NANO TOOLS FOR LEADERS®

SUCCEEDING WITH HYBRID WORK: FOCUS ON 5 Cs

Nano Tools for Leaders® are fast, effective leadership tools that you can learn and start using in less than 15 minutes—with the potential to significantly impact your success as a leader and the engagement and productivity of the people you lead.

THE GOAL

Understand and overcome the most common challenges of full-time work split between home and office.

NANO TOOL

One thing is clear about the future of work: hybrid work arrangements are becoming the norm for many organizations. And no matter the industry, the concerns involve the same "5C" challenges: communication, coordination, connection, creativity, and culture. If you're struggling to manage a hybrid team or workforce, or your own hybrid work, start by understanding the five challenges, then use the action steps below to assess where you're at and where to go from there.

The challenges, defined:

Communication: This challenge includes technology snags; meetings in which some people are remote (should everyone be on a separate computer to level the playing field?); conversations monopolized by one or a few team members; and barriers due to power, status, and language differences.

Coordination: Greater effort is required to equal the playing field between on-site and remote workers. Remote teammates can get left out of small exchanges and minor decisions, which can grow into bigger conversations and more important decisions.

Connection: Social connections, which are important for workplace advancement and psychological well-being, can be weakened or broken when working remotely. If remote workers feel they belong to a new, less connected "underclass" (in contrast to a "dominant class"), they may be less happy, less committed, and more likely to search for opportunities elsewhere.

Creativity: Collective and individual creativity can be threatened. Collective brainstorming via videoconferencing may not equal the more casual conversations, sidebars, and unexpected things that can happen when everyone is on site. Individually, there is reason to think that at least some social interactions and spontaneous conversations with colleagues, seeing random artifacts in each other's cubicles, and even the changes of scenery involved in going from home to work may be important for creativity.

Culture: Employees with a history of working together closely and knowing how to do it effectively, with a solid understanding of the company's norms, values, and expectations, can be highly productive and engaged when working remotely. But for new employees (whether interns, entry-level hires, or seasoned executives), there is a challenge in socializing and integrating them into the company's culture. That culture can be critical for signaling the organization's distinctiveness

to potential new recruits, especially in industries where firms compete heavily for talent, such as tech, consulting, or banking. If employees never or rarely come to the office or spend time together, how can a company's distinctive "feel" be maintained—and then, how can companies differentiate themselves from each other in the war for talent?

ACTION STEPS

Work on the following four steps on your own or with your team to uncover insights and a renewed sense of energy for making changes. Focusing on them with your team can create an even bigger impact: have each person give the team a grade for each C, then share the grades and discuss the reasons for assigning them. Your diagnoses may be very different—and offer insights you might not have gained otherwise. Brainstorm together about ways you could address the problems you've identified, and develop a plan for implementing them. Doing this together will result in better ideas and greater buy-in that will stand you in good stead as you move forward together.

1. **Evaluate.** For each of the five Cs, rate yourself between 1 (highest) to 10 (lowest) on how you think your remote or hybrid workplace, unit, or team is doing. The goal is to use these ratings to summarize whether you think you're in good shape or have room for improvement on each C.

2. **Analyze.** Identify the C you gave the lowest rating to. This is where you can benefit most from focusing your attention—it's your maximum leverage point for making high-impact changes. Then, analyze the underlying issues. Why is your rating weak here? For example, if you scored lowest on communication, are you observing some people speaking up too much while others aren't speaking up enough? If you scored lowest on creativity, is it collective creativity or individual creativity that seems to be suffering most? Then, move on to the C you gave the next-lowest grade and repeat until you've considered each C that didn't get a perfect score.

3. **Plan.** Starting with the C you gave the lowest rating, consider what you can do to make improvements in this area. Aim to develop three action steps you can take to begin addressing the problems you've identified. For example, if your weakest C is coordination, you might come up with more efficient ways to ensure everyone is looped into all important decisions, or a new schedule for ensuring more regular, structured information-sharing sessions with remote team members. Identify potential barriers to the implementation of your action steps and ways to overcome them. Repeat for the other Cs.

4. **Implement.** Set a clear schedule for implementing the changes you plan to make and a communication plan for them. Will they be rolled out over several weeks or months? And in what sequence? Who will need to be consulted and informed at each stage, and how should this be done? Establish key metrics for measuring the effectiveness of the changes—for example, by using surveys to track progress on culture or holding regular check-ins with junior employees to ask about their mentors and networks as part of improving connection. Finally, ensure that you set a timeframe for reviewing how well the changes you've been making are working, perhaps six months down the line and again another six months after that.

HOW LEADERS USE IT

One senior manager who analyzed his team using the 5Cs checklist told me he had a real "lightbulb moment" when he thought hard about connection and realized that the higher turnover he'd been seeing on his team wasn't just due to pandemic burnout or the prospect of higher pay elsewhere, but to the reality that team members' social connections to each other had frayed over the last two years, diminishing their sense of commitment to the team and belonging to the company.

A leadership team I worked with discovered that there was considerable variation among them when it came to evaluating company culture. Team members who had been around long before the pandemic sent the company remote gave their company a 1 or 2 and said they thought the company's culture was in decent shape—they could articulate its central values fairly easily and assumed everyone else could do the same. Members who hadn't been at the company as long, however, gave it much lower ratings on culture and expressed confusion and uncertainty about the company's core values and norms, which they'd hesitated to bring up before. Understanding the reasons for such discrepancies can be very illuminating, and the act of simply discussing them can help to build trust and firmer foundations for making improvements going forward.

CONTRIBUTOR TO THIS NANO TOOL

Martine Haas, PhD, The Lauder Professor, Professor of Management, The Wharton School; Anthony L. Davis Director of the Joseph H. Lauder Institute for Management and International Studies, The University of Pennsylvania

KNOWLEDGE IN ACTION: RELATED EXECUTIVE EDUCATION PROGRAMS

Professor Haas teaches in *Effective Execution of Organizational Strategy*, *Global Strategic Leadership*, and the *CEO Academy®*.

ABOUT NANO TOOLS

Nano Tools for Leaders® was conceived and developed by Deb Giffen, MCC, director of Custom Programs at Wharton Executive Education. *Nano Tools for Leaders®* is a collaboration between joint sponsors Wharton Executive Education and Wharton's Center for Leadership and Change Management. This collaboration is led by Professors Michael Useem and John Paul MacDuffie.