

Navigating Change:

Inclusive Process and Guiding Principles Shape VHB's Evolving Workplace



**Bill Ashworth, PE,
PTOE, ENV SP**
Chief Operating Officer
washworth@vhb.com

Companies the world over are navigating a shape-shifting pandemic and planning for what an eventual return to the workplace will look like. How can business leaders take the best of our remote work adaptations and meld them with the best of the world we left behind when the pandemic struck? **The companies that embrace a thoughtful, hybrid approach are the ones that will draw top talent and not only survive but thrive as we move through a rapidly changing workplace landscape.**

Shaping the Future Together

Collaboration is one of VHB's core values and embedded in our culture. Over the past year and a half, as we had to move away from in-person collaboration, this core value guided us in shaping and advancing our remote work practices and technical capabilities.

VHB took an inclusive, collaborative approach to the challenge of evolving our workplace. The process brought together executives, managers, and employees from across our footprint to engage in dialogue, critical analysis, and creative thinking.

VHB formed a **Workplace Evolution Team** comprised of four groups of eight employees each, carefully balanced to include a range of professional experience, geographies, and disciplines to allow for different perspectives and ideas. The teams met virtually over several weeks to discuss the complexities of what VHB's workplace will look like as we transition, at some point and in some manner, more fully back to the office.

It is important that VHB's evolution stems from and reinforces our company culture, which defines and differentiates VHB. At the heart of the process were the [core values](#) and our [generational company philosophy](#) upon which VHB was built. As President and CEO Mike Carragher explains, "At VHB, we are dedicated to passing along a healthy and growing organization to the next generation so we can continue to provide our clients with value and shape our communities in meaningful ways."

Leveraging Data to Guide Solutions

As a company that applies the power of big data to create solutions for our clients, VHB knew that the evolution of our workplace should be shaped by input from all our people. Throughout the pandemic, VHB has conducted several employee surveys, which became a valuable tool for the employee-led teams. In the most recent survey, 90 percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they felt well informed about VHB's updates and protocols around COVID, and VHB was rated 4.7 out of 5 on how the company has handled the pandemic. Encouragingly, a significant majority said they were as productive or more productive working remotely.

"We started by going through the employee survey data from the past year and half and really got to understand how our colleagues have been feeling and managing during remote work," explained Ben DeJong, a Senior Geologist with VHB's Site Investigation & Remediation Team. "We looked at the data in the aggregate, but also by region, office, length of time at VHB, and other parameters."

Number of respondents who agreed or strongly agreed that they felt well informed about VHB's updates and protocols around COVID.



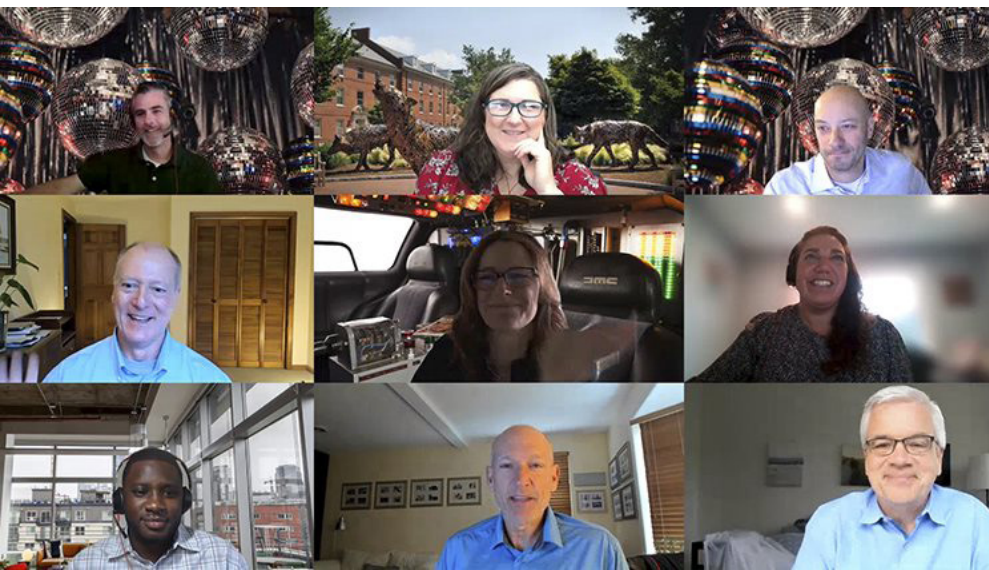
How the company has handled the pandemic?



VHB leverages technology to better understand employee feedback and develop data-driven solutions.

The teams were asked to design an office workplace environment and define how they think VHB should operate as the company grows to meet business targets, advance regional prominence, and continue delivering for clients as we build more sustainable, equitable, and resilient communities.

"Each team got together for an open conversation, which was a powerful exercise," reflected Ivy Huang, a Water Resource Designer in VHB's Raleigh office. "Hearing the diverse perspectives really helped to widen my lens, especially listening to the more senior people in my group. They helped me step beyond my own interests and think about how a hybrid workplace needs to serve everyone for VHB to continue to be a sustainable, generational company."



“

The teams were incredibly thorough and thoughtful, and it was inspiring to see their enthusiasm and creativity shine through. Their work will certainly influence how VHB collectively shapes our future.”

— **Bob Dubinsky**
Corporate Resources Integration Officer

Ten Guiding Principles

Drawing on our core values and generational company philosophy—along with input from the employee-led teams—**VHB crafted 10 Guiding Principles that will steer the company through the uncertainties of today and tomorrow.** These principles will make certain that, whatever specific policies and practices we adopt, VHB will remain true to our identity.

“We don’t want to change who we are,” said Keri Kocur, Chief People Officer, “We want to build on the flexibility we’ve always had to provide the space for our people to improve their work-life balance.”

- 01 **Mutual trust** is inherent to who we are and how we operate. We trust our people and are confident that everyone’s actions are aligned with our core values.
- 02 Decisions around our hybrid workplace are guided by our **Generational Company philosophy** and focused on stewardship, balancing the needs of our people and our business.
- 03 **Regional prominence** is a vitally important business strategy and differentiator for VHB.
- 04 We meet our client’s expectations around in-person interactions and our strategy is to **develop deeper relationships with our clients** at all levels.
- 05 We believe that relationships, career development opportunities, true collaboration, and higher-level integrated thinking, which are important differentiators for VHB in the marketplace, can all be **enhanced with in-person interaction.**
- 06 We are continually enhancing a **“team-oriented” organization** where business growth and career advancement depend on the ability to expand networks of personal contacts both externally and internally.

07

We will **create opportunities to spend time together in person** to create connections, build trust and strengthen existing relationships.

08

Our **inclusive culture** means that our people excel at working on a team where some people are physically present, and others are virtual. We will be equally good at both experiences. Our people are aware of how they themselves work and are open to different ways to accomplish the same result.

09

Employees are measured on their **accomplishments and exhibiting firm oriented behaviors** regardless of where work is performed.

10

We will engage in an ongoing dialogue about what works best for our people and our business, and **continuously improve our approach**.

VHB is planning for a vibrant, successful return to our 30+ offices, balanced with individual flexibility. This will be a partnership that relies on mutual trust to create and embrace a hybrid model and work to make it the gold standard of our industry.

We are defining hybrid as a rich combination of in-person engagement and remote work, where the general expectation is that employees are engaging and collaborating with colleagues, clients, or peers in person at least half of the time, with the rest of the time offering flexibility in where our people work. We will make these transitions in line with CDC guidance and federal policies, which continue to evolve rapidly, and keep safety as our number one priority.

In addition to providing flexibility and benefits for VHB, our approach to a hybrid workplace also prioritizes our clients and communities. **In-person interaction is important to growing relationships, gaining mutual trust and respect, and building collaborative partnerships so that, together, we develop future-focused solutions that benefit our clients and shape our communities in meaningful ways.** Our Guiding Principles will help us prepare for a viable, sustainable, and inclusive future.



VHB's hybrid work environment includes a mix of in-person and remote participation, in accordance with CDC guidelines.

VHB's Bright Future in an Uncertain World

None of us can predict when the pandemic will end or where it will lead us. But by proceeding thoughtfully and prioritizing our values as an organization, we are confident that together we will build a viable, sustainable future for VHB—whatever that future

looks like. **We are committed to remaining flexible, prioritizing the health and safety of our people, and delivering superior innovation and solutions for our clients and communities.**

For additional information, connect with Chief Operating Officer [Bill Ashworth](#).