Flexible Work Myth Busters and WTF is Asynchronous Work

by Cali Yost
Work and Workplace Trends

I always appreciate the opportunity to bust myths about flexible work with Digiday’s WorkLife Managing Editor Jessica Davies. Two of the myths we explored in her latest feature included, “Flexibility means working at home” and “It’s an HR problem to solve.”

The first myth is rooted in the continued focus on location and believing hybrid and flexibility are the same thing. Hybrid, or whether we work onsite or remotely, is A FORM of broader flexibility that works for some jobs and people but not every person and every job.

By emphasizing location and hybrid, we risk excluding an important segment of employees—those who don’t have jobs that can be performed remotely, which is estimated to represent between 55-40% of all workers.

“When you leave that universe out, you’re not creating what we call a flexible operating model. Flexibility is a way of operating your organization. It’s not a program, it’s not a policy.”

And because this is all about operations, “It’s a myth that HR is going to be in charge. Senior leadership needs to understand this is about reimagining the way your organization operates with HR there as a support for the parts that are theirs.”

Work flexibility requires an all-hands-on-deck C-suite approach that includes, but isn’t only, the CHRO. Read the full story and learn why flexibility also is not just about working parents and cost-cutting.

WTF is asynchronous work?

I also chatted with Jessica and WorkLife for an April story about asynchronous work and the confusion surrounding this term. Love the story headline! WTF is asynchronous work?
Synchronous work is when two or more colleagues are working – speaking – together at the same time. Responses are immediate.

Asynchronous work is the opposite and as such, an immediate response is not expected.

I explained, “The confusion is occurring because not everyone has understood that to make it work well, you need to set some guardrails on how it’s going to work. When you hear a lot of managers right now saying they’re overloaded, it’s because there are no rules (around asynchronous working.) If everyone is doing their own thing, there is no coordination. It’s a mess.”

Yes, asynchronous work is another shiny, buzzy “future of work” concept but ultimately it’s about HOW and WHEN we use technology to get work done. Like hybrid or remote are about WHERE we work, and the four-day workweek is about WHEN we work.

But it all starts with WHAT or “what do we need to do?” That’s high performance flexibility.