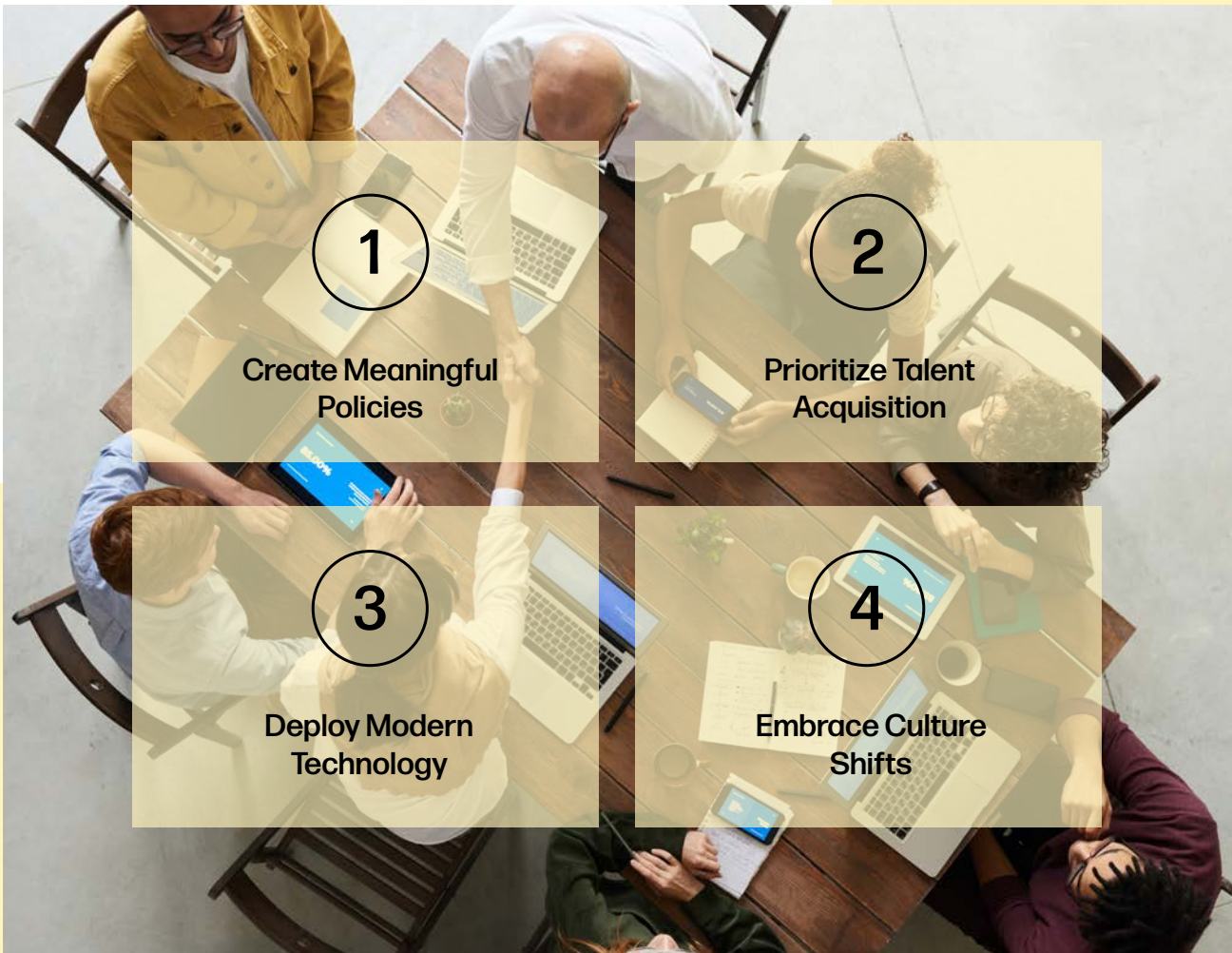# 4 Ways Agencies Can Build an Efficient Hybrid Workforce

Workforces are transforming and agency leaders are looking for ways to secure a hybrid future with emerging technologies that modernize the mission.

Introduction

Evolving technology, increased talent demands, and changing missions all require federal leaders to quickly adapt to meet the continuously evolving needs of their workforce. In doing so, agencies are seeking to promote data-driven decisions, investments in emerging technologies, and an overall modernization effort to increase productivity and collaboration.

While many leaders continue to grapple with their strategy to transform workforce management, others are paving the way for a forward-thinking hybrid approach.

Recently, GovExec and HP Inc. sat down with leadership from the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services to discuss best practices for building an efficient and effective hybrid workforce. During the event, experts broke down the four key objectives for modernizing workforces and discovered ways to make hybrid models of work meaningful, not only for leaders, but all employees.

1 Create Meaningful Policies

2 Prioritize Talent Acquisition

3 Deploy Modern Technology

4 Embrace Culture Shifts

1 - Create Meaningful Policies

As agencies consider new work policies, it's crucial for agencies to lay out effective and thoughtful codes for each staff member and division to adhere to. But understanding what policies are appropriate for all staff is easier said than done.

When CMS, like other Department of Health and Human Services agencies, first shifted to largely remote operations, IT partners worked with CMS leaders to leverage technology that would allow staff to best collaborate and work together across distributed environments. Now as staff starts to move back into the office, DHHS agencies are searching for the right balance between co-locating, working together, and leveraging the convenience of being remote.

For Brian Lau, HP's Future of Work Product Manager, as organizations adapt to hybrid models of work, policies that enable the optimal operation of work are going to be essential.

"To me, hybrid work means working your best regardless of location," said Lau. "There are times when working at home may be ideal, but co-locating teams may be productive, as well. So, a lot of the shifts organizations are seeing really depend on the nature of the work they do and the preferences of their teams."
For teams to really succeed in hybrid environments, policies about who needs to be in the office and when need to be crafted in a way that doesn't get in the way of the workforce and actually improves productivity.

This will look different for every organization, so DHHS agencies need to start by engaging with partners and staff to understand what parts of their remote operations work and what needs improvement. From there, leaders should build that feedback into their return-to-workplace policies and continue to update rules and regulations to ensure employees are able to work as productively and collaboratively as possible.

Given the amount of change being considered, it's more important than ever to bring the right stakeholders to the table when making these decisions. And because many of these ideas may be new and bold, conversations involving leaders from all components of the operation — like finance, talent, technology and strategy — will be essential for creating meaningful policies that work for everyone.

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Brian Lau
Product Manager, Future of Work, HP

2 - Prioritize Talent Acquisition

Over the last few years, agencies have reported a talent shortage and a limited ability to train candidates fast enough to meet agency expectations. To remedy this, many DHHS organizations have broadened their hiring pools geographically.

Tia Butler, chief human capital officer and the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, notes that the CMS is one of these agencies.

"In the most optimal situation, we would be able to hire talent that we're developing, grow the talent that we have, and promote talent from within," Butler said. "But that requires a lot of time and resources."

In the last few years, the CMS began attracting new talent by allowing positions to be filled remotely from anywhere in the country, opening up opportunities to highly skilled professionals who have the certifications agencies are looking for and the skills necessary to operate independently from day one – without the need for laborious training processes.

Previously, Butler said a CMS vacancy announcement would receive around 150 applicants. Now, with a broadened hiring pool, they attract thousands of applicants. And although quantity does not necessarily reflect quality, that increase significantly improves an agency's ability to hire qualified candidates and support growth.

With the right tools, CMS and other DHHS agencies seeking to diversify talent can work toward building a strong workforce that represents the diversity of the public they serve.

3 - Deploy Modern Technology

As technology continues to rapidly evolve, leaders need to ensure they are leveraging emerging capabilities that enable employees across DHHS agencies to do their best work — without sacrificing security or introducing onerous processes that might hinder productivity.

Making sure employees have reliable access to the internet and computers with up-to-date programs is just the start. For Stephen Pieraldi, Distinguished Technologist for Enterprise Technology at HP, it's all about flexible and accommodating IT forces.

According to Pieraldi, organizations like CMS need to supply their staff with tools that can withstand workloads and provide positive user experiences. "We've focused our efforts at HP on how we build more collaborative technologies," Pieraldi said. "When we think through an end-to-end experience, that helps build connections and it makes you feel like you're in the room, whether you're in the office or whether you're at home."

Since teams aren't always together, if agencies want to provide flexibility, they have to be able to provide the right tools, processes and technologies that are going to enable productive collaboration. And with partners who prioritize end-to-end user experience, they can do just that.

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4 - Embrace Culture Shifts

Hybrid work has been able to create a lot of opportunities for agencies to grow and transform. With that change comes increased pressure to keep up, and without a culture of inclusivity and agility, teams risk leaving some employees behind.

For Lau, the key to navigating this culture shift is empathetic communication. Teams need to understand that transitioning to hybrid is a journey that nobody has perfected, that mistakes are going to be made and it's going to be uncomfortable. But they also need to know that their leadership is understanding of that change too.

According to Lau, regular two-way communication should be a top priority to keep teams on the same page. Leadership should be able to communicate what they're trying to do with employees in such a way that invites feedback so both parties can better understand what they need.

And as an organization goes through that journey of figuring out what works and what doesn't work, they're taking a more logical approach to growing the agency by collaborating on all levels of the operation.

"I think we'll find as we turn over all the rocks, there's probably some things we need to take into consideration as we go," said Lau. "And I think empowering your employees to choose how they want to work their best, it's going to help build that trust, and in turn that culture we need to work to preserve and evolve."

While there are still so many unknowns out there about what the future of work looks like, keeping a mindset of agility and fluidity gives agencies the opportunity to critically look at their operations and find the best solutions that help them work better. And with the right partners and tools to accomplish the mission, DHHS agencies can achieve a future of work that works for them.

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