



UNIVERSITY OF
TORONTO

ITS: Enterprise Applications and Solutions Integration (EASI) Return to Workplace Report

– A brief report on discussions undertaken by the EASI RTW focus group
(Oct-Dec 2021)

EASI has been consulting Gartner and also been a part of numerous conversations on campus around preparedness for a gradual return to the workplace. In order to further brainstorm and provide a set of recommendations for an engaged and efficient hybrid workplace in 2022, a return to work (RTW) focus group of eleven staff from various teams within EASI came together between the months of Oct-Dec 2021 and met on a weekly basis for six weeks to discuss ideas on how to make the return to workplace an exciting and a fun experience.

This report provides an overview of those conversations and recommendations under several key themes. **We are posting and offering this report as an example of what your unit might consider under the same circumstances.** NOTE: The members of the group were not responsible for the implementation of these ideas and were just meeting to provide constructive feedback.

Version 1.0 compiled by:

Gary Raposo
Vik Chadalawada



Key Objectives, Themes and Recommendations

Key Objectives

There were 6 key focus group objectives for the 6-week engagement, and they are as follows:

1. **Brainstorm Engagement Ideas:** Have an Open conversation around how to make the return to workplace more engaging and effective
2. **Offer Diverse Inclusive Perspectives:** Gather diverse and inclusive perspectives with a cross representation of all functional teams within EASI
3. **Align on Key Themes:** Establish key themes or focus areas such as organizing effective hybrid meetings, EASI Connections, Training, Health, Well Being & Workplace Safety
4. **Set up Meeting Cadence:** Decide on how often to meet and also what would be the format as well as output of these meetings? How can these meetings create value along with Inclusion?
5. **Review Recommendations:** Review recommendations arising from the various themes and identify easily implementable ideas.
6. **Create a final Report:** Collect and create a final report containing all the recommendations that will be viewed by management and further assessed for implementation in the Hybrid year.

Key Emerging themes:

The following were the emerging themes that came out of the focus group discussions.

1. **Hybrid meetings**
2. **EASI Connections**
3. **Wellness Exploration**
4. **Training and Personal Development**

In the sections below, each of these sections are elaborated with recommendations on ideas for implementation.

Recommendation Highlights

- Establish the goal of your meeting then select the right type of meeting – in-person vs. hybrid vs. remote
- Establish formal Hybrid meeting etiquette
- Have an inclusive mindset – social and collaborative aspects of your hybrid meeting must be as available to remote participants as they are to in-room participants
- EASI Website updates with resources for a hybrid workplace
- Create an organization-wide Hybrid Collaboration and Communication Guide
- Set up a 30 minute conversation with a colleague once a month
- Establish quarterly and monthly team building activities for everyone to participate in
- Implement no meeting days
- Showcase people – their passion and hobbies
- Establish an organization wide wellbeing community and connect this community to UofT resources
- Create dedicated spaces within the building to practice wellbeing (either yoga, mindfulness, stretching etc.)
- Set up a calendar of wellbeing events on the organization website
- Create Discover UofT walking tours to be done as a group activity
- Set up online Book/Music clubs
- Set up online resources and channels for healthy food recipe sharing
- Set a learning goal for yourself and set aside the time needed to meet your goal.



Hybrid Meetings

As we transition from remote work back to working from traditional office workplaces, hybrid meetings will be the norm. For this theme, we wanted to ensure that all attendees are able to participate fully in hybrid meetings – whether they are in a traditional meeting room, attending remotely from their office desk, or working remotely/from home. We identified two categories to support this goal.

1. Equipping Meeting Rooms for Hybrid Meetings

- Meeting rooms need to address several physical aspects in order to support a successful hybrid meeting:
 - All participants must be heard
 - A high-quality microphone is essential so that everyone in the meeting room is heard clearly by remote participants.
 - Similarly, a loudspeaker is required so that remote participants are heard by all in the meeting room.
 - All participants must be seen
 - A high-quality camera with a wide field of view that can capture the entire meeting room should be used.
 - Placement of the camera will affect how well it performs.
 - A PTZ (pan, tilt, zoom) camera may be a good option in some cases but be aware that the constant motion of some AI cameras may be distracting or uncomfortable for remote participants.
 - All participants must be able to collaborate
 - Luckily, modern collaboration software provides facilities for sharing screens and/or presentations, file sharing, chat spaces, and in some cases even virtual whiteboards.
 - Laptops/PCs are not suitable for meeting rooms
 - Built in laptop or PC cameras, speakers, and microphones will not be sufficient for a meeting room. This equipment is designed for capturing a single participant situated directly in front of the laptop/PC and will not perform well in a room full of people.
- Training and support should be provided so that individuals hosting the meeting room portion of the hybrid meeting are comfortable with the hardware and software.
 - Sample Training Plan: Hosting a Hybrid Meeting
 - Common starting point housing reference information (e.g., web site or SharePoint site)
 - Connect+Learn session hosted by SME
 - Recorded for play back/reference at any time
 - Written documentation/instructions/reference material
 - “How to” or “Walk Through” guides – task focused
 - Technical material – user manuals for hardware, links to software
 - In-room posters/quick reference guides
 - “Coles/Cliff Notes” version – get you up and running ASAP
 - Dry run sessions with SME (a.k.a. office hours)
 - Try it, make mistakes, get answers, build confidence – all in a safe, no pressure environment
 - Support
 - Clear instructions on how to get support if something doesn't work as expected
 - Peer support model



2. Recommendations for Organizing and Facilitating Hybrid Meetings

- Preparation for a successful hybrid meeting begins far in advance of the meeting itself.
 - Is a meeting necessary?
 - What is the purpose and goal of the meeting?
 - Can this be done via email/Teams instead?
 - Are you selecting the appropriate format – in-person, hybrid, or online?
 - Consider the number of meeting attendees as well as the goal of the meeting. Some meetings may be better suited to online only (e.g., working session, presentation to large audience)
 - Create and share the agenda in advance
 - Make the meeting content relevant, compelling and participative to keep participants engaged.
 - Invite the right people
 - Contributors vs. listeners
 - Who needs to be onsite?
 - Who can participate from home?
 - Pick a date/time that works for most or all participants
 - Use Outlook's scheduling assistance or FindTime
 - Allow for travel time between meetings for in-person participants
 - Assign roles
 - Host/Presenter
 - Will one person share all content, or will each presenter share their own content?
 - Moderator
 - Watch chat to ensure all voices are heard
 - For large meetings will someone be responsible for muting mics and turning off cameras of disruptive and inattentive participants?
 - Note taker
 - If possible, set up any breakout rooms, polling, and Q&A in advance of the meeting.
- During the meeting
 - Follow all health/safety policies in place
 - Camera and audio on in the room
 - Meeting room camera should capture all participants
 - Remote participants may elect to turn their camera off when listening but should turn on their camera when speaking
 - Body language is important and increases the level of involvement for remote participants
 - Acknowledge when remote participants connect
 - Allow time for social interaction and connections (introductions, ice breakers, stories)
 - For longer meetings, consider meeting intermissions so participants can get up and stretch, focus their eyes away from screens, visit the bathroom, top up coffee/water, etc.
 - Clarify meeting processes and etiquette
 - Use the mute button when you're not speaking to block background noise.
 - Is use of the raise hand option required for all comments and/or questions?
 - Presenters should have their cameras on when speaking



- State your name before commenting/asking your question
- Use virtual tools to make sure all participants are included
 - Shared documents/presentations vs. hand outs
 - Virtual pointer vs. physically pointing at screen
 - Virtual whiteboard vs. in-room whiteboards
 - Actively monitor chats in addition to the discussion
- Take minutes and share them along with presentation materials
- Dedicate your full attention to the meeting – do not multitask
 - If you're multitasking and focused on something else, should you even be in this meeting?
- After the meeting
 - Share presentations, minutes, notes, recordings, etc.
 - Establish a shared space for action items and follow ups

KEY IDEAS FROM HYBRID MEETINGS:

- 1. Hybrid meeting rooms are purpose built – using your laptop's built-in microphone/camera/speaker will not work well in a typical meeting room.**
- 2. Training on the room's AV equipment will help hybrid meetings run smoothly – understand how to connect to and use the equipment in advance of your first meeting.**
- 3. Establish the goal of your meeting then select the right type of meeting – in-person vs. hybrid vs. remote.**
- 4. Let everyone know about the expected etiquette and assign roles to keep the meeting running smoothly.**
- 5. All participants (in the room or remote) should be seen and heard – your facial expressions, gestures, posture, and tone of voice are powerful communication tools.**
- 6. Have an inclusive mindset – social and collaborative aspects of your meeting must be as available to remote participants as they are to in-room participants.**



EASI Connections

Engaging and meaningful connections make the workplace more motivating and balancing. Research suggests that Isolation has been one of the biggest side effects of the pandemic and the team has tried to address this by suggesting some of the activities listed below:

1. Collaborating/Communicating effectively

- Create an EASI recommendations page, e.g., [Highly Effective EASI](#) in the EASI website, under “Resources” that would include all approved suggestions from this work group. Include an intro to explain what we were thinking behind the recommendations.
- Create a Collaboration/Communication guide (e.g., [Collaboration & Communication 101](#)) with everything listed below and add it to the EASI recommendations page.
- Make sure to only invite people that are absolutely needed and will be able to help/bring something to the meeting.
- Always use meeting agenda & meeting notes for large and/or important meetings. E.g., we’re talking about decisions that will impact a lot of people, there’s a call to action for the attendees, etc.
- Reduce the number of meetings and their time (e.g., daily meetings). People’s attention is at the highest for 20mn and decreases after that.
- Keep discussion relevant to the meeting as much as possible.
- Name the person loud and clear before asking them a question.
- If you absolutely need people’s attention for an important announcement/question, make sure to start with this at the very beginning of the meeting, before the “2mn story”, and say out loud “I have an important announcement/question to ask you all”.
- If you have an important comment or question during the meeting and want to make sure everyone will get it, say it aloud and post it in the meeting chat as well beginning with “IMPORTANT – “, e.g., IMPORTANT – The deadline to submit your AWA is December 10. [MS Teams has a feature to mark a message as important]
- Common sharing practices (MS Teams, OneDrive, or SharePoint) – At the beginning of a project/task, make a group decision on what tool should be used to share documents/info, just for this project/task. E.g., we decide to share all documents for this work group in the Files tab of MS Teams, or in a shared folder (someone’s folder or a SharePoint site folder).
- The checklist rule – communicate with bullet points as much as possible to keep all communication concise and to the point. It’s easier and quicker to read. Our value add is to be able to summarize and focus on the important or most impactful.

2. Engaging/Connecting people

- We should all start a meeting with camera on and then only the speaker remains on camera. This way we engage everyone both in person and in hybrid mode.
- Kick start the meeting with somebody doing a 2-3 min story to share something, whatever that is, but stick to 3 min max. (Decide in the last meeting who’s going to do the 2 min story) –This can be done for meetings that are both in person and hybrid.
- Monthly 30 min connection with someone from EASI (volunteer based with random selection). E.g., Share something you recently discovered or learned, or would like to learn about. Or share something you’re struggling with and would like help with.
- Quarterly/monthly team building activities (Trivia based on IT@UofT People Profile, Ice Skating, Hockey, Bowling, Mini-golf, Escape Room).
- Who’s in the Office this week? – Find somebody that also works on campus the day you are there and exchange a few words, take a selfie, or go for a short walk together.



- Foodies' Time – At lunch break, bring food that you love to share with others so they can try it as well (carefully with COVID in mind), or if you are adventurous enough, exchange your lunch box with somebody else.
- Fresh News from EASI (Quarterly EASI Newsletter):
 - EASI projects (like TKF but on a quarterly level)
 - EASI training (Connect+Learn; LLC, web pages, micro-learning videos)
 - EASI people (hobbies, volunteer, passions, etc). Focus on 3-4 people each quarter

3. Other suggestions:

- Implement a NO-Meeting Day during the week.
- Multiple chats and windows at the same time, reduce this number.
 - Where do we put our comments?
- Use the exclamation mark feature instead of writing IMPORTANT in chats.
- Respect the MS Team status and do not disturb people when they are in red status saying in a call or meeting. Send an email instead?
 - We could use custom text to let people know that you're busy and should not be disturb unless very important.
 - Use delayed emails if need to send an email over the weekend.
- Maximize window when in a meeting so you don't see anything else like inbox, other tabs, ...
- Do not expect people to answer chats and emails over the weekend.
- In an "office hoteling" situation, employees can book a space directly via the web browser or mobile app. Use the tool to set neighborhoods, find colleagues or even use certain tools – like video – that facilitate collaboration.
- Profile Picture in Teams – EASI can hire a photographer to take professional headshots to facilitate this effort.

KEY IDEAS FROM EASI CONNECTIONS:

- 1. Create an EASI recommendations page on the EASI website under resources**
- 2. Make sure to invite only people needed to key meetings to avoid meeting fatigue**
- 3. Use Meeting Agendas and Meeting notes extensively for meetings**
- 4. Try to use cameras in meetings as much as possible**
- 5. Connect with a colleague once a month for 30 minutes (can be in person or online)**
- 6. Establish Quarterly or Monthly team building activities that can be fun like Trivia, Ice Skating, Bowling, Escape room, Mini Golf**
- 7. Showcase People and their passions and hobbies**
- 8. Implement a no meeting day (perhaps on Fridays)**
- 9. Include Professional Profile Photos of every team member on Teams so that people can recognize faces even when the video is turned off**



Wellness Exploration

Following are the recommendations to facilitate wellness in the workplace through events, services and resources. Wellness can be approached under 4 categories listed below:

1. Wellness Support Group:

- Connect with Richa Choda from Integrated Wellness Consultant, Health & Well-Being Programs & Services
- Establish a regular program/help line
- Help establish an EASI community for wellbeing

2. Wellness Events

- Walking – Discover UofT
- Wellness Lunches – Discovering Healthy Lunch Spots at Kensington / Nearby, going out for lunch // Bring lunchboxes to find a common area for a communal lunch (find a courtyard etc. in the summer)
- Maybe once a week, see if 936 could be blocked off for group meditation (be silent, sitting etc.) for 10 minutes...
- See if the Athletic Centre (or anywhere at UofT) would be hosting events. We could post them for our team
- Can set up Lunch&Learn Sessions
 - How to effectively set up our phones for Health & Well Being
 - Healthy Breathing / Stretching exercises at your desk (Connect to Resources below)
- Set up fitness challenges
 - They can be short ones, maybe alternating between stretching, breathing, cardio etc.
- Find / Create Online / Contest Events
 - Scavenger Hunts etc.
 - Clue Style Games

3. Wellness Services

- Online Breathing Classes
- Webinars, Stress Relieve Videos – someone responsible for curating a health and wellbeing video / webinar once a week (share, post), or go into a what's happening newsletter
- Guided Meditation – set up times. Could find an online vid, set up for everyone to follow. This doesn't take much time: could just do 10min in an afternoon
- Does Teams have a way of incorporating H&WB? Set up reminders, or maybe connect directly to a calendar that we've come up with.

4. Wellness Resources

- Set up Online groups or spaces for Wellness Style Content / Events
 - Sharing healthy recipes: we could have different people look at this every week. Add to our library. Maybe make it team based (FIS, IS, UX, BA etc) one team would be responsible for finding and sharing each week
 - Set up a space that we could access for stretching exercises
 - Poetry Slams
 - Sharing Music / Books / Articles of Interest



- Set up a central area w. a calendar: something like EASI Connections, could have entertainment, health and wellbeing section...
 - Could have, for example, Canadian Opera Company events -> they sometimes have free events
 - Anything for entertainment, relief for the mind
 - Also any Wellness Events from the 1st section
- Can set up an area for where people can set up events: we can post it there. Does EASI have a Facebook group? Someplace that we can post stuff and share easily
- Recommendations for apps (like breathing and meditation) that people can load onto their phones

KEY IDEAS FROM WELLNESS EXPLORATION:

- 1. Establish an EASI community for wellbeing and link this to existing university resources along with regular programming updates**
- 2. Establish a help line**
- 3. Set up a monthly calendar of wellbeing activities taking place within EASI such as lunch and learns and also events happening outside either within the UofT community or within the city**
- 4. Create a discover UofT walking event that will get groups together to explore UofT by foot.**
- 5. Create a space that can be dedicated once a week to meditation and other wellness practices such as stretching, yoga, mindfulness etc.**
- 6. Create a section within the EASI website to share healthy food recipes**
- 7. Create a Book or music club for wellbeing to share monthly/quarterly reads or share music or other podcasts**
- 8. Set up fitness challenges like 4 minute planks, 10000 steps walking challenge**
- 9. Create online events like discussion panels, talks and also games and contests to make it fun**



Training and Personal Development

For this theme, we considered both the creation of training material as well as the consumption of training material in a hybrid workplace.

1. Recommendations for Conducting Training in a Hybrid Workplace

- Do not make “physical” assumptions
 - Not all participants will be in the same place
 - Not all participants will be available at the same time
 - Not all participants will be able to invest the same amount of time
 - Not all participants will have access to the same equipment
- Short, focused training vs. broad training requiring large investment of time
 - Micro-training vs. classroom sessions
 - Capabilities vs. application
 - Answer the question: “How are we going to use these capabilities to work better?”
- Continuous or on-demand short-form training
 - Make resources available online
 - Record all “live” sessions
 - One definitive source for training – easy to find and navigate
- Different people absorb new information in different ways – have a diverse, multichannel training and communication plan
 - Lunchtime or Friday afternoon “chalk talk” sessions
 - A.k.a. “Lunch and Learns”, “Brownbag Sessions”, etc.
 - Micro-training videos
 - Webinars
 - Email newsletters
 - Links to training materials and documentation (web, SharePoint sites)
 - Walkup “genius bars” in the lunchroom or lobby
 - An “experience lab” where employees can try out new possibilities, with technical support people around to help
 - Engagement/gamification (e.g., badges, rewards)
- Highlight existing resources
 - Don't reinvent the wheel
 - LinkedIn Learning, Gartner, LMS

2. Personal Development Tips

- Set aside time!
 - Talk to your manager about blocking off time on your calendar so that you can focus
- Establish ground rules
 - e.g., I will not answer email during PD time, but I will respond to urgent Teams messages
- Have an agenda – learning vs. surfing
 - Define your learning goal and establish what success/end of job looks like
 - Soft skills as well as technical skills
- Leverage all learning resources



- Traditional learning opportunities may not be available or easily accessible during hybrid work (e.g., in-person, instructor led classroom training, technical conferences)
- Use both digital and physical resources (remember those things called books?)
- Free resources (webinars, blogs, YouTube, public libraries)
- Resources available to university community (Gartner, LinkedIn Learning, SuccessFactors LMS, UofT library resources)
- Commit to a deliverable
 - Consider a project that will allow you to practice your new skills
 - Could this be a new/novel approach to a business challenge?
- Plan to share with your team
 - Set a date for when you will share for accountability

KEY IDEAS FOR TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- 1. When creating training content, don't assume – not all participants will be in the same place, at the same time, with access to the same equipment.**
- 2. Design training material to be reused and plan to make resources available online – flexibility in how and when training is consumed is key.**
- 3. Don't reinvent the wheel – leverage UofT's existing training material and/or access to learning services.**
- 4. Set a learning goal for yourself and set aside the time needed to meet your learning goal.**
- 5. Share what you learn – commit to a deliverable that you can apply to your job to hold yourself accountable.**

Document Contributors:

The key contributors to this document were the following staff representing various functional teams within EASI. Thank you Team!

1. Peter Sverko
2. Miki Harmath
3. Aline Pruvot
4. Andre Kalamandeen
5. Darshan Harrinanan
6. Laurel Williams
7. Rodney Branch
8. Gerald Lindo
9. Parviz Moinipur
10. Vaishnavi Varadarajan
11. Gary Raposo
12. Vik Chadlawada