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Line manager guide on supporting hybrid working

Advice for line managers on supporting and enabling hybrid working

Although many employees have worked from home for an extended period during the pandemic, research (such as from [YouGov](#) and the CIPD) has shown that post-COVID, most employees would prefer a balance where they are in the office for some of the week and at home for the remainder, known as hybrid working.

Working in a hybrid way, where team members may be working from different locations or even at different times, will require planning and organising if it is to be successful. There are few precedents to follow, and it is likely that some experimentation will be required to determine just what will work in a particular context. Exactly how to implement hybrid working will vary from organisation to organisation, and even from team to team – these new ways of working should be tailored to the unique needs of the individual, team or department.

The role of the line manager will be key to establishing these new ways of working and ensuring that they work in practice. In particular managers will be responsible for effective communication and team working within newly hybrid teams.

This guidance provides people managers with some key tips and ideas for enabling effective hybrid working.

First steps

As organisations plan for hybrid working, many will be drafting policies, procedures and guidance. First of all, familiarise yourself with any relevant existing documents and check if any training or support is available. Share any policies or procedures, or other information about the organisation's approach to hybrid working, with your team.

Employees may be anxious about new ways of working, especially if they want to carry on with homeworking but are unsure if this will be permitted. If there are specific timescales when information will be issued or when discussions about hybrid working can commence, communicate these too. This will help to provide clarity and manage expectations.

Discussing hybrid working with your team

It will be helpful where possible to talk to your team individually about their personal preferences for future working patterns. The CIPD has a [short questionnaire template](#) that can guide you; you can either ask people to complete the questionnaire and return to you or use it as a tool to guide a face-to-face conversation. Discuss:

- What work patterns individuals would prefer after the pandemic.
- Whether employees can meet any policy requirements long term, such health and safety or data security procedures, and if they have a suitable space in which to work at home.
- Whether individuals have the necessary equipment or technology to work in a continuously hybrid way after the pandemic.

Although it may not be possible to meet all employee preferences or expectations, when people are able to work within their preferred style this can help them to be productive, support employee engagement and is also good for wellbeing. Make clear with your team that personal preferences cannot all necessarily be met, and provide a timeline for providing more information wherever possible.

After you have gathered information on individual preferences, consider talking with your team as a group. Discussions can include some of the following:

- What worked well for our team whilst working remotely during the pandemic – what can we learn from this?
- What would hybrid working mean for our team? What would need to be in place for us to work effectively in a hybrid way?
- What are the potential risks or challenges for our team about working in a hybrid way? How can we overcome them?
- How often does our team need to be in the office and how often can we work remotely? What would be an appropriate balance to ensure that we meet the needs of our stakeholders, colleagues or customers?
- If we work in a hybrid way, how can we ensure that we are inclusive, fair and work with in a healthy way?

Establishing new ways of working

When it is agreed that hybrid working is possible and individual working patterns are identified, engage your team in establishing new ways of working. This will help to demonstrate that you are treating everyone with respect, consulting people and being open to other perspectives. Remember that a move to hybrid working represents a fundamental change after what has already been a challenging period for many people. It is likely that people will experience this change in different ways. Some will be excited, others may be anxious or concerned and you will need to show empathy, concern and consideration for all points of view.

Consider the following recommendations:

- Are there any opportunities to do work in a different way? It is entirely possible to continue to work at home the same way as you do in the office aside from the location. However, there may be value in rethinking processes or workflows. What work is done best where? How can work best be organised so that individuals get the most out of their remote time (focus and deep work) and office time (collaboration and relationships).
- Consider other forms of flexibility, including time flexibility. Remember that hybrid working is just one form of flexibility. Employees can also benefit from time flexibility – or working differently to the standard 9-5. Include this in your discussions.
- Think about task allocation. Workload and opportunities need to be fairly distributed across your team. It's important to ensure that additional workload does not fall onto those who spend more time in the office, as well as making sure that opportunities are not disproportionately weighted towards this group too.
- When considering work organisation, consider how technology can help. The specific platform isn't as important as the way that technology is used. It can support effective communication and knowledge sharing, connect people and provide innovative ways to create and collaborate. Support people in using technology where necessary.

How hybrid working needs to work and be managed in practice will vary extensively according to the type of work being undertaken – be prepared to engage in ongoing conversations with your team and adapt your approach as you learn what works and what does not. You may need to try different methods and approaches to determine what works best for your particular situation.

Communication

Effective hybrid working is facilitated by strong communication. Communication needs to be more intentional and planned in a hybrid environment, as there might be fewer casual or ad hoc conversations. Exactly how a hybrid team needs to communicate will vary depending on its size and the types of roles being undertaken.

Communication in a hybrid team requires a different approach to communicating with an office based or fully remote team. However, the key principles of good communication remain: employees need to have the information that they need, in a timely way, to allow them to successfully undertake their work.

Good communication is a shared responsibility across the team; engage the team in a discussion about the best ways to communicate. Consider some of the following:

- Discussing and agreeing arrangements for meetings. How often does the team need to meet, and for what purpose? When should meetings be online, and when should they be face-to-face? What other ways are there to communicate other than meetings?
- Deciding upon key communication channels. There are many different ways to communicate – but too many can be overwhelming. It can be helpful to agree primary channels for particular purposes. For example, deciding on one platform for online meetings, and a platform for messaging. Check that everyone knows how to use them fully.
- Processes for sharing working arrangements and locations. Agree a mechanism for sharing who is working where and when. This could include using status updates, auto-signature messages or even a 'people on a page' plan sharing working days, locations and hours.
- When and how different forms of communication should take place. Is a meeting the right format for a status update, or should these be done via email? What communication should take place synchronously (at the same time) and what could be done asynchronously such as via an online update, so that people can access the information at their convenience?

One of the most important factors in communicating with a hybrid team is ensuring that information reaches everyone, wherever and whenever they are working. Equal access to information and knowledge is key to preventing communication issues and feelings of unfairness.

Fairness and inclusion

Hybrid working can support inclusion. Greater flexibility, in both where and when people work, can open up opportunities to people who cannot work a traditional 9-5 working day, including those who have disabilities or caring responsibilities. Increased flexible work can also support the reduction of the gender pay gap. However, if not managed properly it can lead to challenges too, including employees who are working remotely not being sufficiently included, recognised or having equal employee voice.

Consider these recommendations to support fairness and inclusion:

- Hold meetings online by default. When some members of the team are working in the office and some are working remotely, meetings should always be held online. If some meeting attendees are in a meeting room environment with others joining online, this will result in a poorer experience for those not present in the workplace, limiting their opportunity to meaningfully contribute or be heard.
- Ensure everyone has an equal voice, wherever or whenever they are working. Be aware that we can tend to default to people that we can see or are in close proximity to – don't forget about homeworkers.
- Address conflict quickly. It is possible that issues will arise in relation to hybrid work. This could be as a result of miscommunication or perhaps because, as a result of different roles, some employees can work remotely and some cannot. If conflict does arise, address it early, effectively and in an impartial manner, including following up as appropriate. Refer to the [line manager guide on managing conflict](#) for more information.
- Be open and consistent when determining who can work in a hybrid way. In many organisations there may be some roles that cannot work remotely at all. There may also be some roles that can have a great deal of location flexibility and some that can only have a small amount. When deciding who can or cannot work remotely, be clear about your decisions, act consistently and communicate these in an open way.

Tips for managing hybrid teams

Managing a hybrid team is quite different from managing a team that is either mostly office-based, or mostly remote. It will require a range of new skills and approaches. Some of these tips and techniques can help you to manage in a hybrid environment:

1. Engage your team in establishing your new ways of working. Agreeing these together

will help people feel included and that they have an active voice. This should include how to communicate as a team and key principles that everyone can work to.

3. Ensure that you have regular 1-2-1 time with your team. This is good practice at any time, but when you may not be working in the same place or at the same time as your team, scheduling regular time to keep in touch becomes even more important. These meetings can be online or face to face.
5. Talk about wellbeing with hybrid workers. When people work from home, they may find it difficult to manage the boundaries between work and home, and some people have a tendency to work longer hours. Help people to meaningfully disconnect and manage their technology and work life balance. Act as a good role model with your own working practices.
7. Be clear on objectives. When people work remotely their performance may be less observable. You will need to be clear with your team how you will assess their performance, and you will need to focus on desired results and outcomes as your main measure for performance. It is always good practice to have well written objectives and provide regular feedback – this is one more area that becomes increasingly important in a hybrid environment.
9. Build in time for social connection. Although many employees do want to retain some element of working from home, most do want to return to their offices for some of the time too and have missed social connection with colleagues. This can include face-to-face meetings but also creating online social spaces for informal conversations and activities.

If you are working in a hybrid way yourself, don't forget to be clear with your team about when you are in the office, or when you are working so that your team know how to get in touch with you - and always provide opportunities for employees to speak with you one-to-one.

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Behaviours that support health, wellbeing and engagement

Managers play a vital role in determining the health, wellbeing and engagement of their team. Research (funded by the CIPD and led by Affinity Health at Work) identified five key behavioural areas for line managers to support the health, wellbeing and engagement of those who work for them:

- Being open, fair and consistent
- Handling conflict and people management issues
- Providing knowledge, clarity and guidance
- Building and sustaining relationships
- Supporting development

Based on these key behavioural areas the CIPD has created a range of support materials to help you adopt a management approach that supports good health, wellbeing and engagement in your team by helping you explore and develop your management capability. Designed for anyone who manages people, the guidance and exercises are quick and easy to use. They can help you save time and get better results by managing people well – all of which is good for your own wellbeing as well as that of your team.