Reconnecting: How to successfully engage a hybrid workforce

ACT Government | healthier work

Dr. Sean Gallagher

28 Oct 2022

SWINBURNE Centre for the New Workforce

SWINBURNE EDGE

Hybrid working 2.0:
Humanising the office

Turn flexible working into a
competitive advantage.

December 2021

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Reset, Restore, Reframe –
Making Fair Work FlexWork

A Deloitte and Swinburne Edge Report

June 2022

MAKING AN
IMPACT THAT
MATTERS

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Part 1. Impact of remote working on workers

Part 1. Impact of remote working on workers

We learned three remarkable things:

1. Australian workers are **exhausted**

- 1 in 3 are working more

- 1 in 2 working outside standard hours at least weekly, including 1 in 4 daily

2. Increasing expectation of **flexible working**

- 4 in 5 want flexibility

3. The main driver is **wellbeing**

- Flexibility enables better work-life balance

- 2 in 3 prepared to forgo a payrise for flexibility

Reset, Restore, Reframe – Making Fair Work FlexWork

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Part 2. Impact of remote working on organisations

Pre-COVID office network structure

Remote network structure

Social capital =

Strong bonds +
Weak ties

Remote

———— In-person setting

·········· Virtual setting

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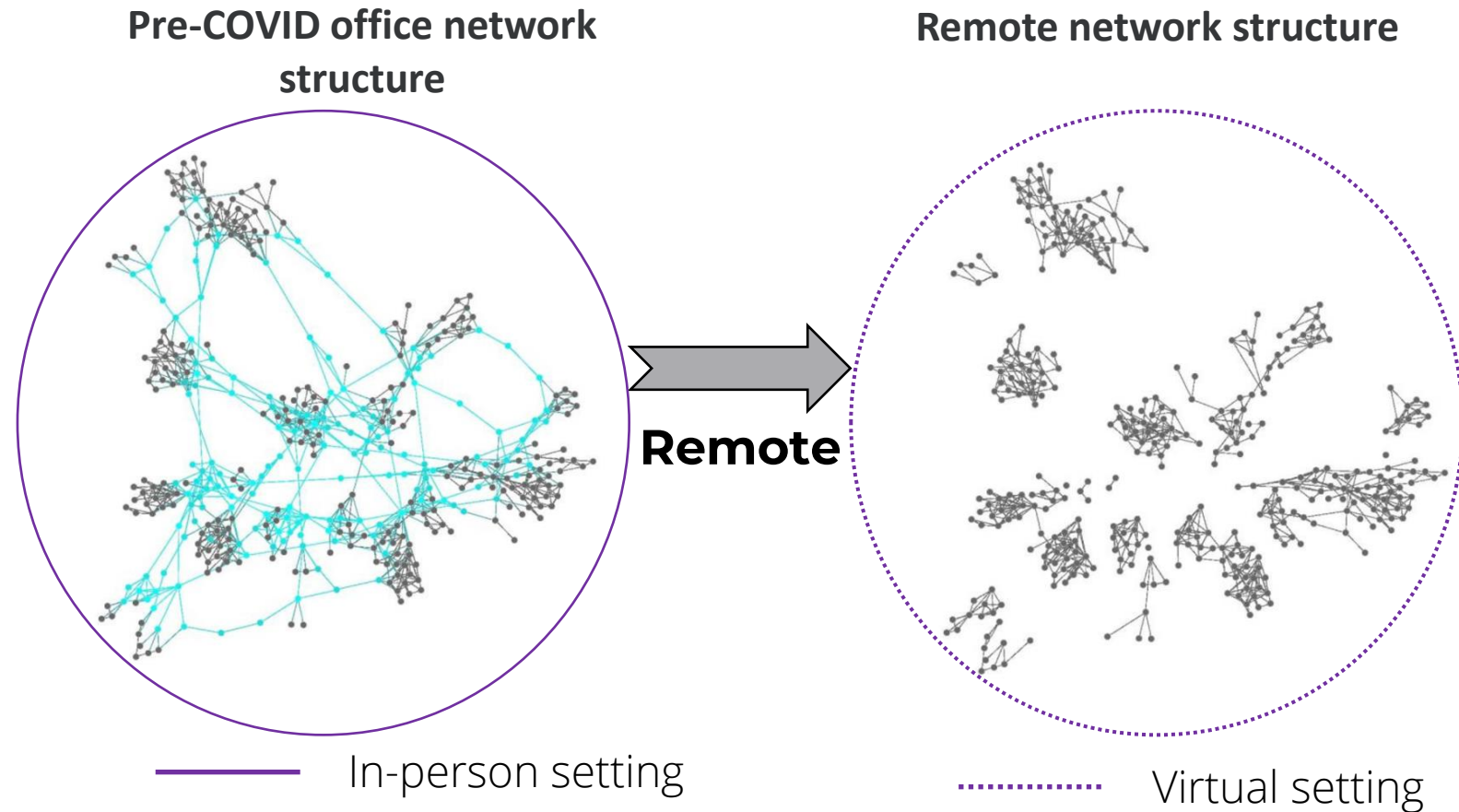
Remote work impacts collaboration networks

Collaboration networks

- Less diversity of perspective on complex problems

- Reduced transfer of knowledge (workplace learning)

- Reduced *quality* of output

- Negatively impact productivity and, in the long-term, innovation

The effect of co-location on human communication networks

MIT case study – remote working impedes formation of weak ties

- Weak ties are important for knowledge dissemination

- Act as bridges between distant parts of a social system

- During lockdown, MIT suffered a loss of more than 4800 weak ties across the university (daily email network)

- Connections with close colleagues were not impacted
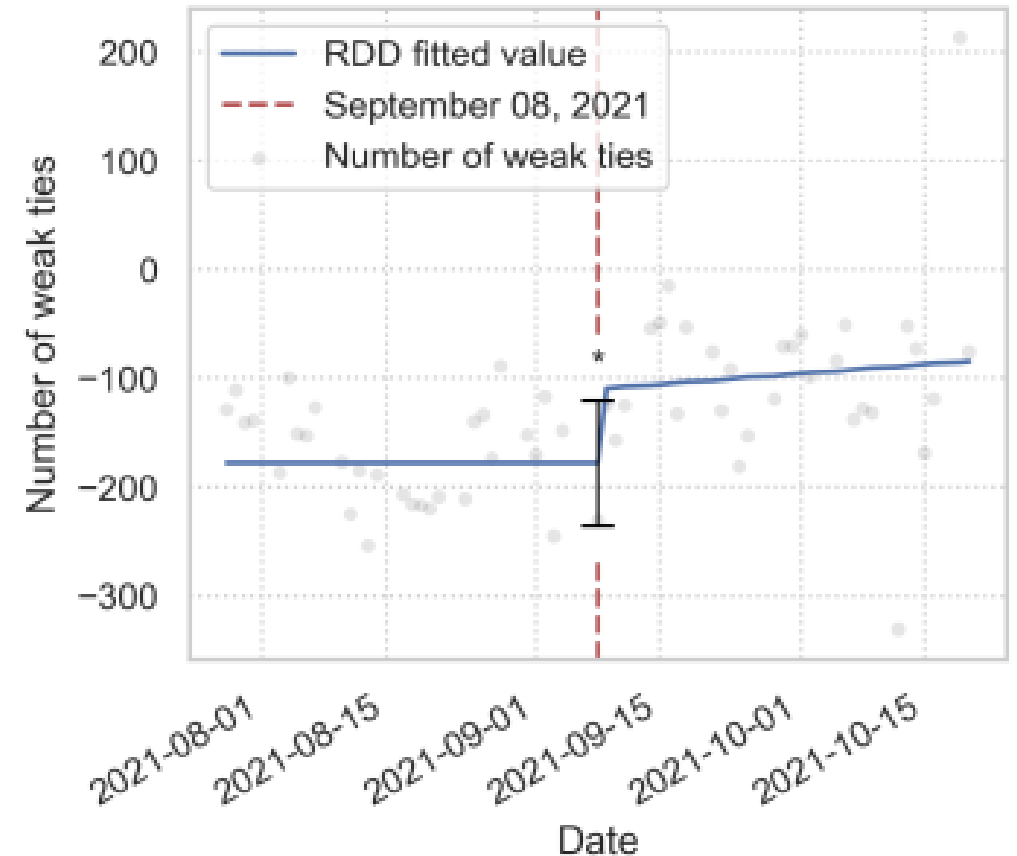
nature computational science

Effect: -456.38
95% CI: [-577, -347]
p < .001

Predicted cumulative change in new close-distance, distinct lab weak ties

Number of new ties

Date

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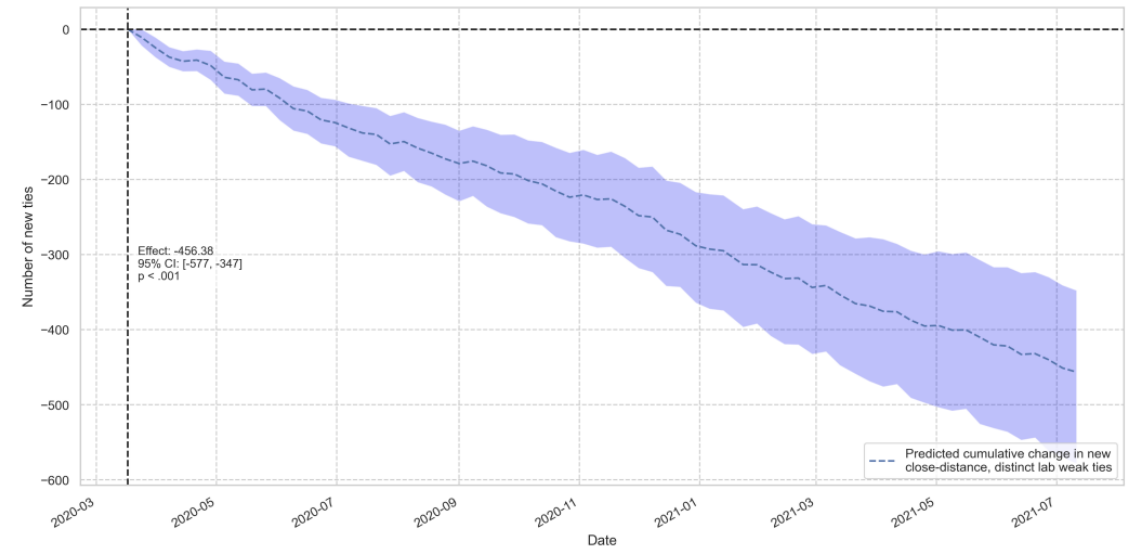
The effect of co-location on human communication networks

MIT case study – move to hybrid work in Fall 2021 led to a partial recovery in weak tie formation

- Return to MIT campus saw a partial regeneration of weak ties, especially between those in close proximity

- Suggests that over time, regeneration will increase with those not in close proximity

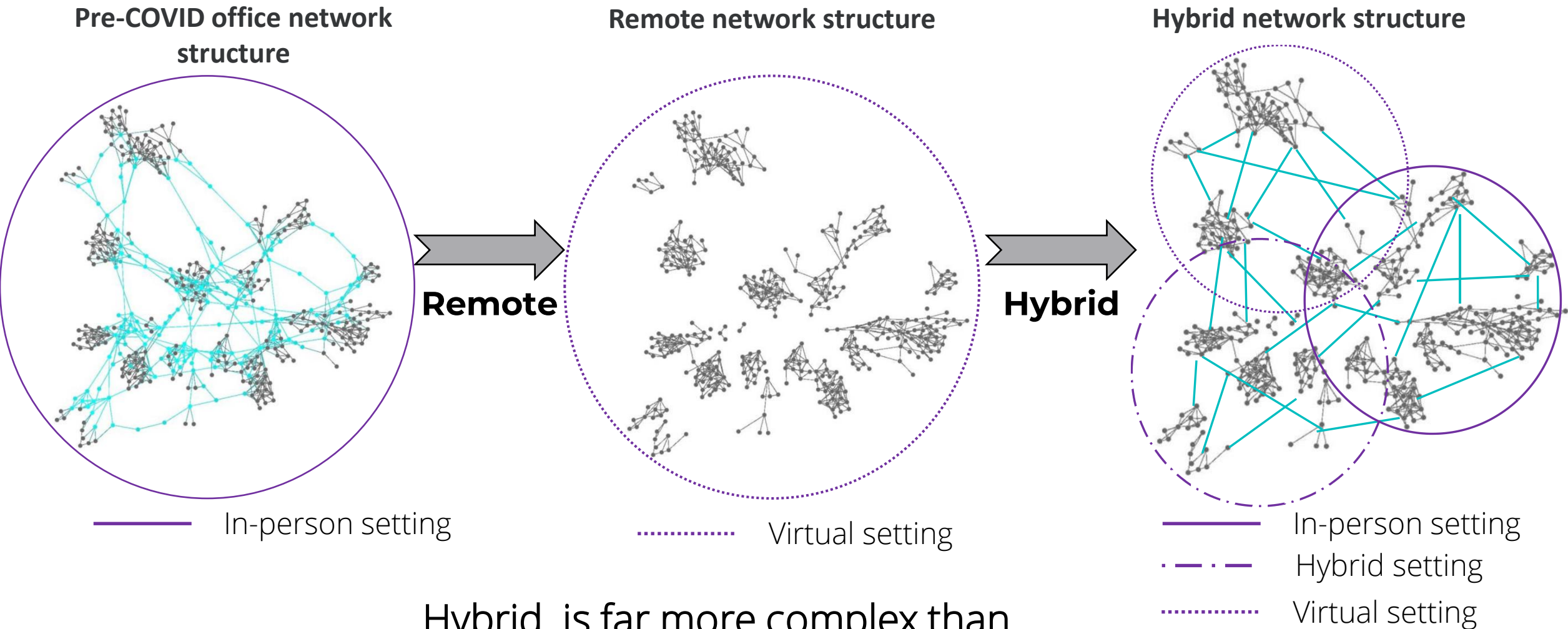- Those *not* co-located are less likely to form weak ties

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Current approaches to flexible working are not sustainable

Compared to workers in a fixed work location,
Flexible workers:

- ❌ Least productive
- ❌ Least able to collaborate
- ❌ Least connected to their organisation
- ❌ Least able to take a break

- Unstructured flexible working is too complicated

- CNeW latest research at the firm level is now showing that workers **demand flexible working** but that it is **causes them stress** having to figure out the where and when of work

Hybrid working 2.0:
Humanising the office

Turn flexible working into a competitive advantage.

December 2021

Organisational network structures – from traditional to disrupted to complex

Pre-COVID office network structure

Remote network structure

Hybrid network structure

Remote

Hybrid

In-person setting

Virtual setting

In-person setting

Hybrid setting

Virtual setting

Hybrid is far more complex than simply combining office + remote

Increasing complexity in how work is organised

Work Era	Location			Time	
	Office	Hybrid	Anywhere	Standard hours	Non-standard hours
Pre-COVID	✓			✓	
Remote			✓	✓	✓
Hybrid	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Hybrid is the most complex work setting we've known
→ We need to structure work to simplify
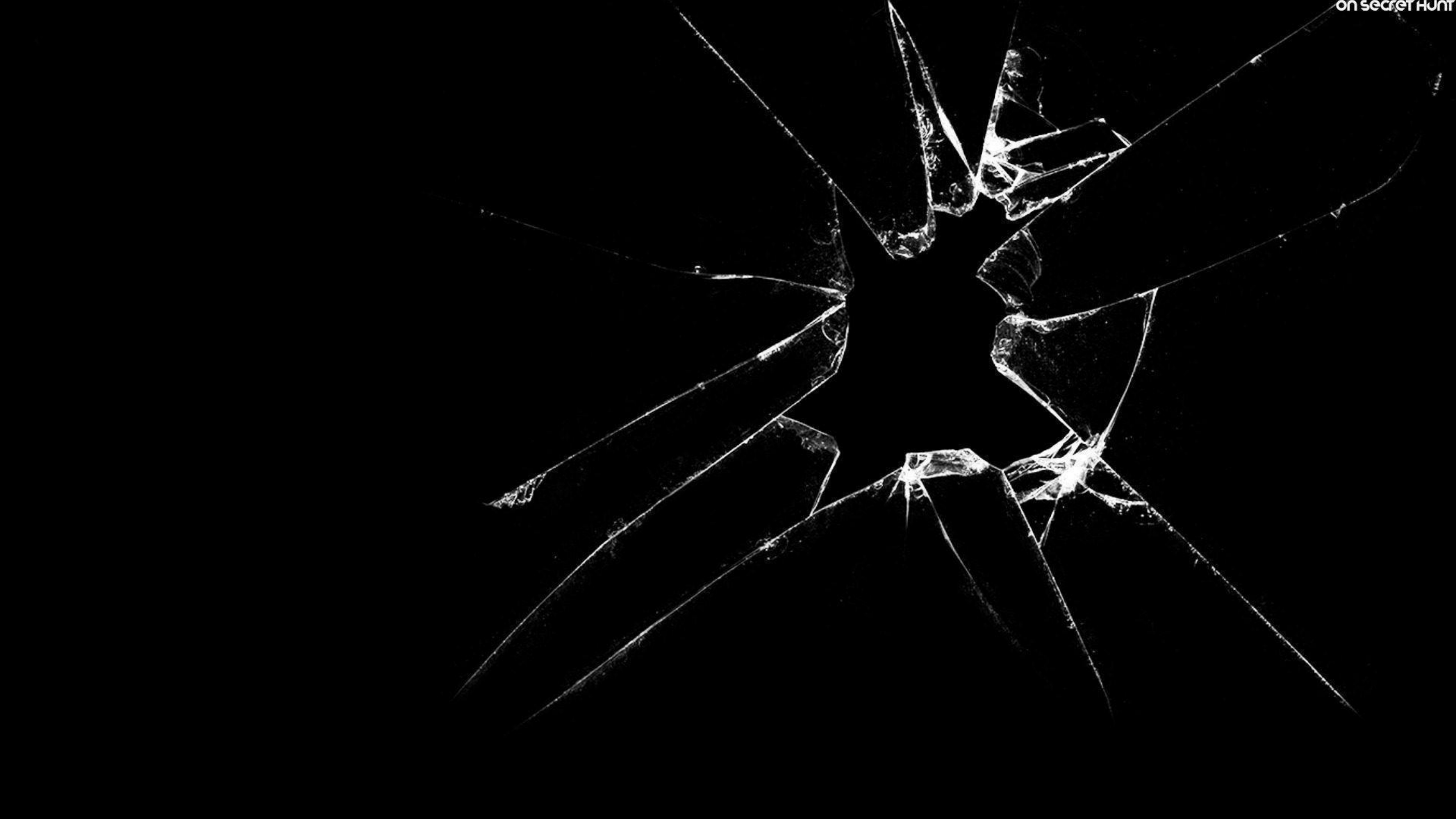
Repair the damage of remote working on work

Communication is broken

- 70% of all meetings keep employees from working on completing their tasks

- Average worker attends 62 meetings per month

Collaboration is broken

- Interacting is easier than ever, but true, productive, value-creating collaboration is not.

- Less time spent on complex problem solving, creative sessions, planning, conflict resolution
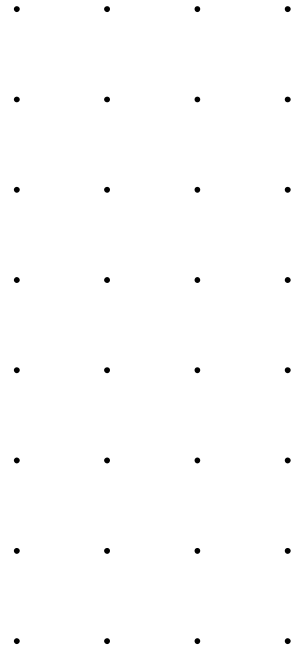
Do we need to meet? Surprising positive impact of meeting-free days

Having some meetings is essential for coordination and social ties, but meeting-free days improve overall work and satisfaction.

Factor	Impact
Autonomy	✔
Communication	✔
Cooperation	✔
Engagement	✔
Productivity	✔
Satisfaction	✔
Stress	✔
Micromanaging	✔

MEETING FREE DAYS PER WEEK

Autonomy, Communication, Cooperation, Engagement, Productivity, Satisfaction

Laker, B., et al. (2022). The Surprising Impact of Meeting-Free Days. MIT Sloan Management Review.

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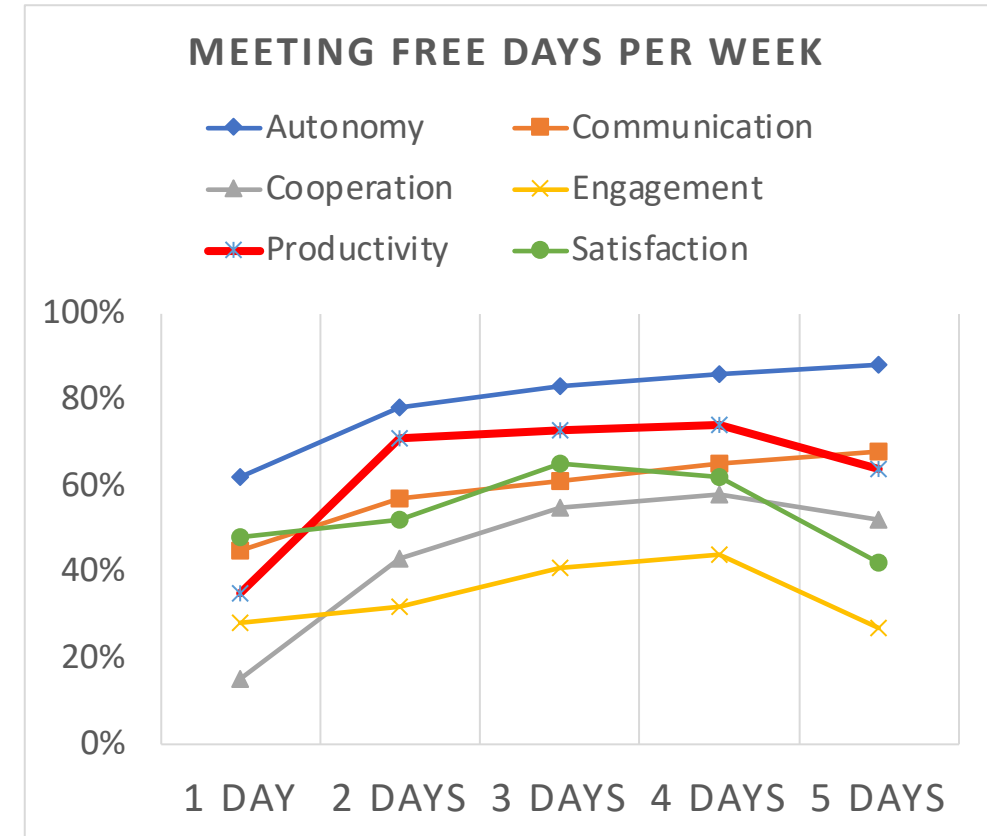
Repair the damage of remote working

- Workers have become
  2D avatars of their former selves

Professional networks –
- McKinsey research on damage to social capital
- Workers are not motivated to rebuild their networks

Social connections –
- Relationships with co-workers no longer important factor in job satisfaction
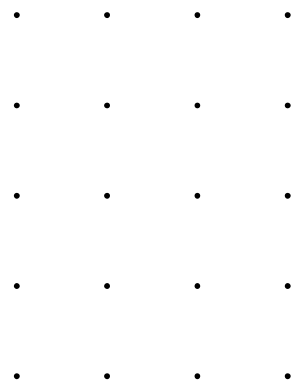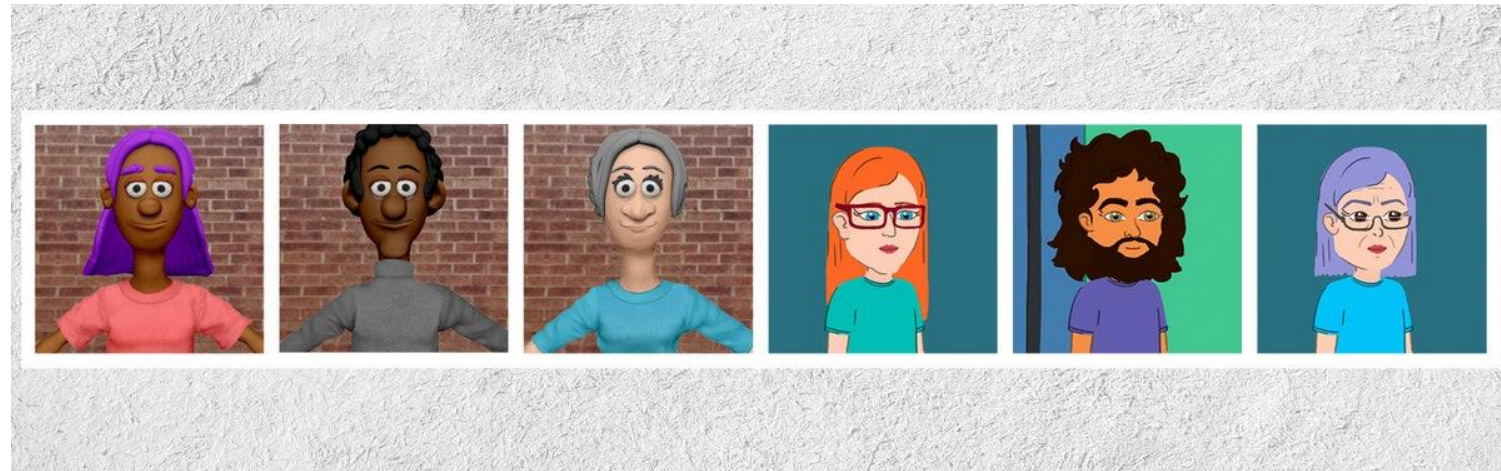
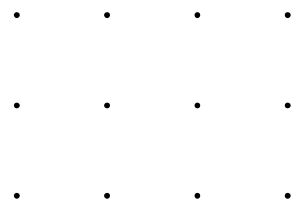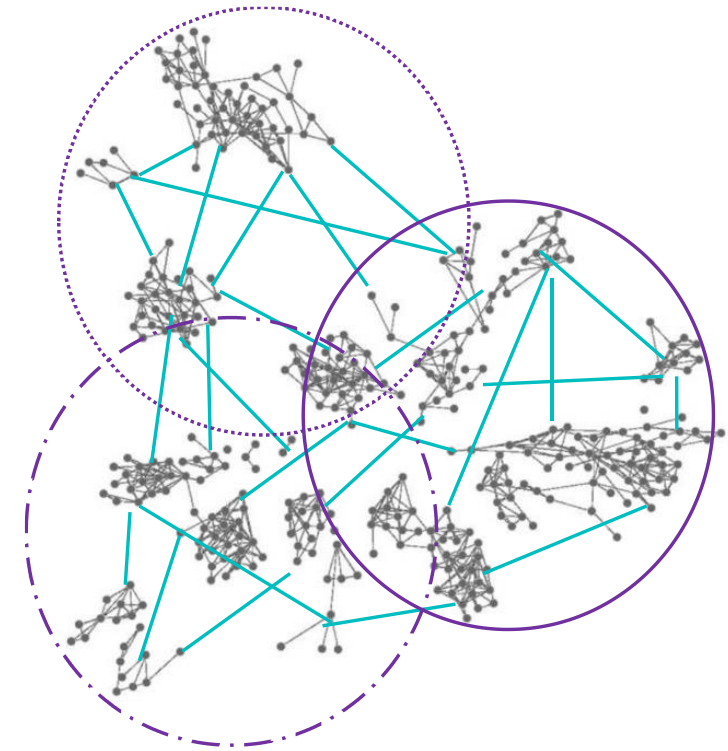# A research informed approach to hybrid working

Repair

- Damage of remote working

Restructure

- Work aligned to office vs remote

Repurpose

- Office aligned to mission / business objectives, with rituals

Decision matrix – Suggested **formats** aligned to the business objective

What is the business objective?	Convey information		Converge on meaning		Connect people	
What is the **context**?	**Familiar**	**Novel**	**Familiar**	**Novel**	**Established or transactional**	**Build trust & relationships**
To share, coordinate or collaborate?	Routine exchange, share info	Non-routine exchange, important announcement (with Q&A)	Clarify concepts, BAU problem solving, coordinate actions	Creative sessions, complex problem solving, planning, conflict resolution	Assemble team, meeting client	Celebrations, major project kick offs, onboarding
Suggested format	**Asynch media** (email, doc, Slack)	**Virtual**	**Virtual**	**In person**	**Virtual**	**In person**

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A research informed approach to hybrid working
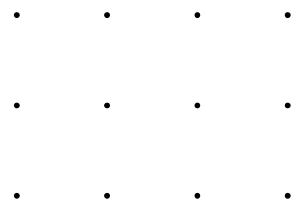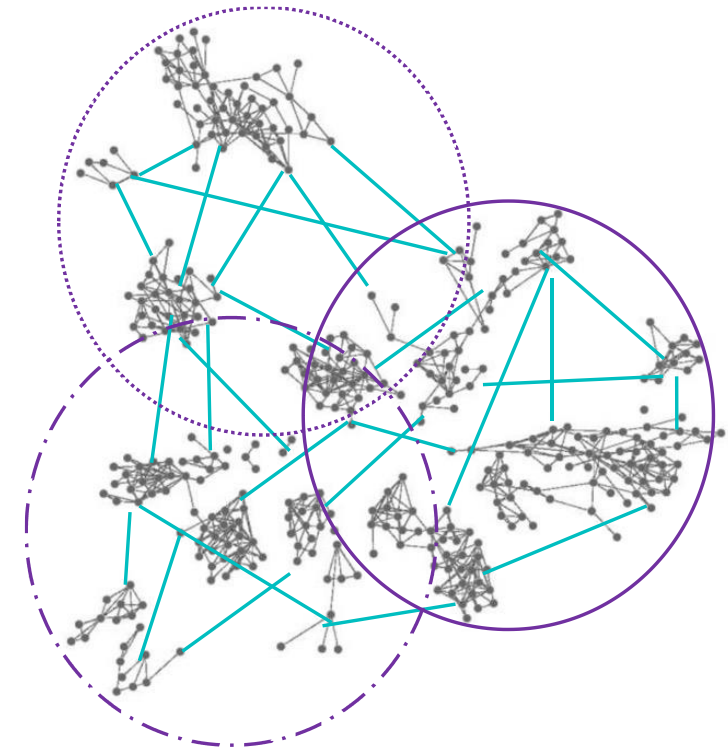
Repair

• Damage of remote working
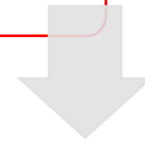
Restructure

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Hybrid working 2.0 restructures work on 'what works best where'

- **Remote working** (2 days a week) increases individual / team productivity up to 5%, where work is simple routine, individual and team task-based, loosely coupled, and focused/deep-thinking work.

- What's the **role of the office**?

- The office is where people come to work together through meaningful and purposeful interactions

Hybrid working 2.0: Humanising the office

Turn flexible working into a competitive advantage.

Restructure work from office to remote

- Think activity-based working through human interactions

Relationship Types	Type of work
1. **Relationship Forming**	Meaningful connections
2. **Unstructured Collaboration**	Ideation and creative work
3. **Collaboration Diversity**	Fast, complex, and dynamic work
4. **Teamwork**	Planning, developing, disseminating and coordinating work
5. **Functional Coordination**	Loosely coupled work

Task-relationship grid
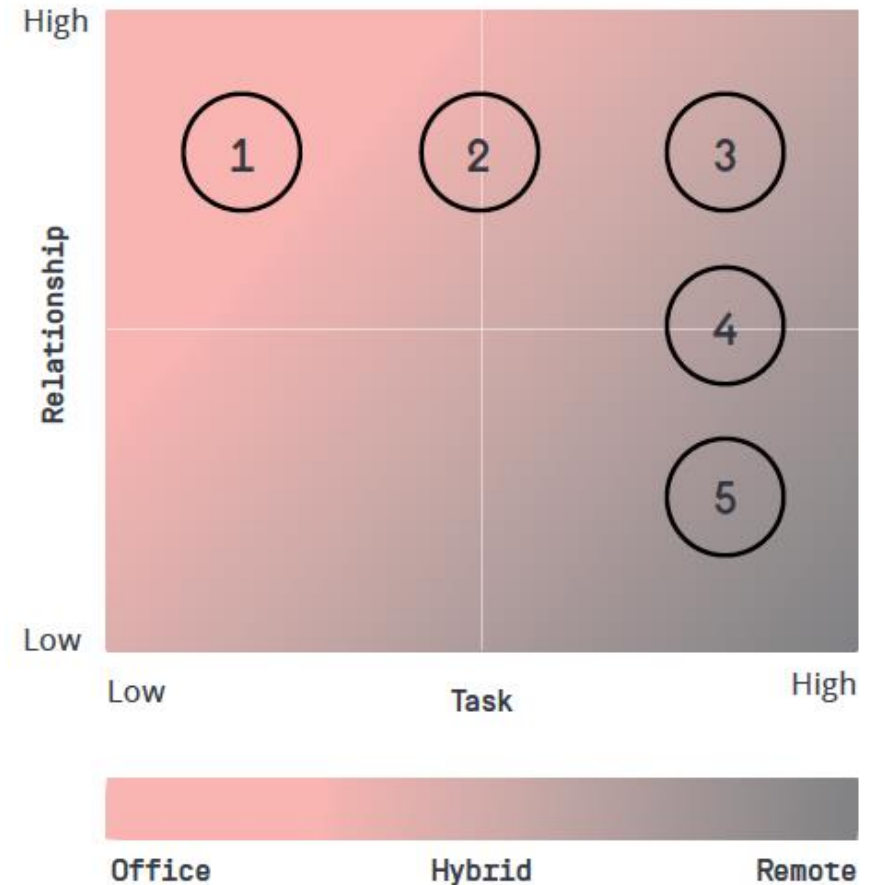
Ideal work activities from office to remote.

Relationship Types	Type of work	Type of activities	Ideal location
1. Relationship Forming	Meaningful connections	Social gatherings, informal meetups, onboarding, forming new teams, work conferences, agenda-free conversations	Office
2. Unstructured Collaboration	Ideation and creative work	Brainstorming, hypothesis formulation, workshopping, humility huddles	
3. Collaboration Diversity	Fast, complex, and dynamic work	Starting new projects, prototyping products / solutions, formulating strategy, dealing with a crisis	
4. Teamwork	Planning, developing, disseminating and coordinating work	Structured collaboration, stand-ups, coordinating workstreams, team meetings	
5. Functional Coordination	Loosely coupled work	Routine tasks, individual-focused work, one-on-one meetings, project delivery, administration	Remote

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Diversity in Hybrid

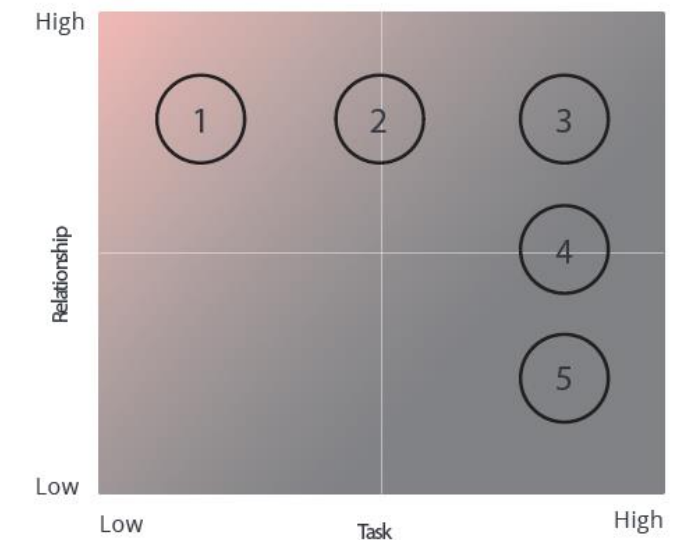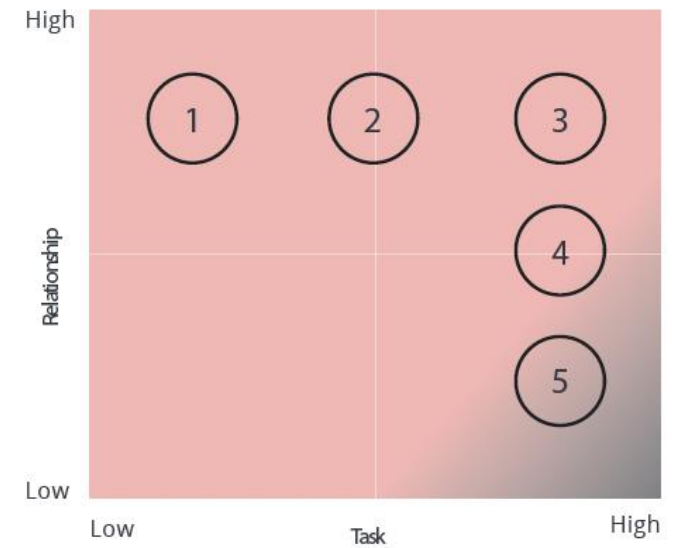**Office Only**: Always work on site, unless given permission to vary location

Office First: Predominantly work on site, but work remotely on occasion

Remote Only: Always work remotely, unless given permission to vary location

Remote First: Predominantly work remotely, but work on site on occasion

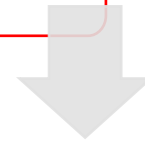**Fixed Split:** Work on site for a set number of days per week (e.g., Tuesday, Wednesday), which are decided by employer

Flexible Split: Work on site for a set number of days per week (e.g. 3 days), which worker is free to decide

A research informed approach to hybrid working
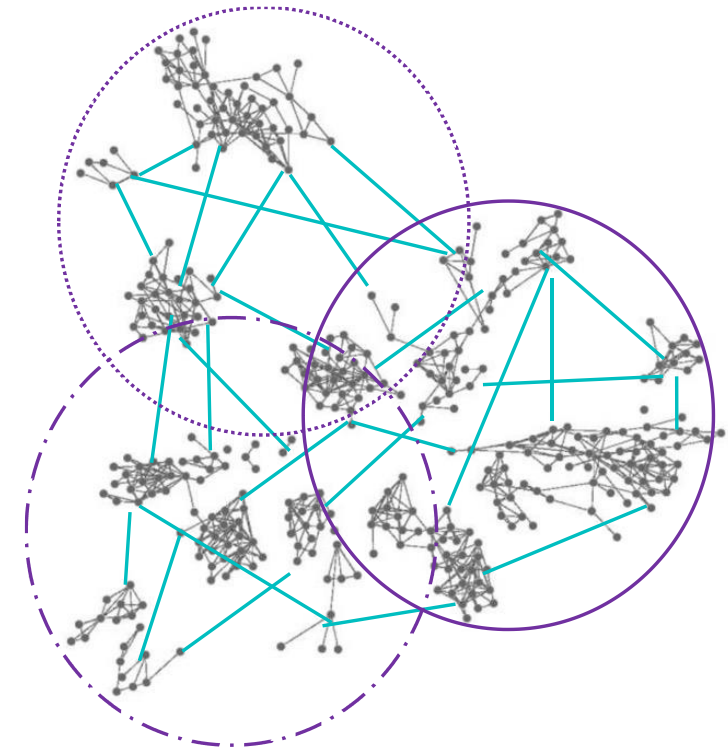
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Repurpose the office aligned to your mission

- What is the *purpose* of your office? How does your office speak to your mission?

- Hint: Be specific – "to collaborate" is not enough.

- Rather "this space exists to accelerate product development"

What purposeful activities will you have in your office?

Rituals for teams and the organisation

Some rituals to consider:

- Start certain days with whiteboarding session/brainstorming
- Monthly 'meet and greet' with new employees
- Ensure major project kick-offs occur in the office
- Create cross-team opportunities to learn from each other
- Post-mortems, such as 'stuff-up sessions', once a quarter in the office
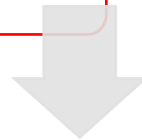
A structured approach to hybrid working

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- Repairing how we work will make work more effective and deliver better wellbeing outcomes

- Restructuring work makes flexible working more sustainable and hybrid work less complex

- Co-creation with your employees is essential

- Skills and capabilities for hybrid

- Test & learn capability

- 'People' is the new office amenity

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About Dr. Sean Gallagher

Director, Centre for the New Workforce

LinkedIn: https://www.linkedin.com/in/seanhgallagher/

Dr. Sean Gallagher is one of Australia's leading experts on the future of work.

He's the inaugural Director of the Centre for the New Workforce (CNeW) at Swinburne University of Technology – a research centre focused on talent development and workforce transformation in the digital economy.

Sean works with leaders from ASX 200 companies to local councils to help their businesses empower their workers to thrive in disruptive change and drive value creation for their organisations.

His research has shaped federal and state government policy, including the Victorian Government Inquiry into the On-Demand Economy. He's also a recognised thought leader and holds a PhD in chemistry.
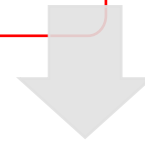
A research informed approach to hybrid working
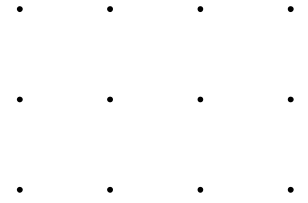
Retrain

• Leaders and employees – how to work and empower
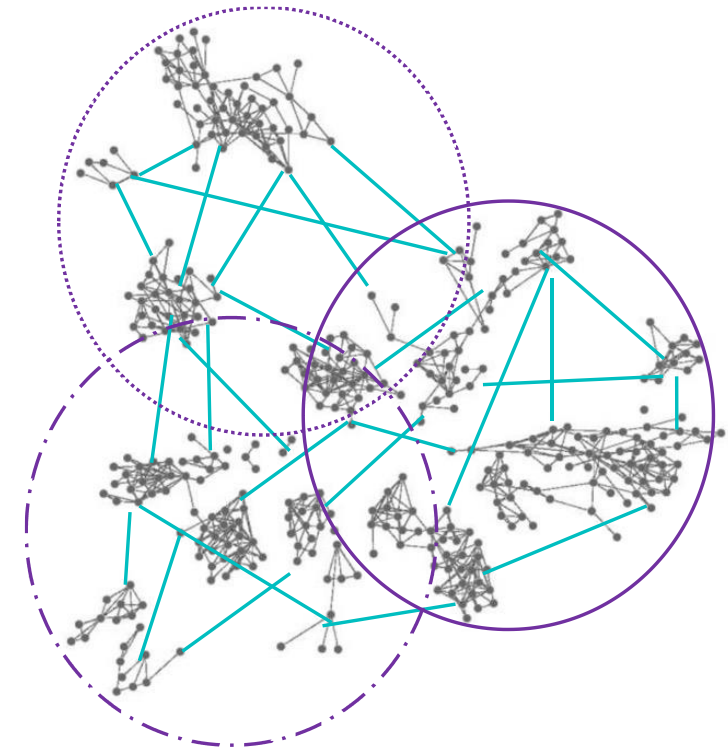
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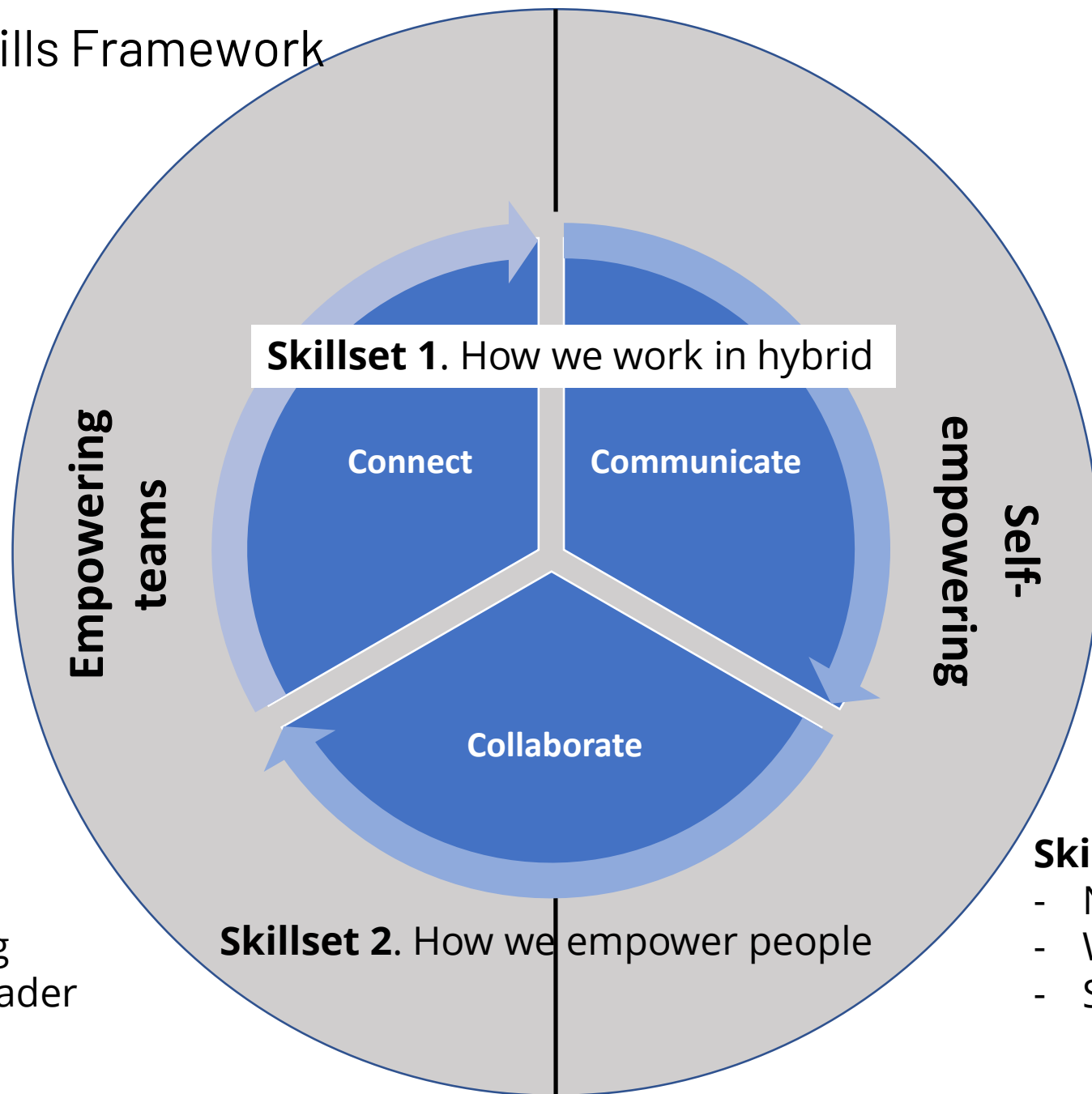• Office aligned to mission / business objectives, with rituals

Hybrid Working Skills Framework

Leaders and teams

Skillset 1. How we work in hybrid

Empowering teams

Connect

Communicate

Collaborate

Self-empowering

Individuals

Skillset 2:
- Coaching
- Team wellbeing
- Relationship leader
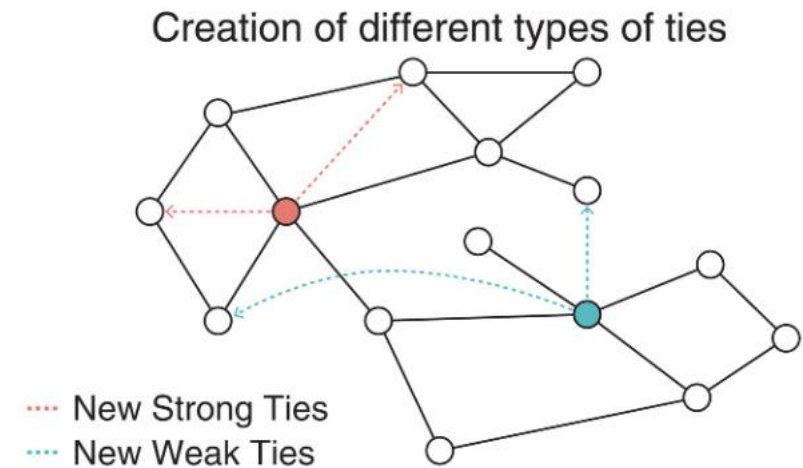
Skillset 2. How we empower people

Skillset 2:
- Networking
- Wellbeing
- Self-manage work
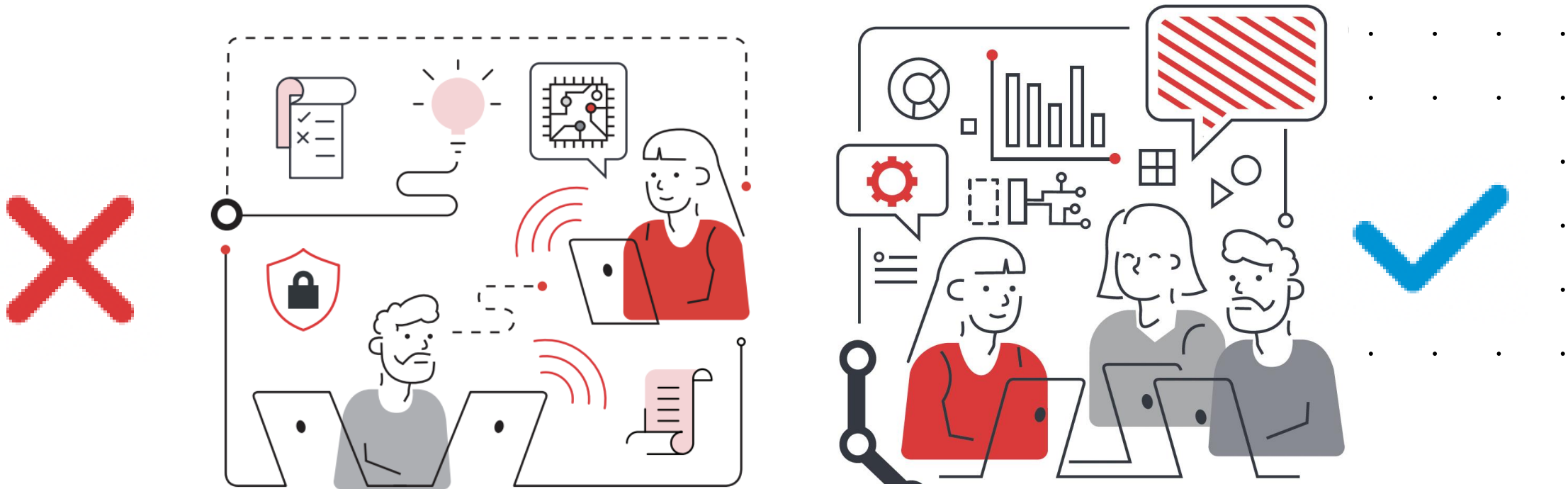
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A causal test of the strength of weak ties

- social-scientific theory that stresses the importance of weak associations (e.g., acquaintance versus close friendship) in influencing the transmission of information through social networks

- LinkedIn's "People You May Know" algorithm

- weak ties increase job transmissions

- the weakest ties had the greatest impact on job mobility, whereas the strongest ties had the least.

Creation of different types of ties


```
---- New Strong Ties
---- New Weak Ties
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Creativity: Virtual communication curbs creative idea generation

Creativity	Virtual	In-person
Total no. ideas	❌	✔️
No. creative ideas	❌	✔️
Selection of ideas	✔️	✔️