it true and real. We

Steve 44:53

will, we will get you back on soon as we can to talk some more about this stuff. But Kelly, folks who. Want to engage with you. Find your stuff, find your engagement organization. Where would you have folks go?

Speaker 2 45:07

Well, you can go to our website, flex strategy group.com, but also connect with me on LinkedIn. I love to connect with people, and I have a great LinkedIn, by the way. Oh, thank you. And I have a new sub stack I'm just launching, called the called the now and next of work, so you can follow me there. I'm a little more long form on sub stacks, so love it,

Trish 45:26

right? I'm gonna go fan girl over that. So

Steve 45:29

awesome. Ali, thank you so much for joining us. It's been a pleasure. Uh, long overdue, and we hope to have you back really soon.

Speaker 2 45:35

It would be my pleasure. Thank you for having me. I appreciate it. This was favorite

Steve 45:39

show of the year, I'm telling you, right? Absolutely

Trish 45:41

my favorite show. Like, anytime I walk away with a ton of notes, do no seriously, Callie, like I'm not even lying, like you've given me so many sparks to go think about, even in our own business, even in how we're working with client, like just you really have a nice, interesting perspective, so that

Steve 46:01

it's no we did and we didn't talk another thing we didn't talk about. We didn't talk about the infinite work day that, oh yeah, I wanted to talk probably back. So okay, yeah, we will many things. We'll bring Callie back to talk about culture and environment and infinite work day and checking your email at six o'clock in the morning from your bed, all of it on a future show. Thanks to Callie again. Trish, thank you. This has been super fun. Thanks to our friends at work, human Of course, for all their support. And that's it. Go to hrhappyard.net for this show and all the archives. Subscribe, tell a friend and awesome stuff. So my name's Steve Bose. Thanks for listening to the at work America podcast, we will see you next time and bye for now. You.

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