

illUminate Blog Transcript: Ozias Moore on a New Vision for the Future of Work

Recorded December 13, 2022. Listen to it [here](#).

- ANNOUNCER: 00:01 [music] This podcast is brought to you by ilLuminate, the Lehigh business blog. To learn more, please visit us at business.lehigh.edu/news. [music]
- JACK CROFT: 00:13 Welcome. I'm Jack Croft, host of the ilLuminate podcast for Lehigh University's College of Business. Today is December 13th, 2022, and we're talking with Ozias Moore about how the unprecedented increase in employees working from home during the pandemic affected teamwork and productivity and what changes may be needed in how we think about offices moving forward. Dr. Moore is an assistant professor of management in the College of Business at Lehigh University. His primary research interests focus on team and multi-team effectiveness. He is particularly interested in exploring the multilevel effects of dynamic team composition on team processes, emerging states and team outcomes. Thanks for being with us today, Ozias.
- OZIAS MOORE: 01:03 Thank you for having me today. Happy to be here.
- CROFT: 01:06 Let's start. As I mentioned, your research is focused a lot on teamwork in the office and, more specifically, on how—and this was before the COVID-19 pandemic—workers were increasingly having to juggle playing different roles as members of multiple teams. When the pandemic swept across the United States, offices immediately shut down and millions of American employees were abruptly forced to transition to working from home. So I wonder, how did the almost overnight switch to replacing face-to-face interactions in the office with Zoom meetings affect how teams performed, from what you've seen?
- MOORE: 01:47 So I think the acceleration of having the pandemic, it really just accelerated what was already happening, right? So in the workplace, we know that there were two modes of work. We had people who were face to face, and in some cases, workers who were working virtually, or in some cases, workers who were in this hybrid work modality where they were partially virtual and partially face to face. But I think what the pandemic has underscored is that most jobs really are not optimized for this remote or hybrid work mode, at least not yet. And we know that what has occurred is that in virtual environments, we know that there is a delay in communication. There is this loss of spontaneity that occurs in face-to-face communication or those spontaneous conversations that happen around the water cooler or in the hallway. And there's also challenges around how to manage the logistics of global collaboration, collaboration across time zones, across different spaces. We know that leaders in the past really weren't expected to have leadership skills or capabilities around managing multimodals. But now leaders will need to be able to operate in both virtual and face-to-face modes, as well as the workers. And so despite where we were before the pandemic, coming out of the pandemic, despite the fact that organizations have embraced the hybrid model, most organizations are still struggling to figure out how to effectively and efficiently manage this mix of virtual and onsite workers.
- MOORE: 03:43 However, we also know that organizations need to answer these questions quickly so that their organizations can be effective at embracing this new way of working.

CROFT: 03:55

Now, are there any examples you've seen in the ways that office's teams have held meetings remotely over the last three years that have evolved that might hold some promise for the future?

MOORE: 04:12

So I'm looking at the literature and what we know about what it means to lead virtually or to work virtually, and knowing that both leaders and their followers are physically separated and that there is this need to mediate this disconnection around using technology. And some of the earlier work in research, Morganson et al. 2010, the taxonomy around virtual work underscores the fact that this empirical support shows stronger effects for people who are working virtually compared to face to face. When there's higher degrees of virtuality, there's an encouragement around self-management, there is a defined mission, there is established expectation and goals, as well as a very supportive social climate. One gap in that taxonomy is that it didn't include the acknowledgment around the facilitation or the need of technology. And so I think the way to respond to your question, drawing from the literature, and rather than looking at it from the typical theoretical perspectives of leadership and managing work around different modalities, whether it's behavioral leadership, LMX leadership (leader-member exchange), or empowering leadership, I think it's important to really focus around four key leadership functions or leadership attributes. And those four areas are around the people, the structure of the organization or teams, thinking through the team process or organizational process. And as I mentioned, the importance of understanding aspects of the technology.

MOORE: 06:00

So when leaders and individuals of organizations are thinking through the attributes around the people aspect, it's important to have measurements in place to monitor and understand aspects around team cohesion, thinking through what are barriers for ways to build communication, community and rapport, how to build inclusive culture, ways to increase social interactions around this area. Also, when we think about people and people process, it's important to think through the understanding of the need for role clarity. So when we think of virtual meetings or the fact that work may be managed in more of a compartmentalized way with people being physically separated in physical proximity, it's important, I think, to have a really strong understanding around role clarity, understanding aspects of accountability and how goals and objectives are shared. And so research shows that half of employees across all sectors lack role clarity, and so that leads to greater role ambiguity, and of course, that leads to inefficiencies in whether you're in the workplace, but I think it becomes much more detrimental when you are virtual and managing work across teams in that way. So I think when you're thinking of the first area of this framework that I'm sharing around the people, I think it's really having a clear understanding of roles, role clarity, making sure that there is a good understanding of expectations around those particular work roles. The second important area that I think is critical is this area around structure.

MOORE: 08:00

And as you indicated in the introduction, my research looks at aspects of how teams are designed, understanding aspects of the configuration of the team, also taking into consideration aspects of structure that look at the interdependence of tasks or task complexity. And research has suggested that aspects of task complexity, task interdependence are important considerations for virtual or hybrid work environments. Research also has underscored that, in Brown et al., meta-analysis that has found task independence to moderate the effect of leadership behaviors in virtual settings. And so this underscores the important need to really consider high or low

levels of task interdependence amongst workers in this particular functional format. And I think it's also important to think about, as a leader or individual worker, what are your KPIs, what are your key performance indicators, as you're thinking of managing structure for decision making, for creating new norms around routines of work, etc.? Also, when we think of the new way of working in organizations, many employees, it's estimated about 44% of U.S. workers are working for more than one manager at a time. So in addition to thinking that people are simultaneously working on more than one team at a time, also in many cases, they're accountable to multiple leaders at one time.

MOORE: 09:46

So it underscores the importance for leaders, for workers to be mindful about the numerous interdependencies between departments, teams and leaders as you're thinking about the best way to structure work given the modality or multimodals that employees or workers are thinking about. The third area that I mentioned in the framework to consider that is important for leaders as well as teams around process is to think of using team charters. And research has documented the effectiveness in the use of team charters for helping to improve team cohesion, team communication, as well as outcomes around team performance. So having documented rules that govern behavior, that govern outcomes, that may be specific to shared ownership, feedback, timelines, etc. And then I also think that team charter in this area of process helps to manage these interdependencies in much more of a visible way, and it underscores the need for, I think, greater adaptability in managing these areas. And then lastly, I think what this transition in the way we think of how work is managed and how to be more effective with work is really for leaders and for individual workers to think of technology as a tool that is facilitating productivity and efficiency. So it's really thinking of how can technology be used to reinforce aspects around how to organize work or how technology will help to reinforce norms around individual or team performance.

MOORE: 11:44

As well as thinking about ground rules for how different tools are selected, guidance around usage for appropriate technology. And research also underscores, again, the need for thinking through aspects that are both informal, as I mentioned earlier, around these norms, around how technology is used, but also underscoring the importance for leaders to think about how technology is going to help organizations be more adaptive to these changes that are occurring in both internally and externally, that affect the way in which work gets done. And I think around each of those important areas, leaders as well as individual contributors in the organization should be thinking about gathering evidence. What data will inform the impact of changes around process, changes around structure, changes around understanding how to manage people, or how are we facilitating the effective use of technology. And it's important to track progress and to make adjustments in real time to redesign the team, redesign the structure, and implement new processes as needed. And so I think the new way of working really makes it more paramount for leaders as well as team members to be much more adaptable using evidence-based approaches and data to redesign and adapt as internal and external factors encourage and underscore the need to make these particular changes.

MOORE: 13:35

So I think it's a multi-level, but also multiple areas of consideration that are important to reassess and to continue to monitor in this particular area.

CROFT: 13:49

One of the things that happened during the pandemic that I think a lot of people found surprising was that as more people than ever before began working from home, productivity actually surged. And in the first quarter of 2021, for example, worker productivity grew 4.3%, one of the highest rates in years, according to the Labor Department. And then as workers started returning to offices in larger numbers, productivity plunged during the first half of 2022, by the sharpest rate on record going back to 1947. And that's according to data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics. And one of the things I've learned in life is that things are rarely as simple as they seem, and I suspect that may be the case here. So I'd like to get your perspective on what's been going on. Does having more people work from home actually make them more productive than being in the office?

MOORE: 14:51

I think what we're seeing here is there's not a linear relationship between these considerations, right? It's more of a collinear effect, right? So I think when you understand how, when you're not able to be in the office and you're virtual and you're using technology, there is a blurring between the boundaries that have been around these ways in which we think of the traditional way work is managed. Also, we know that there has been a shrinkage in the traditional support that people tend to get from their extended family and community networks. So as you have the blurring of these boundaries around work and where work is done, you have a growth in, I think, what we're seeing around burnout. The fact that it has really underscored the fact that there are other sources of stress and anxiety for many workers, that has caused this opposite effect, the more negative effects of this work. And so many organizations and employees are now really focusing a lot more on these challenges that lead to solutions that are in the area of research that we call employee health and wellbeing, in particular to managing aspects of employee mental health around these particular areas of these stressors that I think have been heightened given linkages to psychological or other aspects of social demographic challenges specific to how employees manage their flexibility around work, navigating these new habits for their changing work environments.

MOORE: 16:38

I also think in many organizations, employees are now relying upon one immediate supervisor or if they are reporting to multiple supervisors to interpret these policies. And so there could be greater subjectivity in how these policies are applied across a department or different individuals in a group for an organization. So how these practices are adhered to, how these practices are applied and operationalized, we need to understand the various ways in which they may need to be modified to adhere to these differences across workers. Kind of underscores the earlier comment that I made as far as kind of the first organizational and leadership consideration is having a better understanding or more of a fine-tuned understanding of these individual differences in an organization that are going to lead to potentially needing to have better process to manage these positive and negative effects. So I think the multi-level considerations are having a greater understanding in the prioritization clearly for, I think, the needs of more disadvantaged workers that may be in environments where they either have previously had higher environmental exposure or they're in environments where their work is inflexible or there may be greater threats to job loss and unemployment.

MOORE: 18:18

But also understanding how the current environment has added to this blurring of boundaries and created kind of this new environment in which we're dealing with burnout after burnout after burnout, and how leaders and organizations need to

reassess and reconsider that each employee may have needs that are different and that should be considered in more of an individual way, as well as holistically, to better manage these nuances that I don't think in the past leaders had to consider.

CROFT: 18:52

Now, you were just talking about burnout, and I suspect that's very closely related to a new term that I think we've all been hearing a lot about lately, which is quiet quitting, which basically just means that more employees are doing the absolute minimum needed to avoid getting fired instead of being engaged with their work. And a Gallup poll in September found that at least half of the U.S. workforce, and probably more, are already quiet quitting. So I wonder in terms of your research, particularly, this would seem to pose a real threat to the concept of teamwork if you've got half the people just doing the bare minimum that they need to instead of really engaging in the work that the team is trying to do. So I wonder if you could talk about that a little and if you have any thoughts on the best ways to combat it. And I think you've touched on some of them already, I think, with your last answer, but specifically in terms of this idea of quiet quitting.

MOORE: 19:57

I think it's interesting, and many of my research colleagues would agree that this term quiet quitting is kind of this contemporary new term. But as researchers, we've been examining this issue that is related to what are the factors that lead to counterproductive work behaviors or the factors that lead to attenuated worker engagement. That's really what this broader phenomena that's contemporary and popularized called quiet quitting. So there has been researching and a lot of evidence around when organizations are not addressing factors that are related to the prior reply around burnout, and ways to address that leads to attrition, leads to other ways in which employees show withdrawal that could be higher absenteeism. Again, as I mentioned, lower worker engagement, decreased productivity. And we know for a number of organizations, some of their key metrics that they look at may be around employee satisfaction, employee morale. Some organizations track employee engagement and employee productivity. So we know when the fact that organizations really haven't addressed these aspects linked to burnout, other workplace factors, the research has shown this main effect link between counterproductive work behaviors and lower engagement by not addressing these other factors that are antecedents to these other team and individual effects, right?

MOORE: 21:40

And so some of the things that I think are important for leaders and for organizations to think about that research has suggested to be useful considerations are around greater employee involvement when it comes to thinking about the policies and guidelines for bringing people back into the workplace. Creating employee work councils to get feedback throughout this transition, to get other ideas for how to think about ways in which employee policies acknowledges the fact that there is a greater percentage of workers now that are in multigenerational households, that are involved in caregiving roles across the generations. And so I think it's important to understand how the policies are more effective by getting more employee involvement in how the policies are shaped, but also understanding the employee involvement around how they're applied. And I think what we're seeing is that most employees prefer more of a flexible work model. And the challenge, I think, in many cases are the limited capabilities and training that has been applied or rolled out to leaders to make them more effective around managing workers across multiple modes of work—virtual, remote, hybrid, etc. And so it's creating the vision for work in a way that allows the leaders and workers to be more effective.

MOORE: 23:30

And it also, I think, acknowledges the way in which this transition has occurred, has created more higher levels of concern, higher levels of anxiety, stress and burnout that leaders and organizations should be more mindful to consider, as well as involving employees in the solution. And the more that employees are involved in the solution, one, it helps them have a better understanding back to expectation setting. So in many cases involving employees in the process, they may not necessarily totally agree with the outcome, but they have a better understanding of what decisions and why the policy is shaped in the way that it is. And some of the tensions that we see, I think, around the quiet quitting in the popular press relate, in many cases, to organizations that have just arbitrarily, it appears, mandated this return to work without more of a holistic integration of input, more of a thoughtful job analysis across roles to understand ways in which to apply these policies in not such a broad-brush way. And also knowing in some cases that the policies impact certain worker populations in ways differently from others.

MOORE: 24:57

So I think employees would appreciate being involved and engaged in an ongoing dialogue that I think most organizations haven't had in a consistent way and in a way that I think allows workers to be drawn into this complex new way in which organizations are having to create much more rapid decision-making models, much more rapid job-design models and being much more flexible in ways that considers the worker. But also we know that leaders in many cases have forgotten the first part of the framework that I talked about, which is what are the individual differences around the people? And they're jumping to making changes in the structure and process without really thinking through how does this align with the needs of the workforce in a more thoughtful way.

CROFT: 25:56

To your point about flexibility, there was another Gallup poll in late August that found that slightly more than half of full-time workers in the U.S., so we're talking about more than 70 million employees, said their job could be done remotely from home. And of those, 60% said that they want some kind of long-term hybrid work arrangement moving forward. Have we kind of crossed a bridge where going back to full-time office work for everybody—and clearly there are people, a lot of workers who don't have the option to do their work from home. It does require being on site. But how feasible is this idea that half or more of employees can all be working in some kind of hybrid arrangement over the long term?

MOORE: 26:48

So I'm going to throw back your question in a different way. I think what you're asking is how do you operate and create or lead and/or design a high performing organization given the challenges that are occurring in our environment today, right? And so we think of what research has informed and demonstrated is that organizations need to start with, I think, two components that are very important that will inform your question, which is how do you develop a strategy that fits the demands of our current environment? And within that organizational strategy, you also start thinking through aspects of organizational design. And that comes back to this constant theme around what's the organization's formal and informal structure around staffing rewards and culture? And so when you think of understanding the design, it leads back to this understanding around when has the organization last conducted a job analysis for all employees? And that looks at understanding for each role, what are the core duties of the role, what tasks are important to the role. And I think for a number of organizations that have been very effective in managing this space, they've done a much more thoughtful job role analysis that takes into

consideration proximity, physical proximity and understanding the job role and the proximity to customers, the proximity to other interactions with workers. How involved are the different roles with needing to have higher or lower levels of interaction?

MOORE: 28:46

Can that interaction be conducted in more of a higher human interaction or can that interaction be handled over a broader physical distance and mediated through technology? So we know the answer from our findings with a lot of the research in this area, we know that most of the work that's kind of in this moderate physical proximity area is most suitable for work that can be done remotely. So that would include in many cases a lot of the work that's done in more of the knowledge worker offices, right? The administrative work in many cases has moderate levels of need for the types and the level or intensity of human interactions that probably are best suited for either a hybrid work environment where a person is working partially in a virtual way, or in a case where a worker could be, for the most part, fully remote in that area. But I also think it's understanding the impact in which you're creating different work modes, different levels of interaction, different levels in the way in which the work experience is facilitated for different workers, and recognizing that managing those differences is an area where I think we need to rethink what are the leadership capabilities, how do we train workers to manage those differences when they're having to, in some cases, have managers that they never see or they are primarily seeing remotely, or coworkers that they're only seeing in a remote way.

MOORE: 30:39

And I also think in this area as we think through, it's not a one-size-- all solution, but it's also important for leaders and organizations to think about what is the culture of work around a work environment in which workers are in this multimodal way of working. And so what is the mindset for how to shape the way people work? What is the culture for creating the level of interaction? What's the culture that is going to support the right amount of collaboration that's done in a way that's inclusive, that's done in a way that allows people to bring more of that social emotional way of communication into their work environment? So I think it's thinking more holistically in ways that isn't this one-size-fits-all solution that we know doesn't work, but it's thinking more about these specific areas of the way in which your organizational strategy, your organizational vision, the way you're designing the work that leads back to this job analysis that gets a better, more fine-tuned understanding of how the physical interactions are going to be more-- lead to outcomes that are more effective, higher performance, etc., and ways in which that can maybe be facilitated remotely and still lead to similar outcomes. But I think that's where leaders and organizations, if they're able to do that job analysis, they're able to work through what's needed to help certain job roles be more effective in those areas of managing work across different modalities.

MOORE: 32:36

And also creating a culture where people are still able to have fun at work and interact with their coworkers in a way that builds those fundamental underlying characteristics of team work, such as high cohesion, strong amounts of worker communication, etc., that we know are all important factors for good and effective team and individual worker outcomes.

CROFT: 33:02

One final question along those same lines. Clearly some of what workers have liked about working from home is the simple fact that they don't have to commute. And as someone who, over my career, has had multiple times, years where I've spent more

than an hour each way commuting to work, I get that. And even small things, like when you're working far away from home, you usually have to go out and buy your lunch at an expense. And I think some of those are clearly factors. But I wonder if you've become aware of things that-- changes that offices can make in either their physical set up as well as the cultural things you've been talking about that would make them more flexible, more attractive to workers in terms of the setup of the office itself and almost like the conception of what purpose the office serves in the business as a whole.

MOORE: 34:02

Some of the things that we know a number of organizations have done that have been useful are basic things around core work days in which there may be specific hours or days of the week that an organization identifies as being face-to-face mode of working to facilitate the logistics that may be necessary for scheduling meetings, where it could be difficult and complex and challenging just to schedule a meeting and that's a waste of worker time to not have that be efficient and effective. And I think a lot of organizations are also building in these questions when it comes to their hiring practices. So it's kind of figuring out we're dealing with a current set of workers that may not have the capabilities, the training, the resources or the tools given the changes in their work environment. But we also have an opportunity to refine the recruitment, the selection criteria around who we hire to make sure that we're bringing in the people in the organization that may already have the requisite skills, capabilities for this new way of work. And I think the important aspect is thinking through the decision-making model. So in most organizations, the importance of having teams work together in ways that are, I think, more effective than individual work is the fact that you're able to bring different perspectives, insights and expertise. Having this divergence of perspectives, research shows, brings much more effective outcomes.

MOORE: 36:02

And so I think being more thoughtful around how to create decision-making models and processes that can be effective across multiple modes of work. So traditionally, organizations or teams have been super effective at being face to face in teams, dealing with the process of taking their different ideas and integrating them into their work products and outcomes. But how is that done when you're dealing with workers across different spaces? So I think thinking through what are those important areas for an organization. And for some organization, the outcomes may be idea generation. So that's a whole different type of set of processes for workers to think through. Or could be solving complex problems or it could be a sales process, right? So I think it's working through the ultimate outcome that an organization is striving to be more flexible, as well as thinking of how to evolve the workers' role, their structure and processes, and how to use the technology in those areas to not only attract workers, but to be able to retain workers. And then lastly, as I mentioned, it's so important that organizations are able to collect data to monitor changes in these areas of the organization in a way that is much more proactive than reactive.

MOORE: 37:42

And a lot of organizations now are much more focused around people analytics and other internal analytics that help leaders and decision makers and team leaders make more informed decisions taking into consideration the feedback from employees and other stakeholders that are critically important to effective outcomes, I think, are the hard work that the organizations who are effective in navigating the space have made and are continuing to make. And then some organizations are fighting that transition and haven't done the work necessary to be much more analytical, be much more data

driven around how they're making these policy decisions, these decisions around how they structure work, structure their teams, how they reward their employees in their organizations, and see this as an opportunity to think through a lot of these questions in ways that bring about a more effective way of working than we have in the past and that will require revisiting a lot of the assumptions around how workers communicate, how workers make decisions, how technology has facilitated the role of a leader, team leader, manager, what processes are important for them to think about, as well as being more surgical to understand the individual needs that are necessary for workers to be effective and engaged at work.

CROFT: 39:19

Yes, and engaged. Ozias, thanks so much. I think you've given a very sound framework for both managers and workers, employees to think through as, I think, all of us are rethinking what work looks like heading into this hopefully one day totally pandemic-free future that we're looking forward to.

MOORE: 39:47

It's an exciting time for leaders, it's an exciting time for workers to be a part of this transformation in the way in which we vision how work is organized, defined, and ultimately, the workers are at the center of it and making that much more of a focus than we have in the past. So I think it's an exciting time for all going forward.

CROFT: 40:11

I'd agree with that.

MOORE: 40:13

And thank you.

CROFT: 40:15

Ozias Moore is currently on the editorial review board of the Journal of Management Studies and his research has appeared in leading academic journals in the field of management, including Academy of Management Review, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: An International Journal, Journal of Applied Psychology, Personnel Psychology, Journal of Organization and Occupational Psychology, Small Group Research and in the SAGE Handbook of Industrial Work and Organizational Psychology. This podcast is brought to you by ILLUminate, the Lehigh business blog. To hear more podcasts featuring Lehigh business thought leaders, please visit us at business.lehigh.edu/news. And don't forget to follow us on Twitter @lehighbusiness. This is Jack Croft, host of the ILLUminate podcast. Thanks for listening. [music]