Toolkit for HR Professionals and Managers

STAY CONNECTED

Content

Introduction

In today's dynamic work environment, hybrid work offers unparalleled flexibility and efficiency for both employers and employees. In this arrangement, a strategic framework is necessary to succeed. Building a strong foundation is the first step in navigating hybrid work with this toolkit's thorough approach. Whether employees are working remotely or on-site, it is important to empower them. The toolkit emphasises creating an inclusive culture where every team member is engaged and valued, regardless of their location. This entails outlining expectations and offering assistance and instruction to guarantee that everyone can successfully uphold these standards. Learning material innovation is another important area of study. These tools help maintain team cohesion and morale. Additionally, it highlights the importance of building capacity among leaders to promote digital and social inclusion, ensuring all staff members have equal opportunities to contribute and succeed.

The Toolkit contents are based on a comprehensive transnational report aimed at investigating digital and social inclusion in hybrid workplaces across six European countries: Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece, Ireland, Spain, and Portugal. This insightful report collects findings from surveys and focus group discussions, presenting innovative strategies for the effective implementation of hybrid work models.
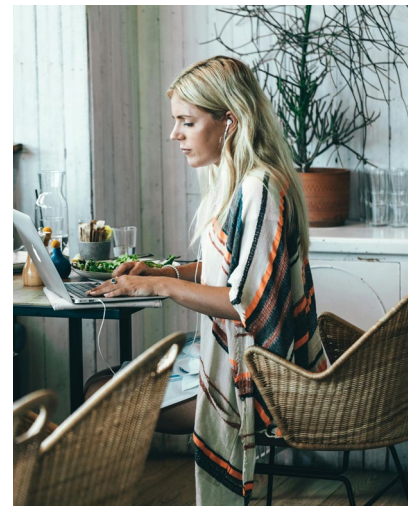
Executive summary of the stay connected transational report

The report identifies several key findings associated with the hybrid work environment. Flexibility emerges as the primary advantage, allowing employees to tailor their work schedules, thereby improving work-life balance and job satisfaction. Indeed, the flexibility inherent in hybrid work arrangements enables employees to adjust their schedules to better fit their personal lives. Similarly, many of them also benefit from significant reductions in commuting time and associated costs. The flexibility afforded by hybrid work models enables employees to manage their personal and professional lives more effectively, leading to higher levels of job satisfaction and overall well-being. This adaptability is particularly valuable in today's fast-paced and demanding work environments, where balancing professional and personal responsibilities can be challenging.

The importance of a robust technological infrastructure is also highlighted, with access to necessary hardware, software, and reliable internet being critical for maintaining productivity and effective communication. In a hybrid work environment, the reliance on technology is essential, as it serves as the backbone for all communication and collaboration efforts. Employees need access to the latest tools and platforms to ensure they can perform their tasks efficiently and stay connected with their teams, regardless of their physical location. Regular and clear communication is essential for maintaining team cohesion and alignment, with tools for virtual meetings and feedback mechanisms playing a crucial role in ensuring continuous engagement and accountability. This continuous interaction helps bridge the gap created by physical distance, ensuring that team members remain connected and aligned with organisational goals.

Trust and support from leadership are also identified as critical success factors, with transparent performance expectations, regular check-ins, and supportive leadership practices helping to foster trust and motivation. In a hybrid work setting, it is essential for leaders to establish and maintain a culture of trust and transparency. This involves setting clear expectations, providing regular feedback, and being available to support employees as needed. When employees feel trusted and supported, they are more likely to be engaged and productive. The report notes a positive impact on employee well-being due to improved work-life balance and reduced commuting stress. The ability to work from home or a location of their choice reduces the physical and mental strain associated with daily commuting, leading to a healthier and more productive workforce.
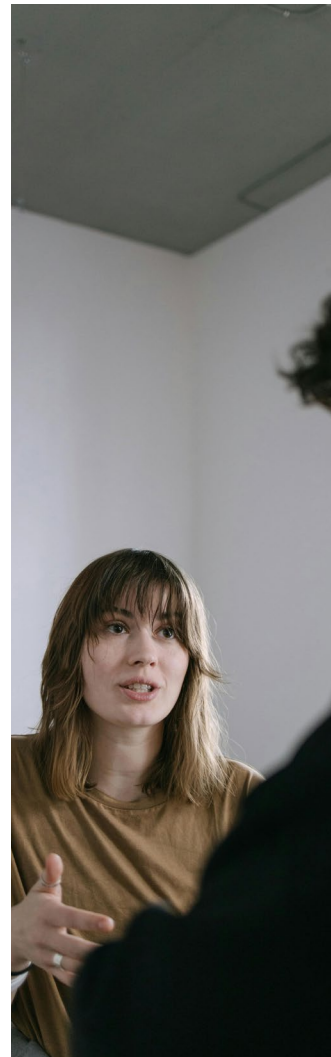
However, the report also highlights several challenges.

Maintaining team motivation and engagement
Maintaining team motivation and engagement is challenging across different regions due to limited face-to-face interactions. In Bulgaria, the lack of regular in-person contact can cause isolation, lowering morale and team cohesion. Similarly, in Cyprus and Spain, the absence of spontaneous office interactions can lead to employees feeling disconnected and less committed, affecting productivity.

Building and maintaining trust
Building and maintaining trust is challenging for managers in Bulgaria, Cyprus, and Greece, as remote work raises concerns about productivity and accountability without direct supervision. Clear performance metrics and open communication are essential to address these issues. In Greece and Ireland, poor communication and social connectedness require strategies to enhance collaboration and cohesion. Effective communication tools and practices are critical to overcoming the barriers of physical distance in remote teams.

Time management and prioritisation
Employees in Bulgaria and Greece struggle with time management and task prioritisation without the structure of a traditional office setting, making it hard to stay organised and focused. organisations should provide training and resources to help develop effective time management skills and create structured work environments. In Greece and Ireland, maintaining a cohesive company culture is also a concern, with the absence of a strong culture and delegation issues highlighting the need for proactive measures. A strong company culture is essential for fostering belonging and community, and organisations must actively work to cultivate this in a hybrid work environment.

Effective collaboration
In Cyprus and Portugal, effective collaboration is challenging due to remote work. To mitigate this, organisations should strengthen cooperation mechanisms by implementing strategies that encourage teamwork and provide platforms for collaboration, such as virtual workspaces and regular team-building activities. These efforts help bridge the physical separation gap and ensure effective teamwork.

In summary, while hybrid work offers numerous benefits like flexibility and improved work-life balance, it also presents challenges, particularly around maintaining motivation, trust, communication, and company culture. Addressing these challenges requires clear communication, effective use of technology, supportive leadership, and tailored strategies to foster collaboration and engagement among team members. By focusing on these areas, organisations can successfully navigate the complexities of hybrid work and create a productive and inclusive work environment.
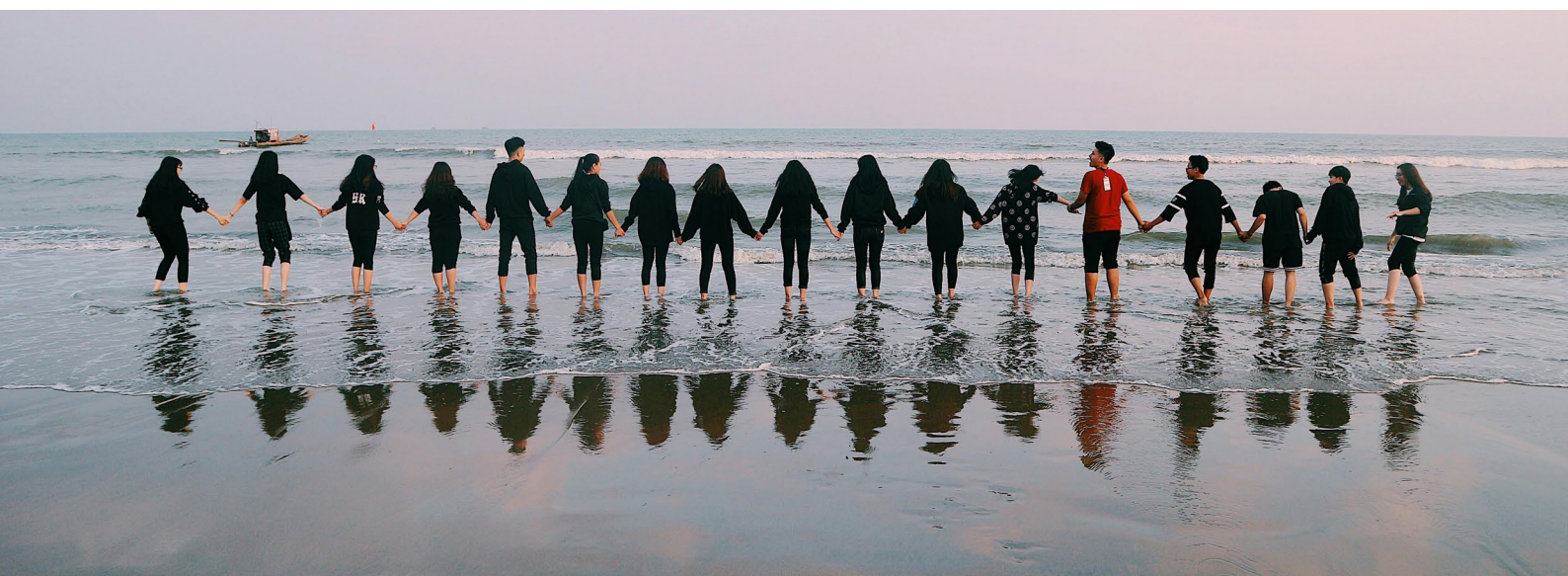
TOOLKIT STRUCTURE:

Chapter 1 lays the groundwork by defining hybrid work and its key terms, highlighting its benefits and challenges. It discusses essential communication and collaboration skills, various office layouts, and crucial elements like communication infrastructure, inclusive policies, and fostering a culture of trust.

Chapter 2 focuses on the technical aspects, detailing the digital tools and skills required for effective hybrid work. It also emphasises the importance of digital wellbeing and provides guidance on how to cultivate healthy digital habits to prevent burnout.

Chapter 3 addresses digital inclusion, providing strategies to overcome barriers and create an inclusive work environment. It offers insights on conducting inclusive meetings and ensuring all employees are engaged and supported.

Chapter 4 covers leadership in a hybrid work setting. It provides practical techniques for boosting employee engagement, building trust, and adapting leadership styles to suit hybrid teams.

Chapter 5 examines the challenge of proximity bias, which can affect hybrid or remote workers. It explains how to identify this issue and suggests strategies for preventing it from occurring and to address its root causes.

Chapter 6, the final chapter, presents best practices for implementing hybrid work successfully. It includes case studies, research, and expert insights to offer a comprehensive framework.

You'll also find guidance on collaborative planning, essential tools, and fostering effective communication and employee well-being.

This toolkit empowers individuals and organisations to embrace hybrid work through a multi-faceted approach. Successful implementation requires a blend of top-down directives, bottom-up initiatives, and collaborative efforts across the organisation.

Chapter 1: Understanding Hybrid Work

Over the past few years, the workplace has rapidly evolved, a change accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic. A more complex work model, known as Hybrid Work, has emerged from the shift to remote work. Chapter 1 aims to introduce professionals and managers to the relevant terminology, explaining the key characteristics of the hybrid workplace and the importance of flexibility. Furthermore, the content below enhances their trainers' understanding of the pros and challenges of the hybrid workplace, as well as the required skills to enhance collaboration among workers. In addition, it presents the various office layouts in a hybrid workplace and identifies factors essential for efficient hybrid work arrangements, including communication, digital infrastructure, and inclusive policies. Finally, the chapter offers practical recommendations and strategies for fostering a culture of trust and accountability in the hybrid workplace and concludes with reflection questions and an assessment tool for users.

1.1 Introduction to the key terminology

The **hybrid workplace** is now known as a workplace model which combines remote working with on-site or physical office working. In simple terms, employees have the flexibility to work from anywhere of their choosing during the remote working schedule (Peprah, 2022). Although the term "hybrid workplace" may sound new, other terms have also been used interchangeably and refer to the context of an employee working from a location physically apart from their employer, while using telecommunication technology. These are telework, remote work, home-based working, telecommuting, and virtual working.

Key characteristics of the hybrid workplace

A lot of organisations adopt a hybrid model to reduce office space and related expenses. However, hybrid work is about much more than where work is done. It is about transforming the organisational culture towards seamless access to collaboration tools. An effective hybrid work model requires some key characteristics such as flexibility, inclusivity, supportiveness, and security which are achieved through skillful management.

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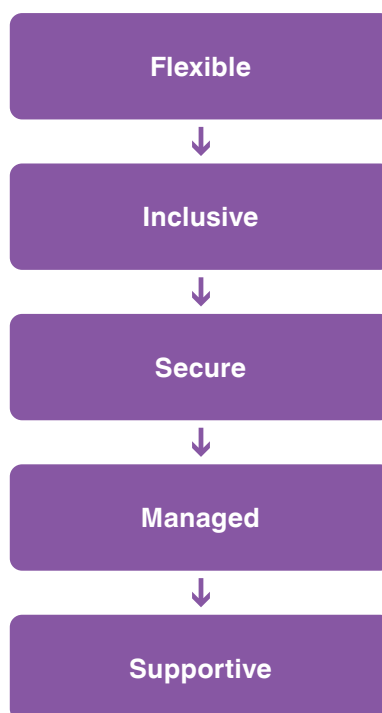
Additional Information: For more on the key characteristics of hybrid workplace, explore the resource in this link.

Hybrid Work Models

The combination of remote work and physical presence in the office forms the hybrid work model that an organisation implements. According to Lenka (2021), three are the most common hybrid work models adopted by different organisations:

- Remote First Model: organisations following this model encourage their employees and leadership to primarily work remotely and use the office space for urgent matters.
- Office Occasional Model: Employees of these organisations more or less work two or three days per week in the office.
- Office First, Remote Allowed Model: This model combines the remote first and office occasional in a third model where the organisation operates offline, and a part of the employees might work remotely.

Understanding Flexibility in Hybrid Work

Labour markets have changed significantly, moving towards more flexible work arrangements with varied contracts, hours, and locations. Hybrid work involves a mix of different elements and adapts to the demands of the tasks and workplace. Therefore, flexibility is crucial for organising operations and understanding how hybrid work functions. Let's try to unpack the flexibility concept with reference to the organisational and social aspect and also the parameters of employees' autonomy or individual flexibility.

Organisational flexibility entails the challenge to coordinate internal and external resources and thus can have many forms as follows:

- In terms of flexible time schedules (when, how often, low long)
- In terms of location (then need to work from home or other working locations)
- In terms of the organization (flexibility for job rotation, role expansion, project based work, temporary teams or virtural teams, or multi-team systems)
- In terms of work relations (work on demand, part-time, labour leasing contracts, outsourced workforces, pay-per-piece basis)

Social flexibility relates to teams and associated social relations and the challenge to harmonise face-to-face with virtual synchronous and asynchronous contact. Social flexibility prompts organisations to be able to effectively handle the following three cases.

- Stable teams turn for often to dynamic teams
- Team membership may change frequently
- Lack of clear social boundaries

Individual flexibility is enhanced at the hybrid workplace through job autonomy. Employees in hybrid workplaces have more opportunities to make choices which affect where, what and how long they are engaged in tasks at work. This autonomy can affect work schedules, task-related preferences, work methods and workplace (Kubicek et al., 2017). Therefore, the managers should set the terms/policies regarding employees' autonomy to drive:

- Freedom
- Independence
- Discretion

Did you know about the research on...

… the flexibility paradox (Chung, 2022), in which autonomous workers were found to take on more work and work longer hours voluntarily. This has given rise to a debate about whether regulations on working hours are needed to ensure the 'right to disconnect' (Eurofound 2021).

1.2 Pros and Cons of Hybrid Work Models

There are reasons that explain why many organisations have decided to move on fast to hybrid work models and these relate to the pros and cons of the new work models. Here are some key evidences shedding light in this topic:

Advantages	Challenges
Cost saving & Time saving	*Physical distance*
Lower absenteeism rate	*Communication issues*
Better work-life balance	*More complex management*
Flexibility and increased family time	*Complex recruiting criteria*
Higher competitive advantage	*Social isolation of workers/teamwork affected*
Access to a wider pool of talents	*Cross-network communication*
Increased productivity & efficiency	*Less sense of inclusivity*
Employees' self-confidence increased	*Less professional interaction & engagement*
Digitalisation of work	*Reduced employee visibility*
Ziegler & Lutger (2023) & Lenka (2021)	

The fact that the contemporary workplace is no longer a platform for face-to-face interaction among people that work and moderate the organisational culture, puts upfront several challenges and advantages which need to be effectively addressed in the hybrid work model. Ziegler & Lutger (2023) urge the hybrid workplace leaders to deal with the challenges of professional interaction and inclusivity in the hybrid organisational context as a priority, if they want to proactively address the forthcoming conflicts and concerns

Watch this video — How it works with the hybrid model, pros and cons.

1.3. State of Art Current Practices

Many organisations, when transferring hybrid models, experiments with practices to foster collaboration and policies for managing office spaces.

How can we enhance collaboration in the hybrid workplace?

Evidence indicates that there has been a significant rise in the use of asynchronous communication technologies, such as instant messaging, leading to increased team collaboration (Yang et al., 2022). Furthermore, the modes of communication that hybrid workers use have a significant impact on knowledge transfer and collaboration.

To maintain high levels of collaboration in a hybrid workplace and retain the benefits of teamwork dynamics, several strategies are essential. According to Lomas et al (2008), key actions facilitating collaboration are:
- Effective communication and connection between employees and managers
- Clear delegation of tasks and work schedules
- A culture of sharing ideas and work
- A clear policy for hybrid work arrangements

Here are some practical tips for effective task delegation:
- Rank the tasks and always relate to the purpose
- Highlight the capabilites of the workers
- Share the load with your team
- Check regularly and offer support
- Offer the appropriate regognition for the work done

In addition, employees have observed that remote work impacts team collaboration, highlighting the need for flexibility and significant investments in **collaboration** tools and **autonomy**. Therefore, organisations should adopt effective collaboration **software** to ensure work tasks are transparent during remote work.

To put it simply, the most user-friendly collaboration tools should mimic face-to-face meetings in front of the screen.

Here are some indicative examples of such tools:
- [Microsoft Teams](#)
- [Zoom](#)
- [Google Meet](#)
- [Skype](#)
- [Around](#)
- [Google Drive](#)

The key criteria for choosing the right communication tool include:
- Pick a tool that your team will enjoy using.
- Consider scalability.
- Look at the main features.
- Consider the size of the organisation (# of people) and the volume of information.
- Pay attention to privacy and security.

- Consider the frequency of communication.
- Compare the cost effectiveness.

What is the future of the office?

The office environment has traditionally been a key driver of organisational strategy, culture, and performance (Parker, 2020). The adoption of remote work policies has led to working environments (Xiao et al., 2021), either entirely or through a hybrid work model that blends home and in-office work.

Many employees have enjoyed the benefits of working from home and employers have supported this transition by funding home office setups. Despite these benefits, working from home introduces stressors such as inadequate workspace, childcare responsibilities, and social isolation, which have adversely affected overall performance (Bellmann & Hübler, 2021).

These challenges underscore the need to rethink the layout of the office to accommodate a hybrid workplace which balances flexibility and employees' autonomy with sustained productivity and well-being.

According to Barath & Schmidt (2022), these are six variations of the flexible office space:
- The **open office** is an office configuration with minimum or no interior boundaries, to facilitate communication and idea flow in organisations.
- The **co-working office** is where a group of different employees, from different employers or self-employed, use a common, shared workplace. A variation is the **virtual co-working and digital co-working mechanisms** that can adversely impact the home office.
- The **activity-based office** allows employees to work on various activities, whether alone or in collaboration with others, while changing multiple types of flexible work settings during the day with no fixed desk in the workplace.
- The **satellite office** is a type of remote work environment where an employee works in a centre established by the employer outside the employer's premises, e.g., at the client's place in their location or region.
- The **home office** gives employees the flexibility to arrange their work time and environment.
- **Other remote locations** (offices) are alternative workspaces or locations that are open to the public, such as cafés, libraries, vacation homes, streets, parks, car parks or railway stations.

Research evidence indicates that the most popular office layout will be an open office with high partitions to serve also as a flexible office. The flexibility of this layout can be also supported further by activity-based office layout (Barath & Schmidt (2022).

1.4. Success Factors for Hybrid Work Arrangements

Considering that a hybrid workplace is here to stay, both organisations and employees acknowledge that hybrid work offers a high level of flexibility and a better work-life balance for the employees. However, both parts are challenged by what are the best communication and inclusive arrangements, as well as the robust infrastructure and how to build trust and accountability in hybrid work.

Clear Communication & Hybrid Work

Clear communication in a hybrid work context is essential for maintaining team cohesion and productivity.

This is accomplished by:
1. Implementing effective communication tools such as video conferencing, instant messaging, and project management software.
2. Establishing regular check-ins and virtual meetings to ensure all team members are aligned and informed, regardless of their location.
3. Introducing clear, concise, and consistent communication protocols to avoid misunderstandings and keep everyone on the same page.
4. Encouraging open dialogue and feedback to foster a culture of transparency and trust.
5. Providing training on digital communication tools and best practices to further enhance communication effectiveness in hybrid teams.

When employees are split into office and on-line workers, it is important that the remote workers feel that they belong to a community.

Here are some tips on how to **create a sense of community** among the employees, in a hybrid work environment.
1. Organise **informal but optional** online meetings for coffee to engage them to feel the sense of community.
2. Encourage remote workers to take part regularly in **pre or post-meeting socialisation**.
3. Set up regular **company-level meetings** for the teams to let others know what they are working on and report on various on-going projects.
4. Support the managers to **connect more** with employees.
5. Make sure that the remote workers are fully engaged in all activities of the organisation.
6. Set a clear framework for "**availability**" and "**not availability**" on flexible and remote work models

From the Field: Did you Know that Evonik has a Policy of Respecting Agreed Working Hours?

Efficient communication relates also to the time parameter selected to interact in the context of work. In addition to the right not to be available outside agreed working hours, all managers and employees are expected to respect the 'email break'. The company namely Evonik introduced an agreement stipulating that emails should not be processed outside the company's working time corridor (generally between 07:00 and 20:00). In practice, this means that both have a right not to be available outside agreed working hours and a requirement not to send or respond to messages outside the company's working time corridor apply. Thus, although the working time framework can differ from employee to employee, the most frequent disconnection pattern includes the evenings, early mornings, and weekends. Evonik has also set compliance monitoring tasks to ensure that no significant variations appear between line managers, leading to unequal protection (Eurefound, 2021).
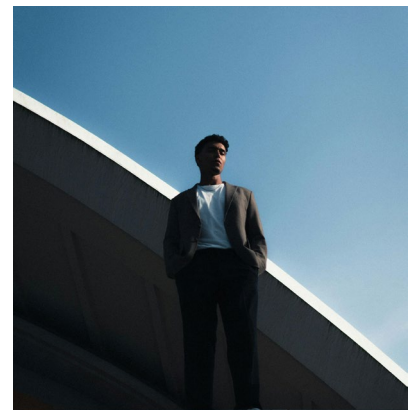
Digital Infrastructure in Hybrid Work

A robust digital infrastructure is crucial in a hybrid community to ensure seamless collaboration and productivity. This includes:

- reliable high-speed internet,
- secure cloud storage, and
- advanced communication tools like video conferencing, instant messaging, and project management software. Investing in cybersecurity measures is essential to protect sensitive data and maintain trust.

Equipping employees with up-to-date hardware and software enhances their work efficiently from any location. Additionally, providing IT support for troubleshooting and maintaining systems helps minimise disruptions. A strong digital infrastructure enables smooth transitions between remote and in-office work, supporting the diverse needs of hybrid teams.

Inclusive Policies and Hybrid Work

Let's start by stating that a hybrid work model with inclusion can make an organisation a desirable place to work. Inclusive policies are essential for fostering a diverse and equitable work environment. These policies should ensure that all employees:

- can be heard and feel welcome,
- have equal access to resources, opportunities, and support, regardless of their location
- offer flexible working hours, and
- ensure digital platforms are accessible to all employees.

Watch this video: What is the real meaning of inclusion?

By prioritising inclusivity and fairness, organisations can create a supportive and collaborative hybrid work environment that benefits everyone

What kind of policies are critical to promote an inclusive and flexible working environment.

According to Taylor et al. (2021), each organisation can start with the following:

1. Firstly, develop an inclusion and flexible policy which states that the organisation respects and values highly inclusive practices and inclusive flexible working practices.
2. Share the policy with all employees on the organisation's approach to flexible work.
3. Train and support the managers with capabilities to provide inclusive hybrid work.
4. Make flexible working the default for all employees and ensure fair hiring practices for new hires.

Furthermore, resources like providing accommodation for remote work setups, offering flexible working hours, and ensuring accessibility in digital platforms are critical steps. In addition, regular training on diversity, equity, and inclusion can help raise awareness and reduce biases. Lastly, encouraging open communication and feedback allows employees to voice concerns and contribute to a more inclusive culture.

Read more on inclusion workplace strategies here.

How to Foster a Culture of Trust and Accountability in a Hybrid Workplace

Fostering a **culture of trust** in a hybrid workplace is vital for team cohesion and productivity. Regardless of the hybrid work model, when the organisational culture promotes trust and support the employees' satisfaction is higher (Dowling, et al., 2022).

Trust in the organisational context depends on effective team builders and managers who know how to foster collaboration and effective conflict management. Empowering employees with autonomy and support shows confidence in their abilities, reinforcing mutual trust. Here are **three effective** practices to build psychological safety in a hybrid environment:

- Make sure that employees **know each other**, and what they do in the organisation.
- Regularly **plan team events** to build connections among employees, taking into account vital information such as time restrictions, accessibility factors, type of activities etc. Also make sure to smoothly orient new team members in the hybrid work environment.
- Work to foster **healthy conflict** among members and conflict management.

Organisations as they transform their activities in hybrid work models require also to modify how their teams work in the new workspace. Besides leading by example, leaders need to demonstrate reliability and integrity. According to Grossi et al. (2021), managers should also be able to put in place specific practices that inspire ownership and accountability as norms.

How is this attained in a hybrid workplace? What can the leaders do so that their members do not feel disconnected in a hybrid workplace?

- Ensure clarity of goals and direction for the team (discuss-agree-document clear objectives)
- Foster ownership with tools like Team Charter which defines how the team members work together
- Be proactive by offering support and buidling relationships

Watch this video on [Team Building Games](#).

Overall, regular check-ins and performance reviews help maintain accountability, ensuring everyone meets their responsibilities. Recognizing and celebrating achievements fosters a positive environment where employees feel valued. By cultivating these practices, organisations can create a hybrid workplace where trust and accountability drive success and collaboration.

Team Purpose Defines what success looks like for the team and clarifies the purpose of the team.	• What kind of team is this exactly? (e.g., project team, coordination team) • Why does the team exist? What's the team responsible for accomplishing? • What "work" does the team do? (broadly stated)
Team Context How does the team fit into the bigger picture?	• Who's the team accountable to? • With what other teams do we connect? • What do they want/need from us? • How will our team interact with other groups? • What defines and sets apart our group?
Team Goals Clarify the group's output, tasks, or concrete contributions.	• What specific results do we expect from our team? • What outcomes do we want? (Be as specific as possible.) • How can we measure those outcomes?
Team Roles Who is included on the team? How might this change over time?	• Who's on the team? What perspective/skills does each member bring? • Are there special roles (e.g., leader, facilitator, etc.) on the team? • Are there key sub-groups within the team? What do the subgroups do?
Teamwork Processes How will the team share information, deliberate, and decide things?	• What processes will we use to do the team's work? (List them out, step by step.) • What expectations do we have around how we work and what we do? • How often will we meet? • Who determines and manages our agenda? • How will we connect with other significant partners of our work?
Team Decision-Making	• What decisions are made within this team? • What level of decision-making responsibility do we have? • What decision process will we use? • How will we communicate with each other and connect to others within the organisation?
Team Values & Norms	• What shared values define our group? • What links exist between our group? • What do we expect of each other? • How do we agree to handle conflict? • What are our team norms and/or operating principles?

1.5. Additional resources for implementation:

Titles	Links
Best Online Collaboration Tools	*Best Online Collaboration Tools*
25 Best Team communication tools . a guide to choose the perfect fit	*25 Best Team communication tools. a guide to choose the perfect fit*
How to choose the right communication tool	*How to choose the right communication tool*
The steps to create inclusivity in the hybrid workplace	*The steps to create inclusivity in the hybrid workplace*
Hybrid work: Making it fit with your diversity, equity, and inclusion strategy	*Hybrid work: Making it fit with your diversity, equity, and inclusion strategy*
Why inclusion matters—and how to foster it	*Why inclusion matters—and how to foster it*
Four ways to establish team accountability in a hybrid work environment	*Four ways to establish team accountability in a hybrid work environment*
Discover hybrid meetings that feel inclusive, engaging, and productive	*Discover hybrid meetings that feel inclusive, engaging, and productive*
Tips on communicating better in a Hybrid Work environment	*Tips on communicating better in a Hybrid Work environment*

1.6 Reflection Questions

1. Flexibility is a key challenge of the contemporary hybrid work environment and takes different forms.
   - What sense can you make of a familiar hybrid workplace using the four different forms of organisational flexibility?
   - What kind of arrangements does your organisation offer for organisational flexibility?
   - As an employee, which type of organisational flexibility do you consider more critical?

2. Based on the content of this module, pick three advantages and three challenges that you consider most important for a successful implementation of the hybrid work model. Consider one suggestion which will address each one of these challenges.

3. How would you describe the office of your current or desirable workplace? Which layout would you consider as most appropriate for hybrid work?

4. Write a short reflection of 100 words on Evonik's policy concerning the respect of agreed working hours so as to enhance communication.
   - What were you thinking and feeling while reading this case?
   - Would you recommend this policy to a hybrid organisation you know?

5. Consider the digital infrastructure of a recent hybrid work experience of yours, what kind of equipment were missing which would make your work more efficient?
   - Prepare a list with the three most important items which would make a big difference to the particular remote work.
   - Compare your list with that of two of your colleagues and come out with a final list of three common items.

6. Consider the importance of culture of trust and accountability in the hybrid workplace, and respond to the following:
   - Overall, how would you evaluate the degree to which you know your colleagues in your organisations?
   - When was the last time that you participated in a team event which aimed to strengthen the ties among the members of your team?
   - Was your team guided by a clear team charter? If not, do you find the Team Charter a useful tool to clarify team goals, roles, processes, values and decision making?

1.7 Assessment Activity

1. What is a key aspect of an effective hybrid workplace according to the text?
    a. Increasing employee work hours
    b. Transforming organisational culture
    c. Eliminating remote work entirely
    d. Reducing reliance on technology

2. Why is flexibility crucial in the hybrid workplace?
    a. It ensures employees work the same hours each day.
    b. It simplifies the organisational hierarchy.
    c. It is essential for understanding how hybrid work functions, impacting organisational and social aspects, as well as employees' autonomy.
    d. It mandates all employees to work from the office at least three days a week.

3. Which of the following strategies is NOT mentioned as essential for maintaining high levels of collaboration in a hybrid workplace according to Lomas et al (2008)?
    a. Effective communication and connection between employees and managers
    b. Clear delegation of tasks and work schedules
    c. Regular in-person meetings for all team members
    d. Culture of sharing ideas and work
    e. A clear policy for hybrid work arrangements

4. Which of the following is listed as a key criterion for choosing the right communication tool?
    a. Picking a tool that the team will enjoy using
    b. Considering the tool's scalability
    c. Looking at the main features of the tool
    d. Considering the size of the organisation and volume of information
    e. All the above

5. Which of the following is NOT mentioned as part of a robust digital infrastructure for a hybrid community?
    a. Reliable high-speed internet
    b. Secure cloud storage
    c. Advanced communication tools
    d. Regular in-person meetings
    e. E. Investing in cybersecurity measures

Chapter 2:
Tools Enterprises
Need to
Enable Hybrid
Workplaces

The main focus of Chapter 2 is to serve as an introduction to the meaning and importance of the technical tools and skills that organisations and companies need to enable and maintain the hybrid workplace. Communication and digital collaboration skills are essential for the new way of working in a digital world. At the same time managers of hybrid teams must be equipped and trained with the right skillset ensuring that their teams can cooperate effectively. In today's world driven by new technologies, digital wellbeing has become an important aspect of hybrid work, and it helps individuals to achieve a healthy balance between their online and offline activities. By adopting healthy digital habits employees can reduce their digital distraction and addiction.

2.1 Setting Clear Goals and Expectations

Defining clear objectives for hybrid work arrangements

Effective goal setting is essential for successful hybrid teams. Managers need to work with their teams to establish clear objectives and timescales, ensuring these are reviewed periodically and regular feedback is provided as required. A hybrid work policy is a flexible work arrangement document that typically outlines the guidelines, expectations, and procedures for employees. When managing a hybrid team, it is particularly important to ensure that the specifics of all objectives are set out clearly one by one and are recorded so that both the manager and the employee have a reference point. It is important for the impact of hybrid working to be considered when agreeing timeframes. Hybrid work can often provide more focused working time without interruption, so impacts on timescales may be positive in some types of roles

However, as with any new way of working it is often prudent to pay particular attention to early progress and to test, trial and adapt as needed to ensure that agreed timescales are appropriate.

In the context of hybrid working there may be a requirement for additional IT resources to be made available for all colleagues.

Establishing transparent expectations regarding tasks and responsibilities

Establishing transparent expectations regarding tasks and responsibilities in hybrid working places is crucial for creating a successful and collaborative work environment. Here are some key recommendations:

Flexibility models:
Hybrid work models can take various forms, such as universal (applied across the entire organisation), variables (decisions made at the team level) or case-by-case (individual level).

While hybrid work offers flexibility, it's important to have some structure in place. This could mean setting core hours when everyone is expected to be available, or scheduling regular check-ins to ensure that work will be done and that goals will be achieved.

Clearly defining the options and boundaries allows leaders to understand how employees work and provide necessary support and tools to achieve their goals.

Visibility needs:
As flexibility becomes more defined, organisations must also clarify visibility requirements. Leaders should determine the data necessary to track progress and results of hybrid teams. Balancing transparency with privacy is essential for establishing trust and maintaining a positive work environment.

Clear communication:
Transparency is critical. Managers need to be as clear and transparent as possible when setting expectations for

remote and in-office work. They should clearly define what tasks are expected to be completed, the quality of work, and the deadlines, and use various communication channels effectively, such as emails, project management tools, and regular meetings. Honest communication sets a high standard, fosters trust among employees and improves morale and productivity.

Performance expectations and metrics:
Setting clear, enforceable performance expectations for remote and hybrid employees is essential. Leaders of hybrid teams have to establish clear metrics for measuring their performance that could be based on the completion of tasks, the quality of work or other relevant factors. This helps ensure that everyone is held to the same standard, regardless of where they are working.

Regular feedback:
Providing regular feedback to employees about their performance helps them understand how they are doing and where they can improve. It also shows them that their work is being noticed and appreciated.

It is important for the manager to ensure that all employees, regardless of where they are working, have equal opportunities for advancement and recognition. This helps maintain fairness and prevents resentment from building up.

Training and Support:
Providing training and support can help employees adapt to the hybrid work model. This could include training in new digital tools and technologies, or support for setting up a home office.

Policies and Guidelines:
Clear policies and guidelines in place for hybrid work should be set in the organisation. Policies on communication, availability, and use of company resources help ensure that everyone is on the same page and that the company's interests are protected.

2.2 Communication Policies for Asynchronous Collaboration

Implementing policies to facilitate effective communication across time zones and schedules

Hybrid work policies have potential challenges, such as collaboration issues, maintaining company culture, setting transparent legal aspects, and ensuring employees feel connected to their colleagues and the organisation. However, careful planning and communication can overcome many of them. Managing a remote or hybrid team often comes with unique challenges, including a lack of team cohesiveness, less face-to-face supervision, and communication issues. Things could become even more difficult when the employees are in different time zones.

In this situation the best decision is asynchronous communication. It overcomes the communication barriers that come with remote work by allowing employees to respond to messages when they can. At the same time, it gives them time to focus on their most important tasks.

A clear communication policy for asynchronous work should be drafted and implemented in the companies and organisations. The asynchronous communication policy should include a set of "do"s and "don't"s that everyone must follow. That way, expectations will be clear for all employees. For example, the team should define a specific time frame to respect when it comes to replying to messages, such as within 24 hours. Also,

part of the communication policy could be establishing a limit on the number of online meetings employees can participate in each day. Communication with the employees could help to determine what this limit should be.

Facilitating effective communication across time zones and schedules is essential for global teams and remote work. It requires a combination of technology, cultural awareness, and clear policies. Here are some strategies to help leaders manage these challenges:

Time Zone Awareness and Sensitivity:
- Ensure that every team member's time zone is clearly stated in their contact details.
- Educate team members about different time zones within the team and encourage them to respect others' working hours when scheduling meetings or communicating.
- Be mindful of time zones when sending messages or scheduling meetings.
- Avoid sending urgent or unscheduled messages to your colleagues during their off-hours.
- Respect designated work hours to maintain work-life balance and productivity.

Leverage Technology:
- Use tools and technology to facilitate seamless communication across time zones.
- Virtual collaboration platforms, instant messaging apps, and project management tools can help bridge the gap.
- Consider time zone converters or widgets to display multiple time zones during scheduling or planning.

Cultural Awareness:
- Understand cultural norms related to work hours, holidays, and communication preferences.
- Adapt your communication style to accommodate different cultural expectations.

Clear Expectations and Guidelines:
- Establish clear guidelines for communication across time zones.
- Define response time expectations, availability windows, and preferred communication channels.
- Encourage asynchronous communication to allow flexibility for team members in different time zones.

Communication Protocols:
- Establish clear guidelines on how communication should be conducted, including response times for emails and messages, meeting agendas, and the use of language that is inclusive and respectful of cultural differences.
- Implement policies that encourage the use of various communication channels such as email, instant messaging, video conferencing, and collaboration platforms to cater to different time zones and schedules.

Regular Check-ins and Schedule Planning Tools:
- Encourage regular check-ins and status updates to keep team members informed of project progress and any issues that may arise. This helps in maintaining transparency and accountability across different time zones.
- Utilise scheduling tools that can help identify overlapping availability among team members and facilitate scheduling meetings at convenient times for all parties involved.

By implementing these policies, organisations can promote a culture of effective communication and collaboration that transcends geographical boundaries and time zones, leading to improved productivity and team cohesion.
- Leveraging communication channels and platforms for asynchronous collaboration

Asynchronous communication is simple, and people actually do it all the time, when they send messages, leave voicemails, and record videos. With the right tools and strategies in place, managers can optimise asynchronous communication to help their team stay productive. Many tools can be used synchronously or asynchronously, depending on the expectations of the users.

Examples of Asynchronous Communication:
- Emails
- Instant messaging platforms
- Project management systems
- Cloud-based document-sharing platforms
- Apps that allow to tag individuals, scan conversations, and see who's read your thread
- Digital whiteboards for collaboration with others on a shared digital canvas with features like sticky notes, polling, and comments.

Another challenge of hybrid work models is related to the information flow. For online workers it is very hard to overcome the poorly organised information flow. All goals, decisions and actions taken so far should be recorded and available for all employees in an accessible place and in a way which is clear to understand.

Workload digital tools aim to improve the overall effectiveness of teams by collecting at one place information about staff calendars, resource allocation, project management tracking tools, staff utilisation and workforce planning.

2.3 Collaboration Tools for Communication and Sense of Belonging

Exploring tools and platforms for real-time communication, project management, and team collaboration

Communication and collaboration are the abilities to exchange information, ideas, feedback, and to work together towards a common goal. Cross-team collaboration is one of the biggest challenges currently facing hybrid teams as the team members may struggle with feelings of isolation, communication barriers, and difficulty in separating work and personal life. Managers play a key role in fostering the relationships that hybrid teams need in order to collaborate effectively. Cultivating a culture of trust, transparency, and open communication is fundamental for effective collaboration.

Technologies to facilitate real-time communication and collaboration, such as video conferencing and instant-messaging platforms, can help to overcome the challenges of hybrid team collaboration.

There are plenty of tools and platforms to make remote collaboration easier.
- Instant messaging platforms like Google Chat, Microsoft Teams, Viber or WhatsApp
- Project-management tools like Trello or Asana are good examples. These enable collaborators to see a project's status at a glance, and to update it appropriately.
- Cloud-based document-sharing platforms like Google Workspace, Dropbox or WeTransfer provide simultaneous access for multiple users to a common set of files stored in the cloud
- Tools like Zoom, RingCentral or Google Hangouts are suitable for communication with Team Leaders, HR Managers and remote workers.
- Apps, like Slack or Threads, allow to tag individuals, scan conversations, and see who's read your thread.

- Virtual whiteboard like Mural or Miro for collaboration, allow teams to brainstorm outcomes and plan workflows.

Cultivating a sense of belonging and connection among remote and in-office team members

Building a digital inclusive culture requires actions on each level of the team. Without a sense of belonging, employees can feel stifled or ignored – leading to an unhappy, disengaged workforce. The transformation towards digitally inclusive culture could start with the employee's onboarding even before the official first day at work. For the new remote/hybrid employees the first day could be stressful and challenging as some of the colleagues are at the office. Cultivating a sense of belonging and inclusivity is crucial, and the role of the manager is very important in such cases. Organising a pre-boarding activity can reduce the tension of the new start and bringing together (online and offline) all team members will build the ground of a sense of belonging. Small actions could increase the sense of belonging and inclusion, for example:

Regular meetings – short online meetings every day (up to 10-15 min) can significantly increase the impact of experience of the employees. Otherwise, remote employees may feel socially excluded.

Recognition and feedback - Maintaining continuous feedback is something that managers often skip entirely. Feedback is essential for employee development, especially the constructive one. Affirm good behaviour and improve performance with positive recognition.

Collaborative experience – organising spaces (virtual – offline participants) for collaborative work is essential to boost engagement and sense of belonging because the technology overcomes the problem with the distance between the team members.

Benefits – something simple like benefits can showcase or reinforce the culture of inclusivity in the company. Providing fruits, free coffee or juice in the office might make the remote employees feel excluded. A basket with benefits mix for employees to choose, such as medical care, childcare, training opportunities, lifestyle or free food, accessible on site or for workers remotely, could be a wise solution.

Team buildings – such events have great importance and impact on the culture, motivation and engagement within the company. Standard team building activities could be reshaped to hybrid reality: virtual happy hour, hybrid wine or beer tasting, hybrid cooking/dancing/yoga classes; hybrid Halloween or Christmas costume contest.

Employee resource groups – providing (online and offline) team members with space to share ideas, interests, hobbies or plans is a great way to foster a culture of inclusivity at work. The ERGs are voluntary and fully led by the employees themselves. In a remote work environment, ERGs can provide connection and support for employees who might be at risk of isolation and burnout.

Flexible work environment - being flexible can start with being empathetic to individual work styles, which means active listening. For example, some employees may prefer an asynchronous approach to project management, while others work better in face-to-face Zoom meetings. Empowering employees to freely share ideas and take on a "leadership" role within their team is another healthy approach to cultivating sense of belonging and communication between employees.

2.4 Digital Wellbeing Policies to Address Work-Life Balance

Developing policies and practices to promote work-life balance and prevent burnout

With the increased number of remote workers, it has become much harder to set boundaries at work and maintain a healthy work-life balance. Work-life balance is important because it reduces stress, helps avoid burnout, increases job satisfaction, and improves overall health and well-being of the employees. Achieving a healthy work-life balance means finding the right mix of work, family, and personal time that allows for a fulfilling life both inside and outside of the office.

Achieving a healthy work-life balance is a shared responsibility between employees and employers, and by taking together proactive steps to implement policies and create supportive environments, everyone can experience the benefits of a well-balanced life.

To foster the balance between work and family, it is essential to promote policies that enable team members to manage their time and energy efficiently. These policies not only contribute to people's well-being and happiness, but also boost productivity in the workplace. The successful wellbeing policy includes:

Flexible work hours:
A flexible work arrangement means changes in standard working hours, days or location of work on a temporary or long-term basis.

Remote/hybrid working:
Opportunity to work from home or remote locations on certain days of the week, with less travelling time reduces employees' stress related to time management.

Emotional support and counselling programs:
Providing support services for those facing personal or family challenges is a sign that they have been heard and understood by their employer.

Switching shifts or job sharing:
Allowing teams to swap shifts or share work responsibilities can facilitate balancing family and professional demands.

Wellness and life-balance programs:
Providing wellness benefits and activities like yoga, meditation, mental health counselling, and sport activities helps employees manage stress and improve their overall well-being.

Unlike traditional office settings, where the boundaries between work and personal life can be more clearly defined, the hybrid work model enables people to adjust their schedules to accommodate personal responsibilities while fulfilling professional duties. However, this also creates challenges as the lines between work and personal life can blur, potentially leading to burnout or difficulty of disconnecting.

Providing resources and support for managing digital distractions and maintaining mental health while working remotely

In hybrid or remote work environments where the employees are constantly connected to devices and online platforms, digital wellbeing has become an important aspect of the overall wellbeing. Excessive use of technology

can have negative impacts on mental health, physical health and social interactions.

By adopting **healthy digital habits**, employees can reduce their risk of developing digital addiction, anxiety or depression – negative outcomes associated with excessive technology use. Managers need to support team members struggling with digital addiction to seek help and to encourage healthy habits such as:

Setting digital boundaries around technology use – check the email only at certain times each day or use the "Don't disturb" mode while doing important tasks. Apps like Zoom, Microsoft Teams and Slack keep a digital force connected but at the same time they also lead to an employees' attention being pulled out in many directions at once.

Digital detox is a break from screens at least for one day and spending time offline in nature, with family and friends or exercising.

Cultivating mindfulness is the practice of bringing attention to the present moment while working and being aware of your thoughts, feelings, and physical sensations as you go about your tasks.

Managing notifications by switching off notifications for non-essential applications and setting specific times to suspend notifications from all apps to enhance concentration and enjoy offline time more.

Regular breaks during the working day – stepping away from the screen every hour, getting some fresh air or taking a short walk to remove the pain or stress.

Another way for employers to provide support and resources to their hybrid team members is through an Employee Assistance Programme (EAP). It is a confidential service delivered online or face to face that assists the staff with personal or workforce issues that affect their performance, wellbeing or mental/physical health.

Providing training and education to the employees on digital wellbeing and how to adopt healthy digital habits should be a priority of the hybrid manager.
Some useful applications for managing digital wellbeing are:

Headspace for work – mindfulness app designed to improve mental health and clarity.

ActionDash – monitors your screen time in various apps and identifies those which leave a lot of notifications so you can consider turning them off.

BreakTimer – allows you to set up customised breaks and reminds you to take them.

Meditopia for work – supports employees to explore their thoughts, emotions and how they impact their body.

Noisli – the app blocks out external distractions with background sounds that can be mixed in various combinations and comes with a timer to prevent burnout.

2.5 Reflection Questions

1. Based on what you covered in this chapter, make a note of the various digital communication tools used in your organisation or company and identify the challenges your team members are facing in the hybrid work environment.
2. Identify and present to your colleagues 3 digital tools or apps that could support them to adopt healthy

digital habits.

3. Consider what digital wellbeing means to you, reflect on the following questions:
    a. When do you think about your digital wellbeing?
    b. How does it make you feel?
    c. What makes you think about your digital wellbeing?

2.6 Assessment activity

1. The change toward digital inclusive culture is done by:
    a. HR
    b. Leaders
    c. Employees
    d. All of the above

2. Which of the workload management challenges is the responsibility of the employees themselves, not the management?
    a. Poor time-management skills
    b. Insufficient company resources
    c. Unrealistic goals
    d. Uneven task distribution in the team

3. On which stage should a digital inclusive practice be implemented?
    a. Engagement
    b. Onboarding
    c. Team meeting
    d. All of the above

4. What is digital wellbeing?
    a. Digital wellbeing is a fitness program that allows using digital technology to track your progress.
    b. Digital well being refers to the state of individuals' mental and physical health about their use of digital technologies.
    c. Digital Wellbeing is a virtual therapy that helps individuals overcome their fear of technology use.
    d. Digital wellbeing is related to the amount in an individual's bank account.

5. Employees who prioritise their digital wellbeing are more likely to be:
    a. Uncooperative and disconnected
    b. In a good mood
    c. Engaged, focused and productive
    d. Distracted and uncommunicative

2.7 Additional resources/ Further reading

Titles	Links
What is digital wellness and why is it important?	*What is digital wellness and why is it important?*
What Hybrid Work Means for Work-Life Balance?	*What Hybrid Work Means for Work-Life Balance?*
What is hybrid work and why do employees want it?	*What is hybrid work and why do employees want it?*
4 Ways to Make Hybrid Work Better for Everyone	*4 Ways to Make Hybrid Work Better for Everyone*
Addressing Digital Distractions to Focus on Work	*Addressing Digital Distractions to Focus on Work*
20 Best Remote Communication Tools for Culture & Collaboration in 2024	*20 Best Remote Communication Tools for Culture & Collaboration in 2024*

Chapter 3:
Barriers to
Digital Inclusion

In today's rapidly evolving digital landscape, achieving true digital inclusion in the workplace is paramount for organisations seeking to maximise their potential and foster a diverse and inclusive work environment. However, several barriers hinder the journey towards digital inclusion. This chapter aims to identify these barriers, anticipate challenges in hybrid work environments and provide strategies for conducting inclusive work meetings within a hybrid mode.

3.1 Identify Barriers to digital inclusion:

Digital inclusion faces challenges stemming from both individual and systemic factors.

Working together online can be harder than working side by side as team members depend on digital messages and might not work at the same time, often leading to fractured communication and misunderstandings.

According to Pekkala , the rapid growth and rising importance of digital communication tools are leading to new types of gaps within the workforce. For those responsible for employee development, the move to digital work and communication means learning new skills. To promote inclusivity, organisations should offer training for all levels and areas of the company and support diversity by allowing different methods for involvement and contribution.

People working remotely may have less visibility to their line managers and colleagues, with potential proximity bias entering the equation. In their paper "Conceptualising visibility in hybrid work" (2023) Nuswantoro, Richter and Riemer distinguish between several dimensions of visibility and their characteristics:

Framework for Conceptualising Visibility

Dimensions	Characteristics		
Location	Physical		Virtual
Observer-observee relationship	Manager – managee	Colleagues	Customer-worker
Mode of observation	Active		Passive
Awareness of observee	Aware		Unaware
Type of interaction	Direct		Indirect
Work scenario	One-to-one	One-to-many	Many-to-many

They argue that effective visibility is key in remote work for collaboration and management. Excessive visibility, however, can backfire, being seen as self-promotion or causing workflow disruptions. Balancing visibility with flexibility is essential, as overemphasis on presence can hinder personal life and work productivity. Optimal visibility, aided by suitable technology, can enhance work progress and collaboration without the downsides of hyper-connectivity. In the below graph they recap how IT infrastructure and tools can bridge the visibility barriers:

Summary of Visibility Practices and IT in Use.

Visibility Practices		IT Artefact (Examples)	References
Availability	To know colleagues' availability for work	Online calendar	Olson and Olson (2014); Wajcman (2019)
	To signal accessibility	Video conferencing tools	Gibbs et al. (2013); Olson and Olson (2014); Riemer et al. (2007)
	To show degree of responsiveness	Email Instant messaging	Dimitrova (2003); Koehne et al. (2012); Mazmanian et al. (2013); Sewell and Taskin (2015)
Identity & Expertise	To seek, or let others know of, one's identity and expertise	Enterprise social network Digital collaboration tools	Dely and Hafermalz (2016); Leonardi (2015); Groysberg et al. (2022)
Work Progress	To provide a status update	Instant messaging Video conferencing tools	Malhotra et al. (2007); Waizenegger et al. (2020)
	To monitor and maintain team's project	Collaborative writing tools	Jung et al. (2017)
		Project management tools / Digital collaboration tools	Dabbish et al. (2012); Jurison (1999); Malhotra and Majchrzak (2014); Olson and Olson (2014)
Work Outcome (Contribution)	To assess employee's performance	Collaborative writing tools	Jung et al. (2017)
		Digital collaboration tools	Groysberg et al. (2022)
	To show contributions (both individual and team)	Email	Mazmanian et al. (2013); Mulki et al. (2009)
		Enterprise social network	Averkiadi et al. (2020)
Commitment	To see employees' level of commitment through digital footprints	Various digital collaboration tools	Leonardi (2021a); Malhotra et al. (2007)
	To depict commitment through presence or extended availability	Instant messaging Video conferencing tools Project management softwares	Afota et al. (2022); Cristea and Leonardi (2019); (Malhotra et al. 2007)

Another barrier to digital inclusion is the lack of social connectedness and collaboration. Geographical distance, if not addressed often, can lead to feelings of isolation and lack of belonging amongst co-workers.

3.2 Challenges of Hybrid Meetings

Employees can face several challenges during hybrid meetings, such as:
- Unpredictable technology failures (connectivity, audio, visual)
- Difficulting in picking up social cues
- People talking over each other / at the same time and not realising they are not being heard
- Time lapses in audio and people not knowing when to wait before they can speak
- Difficulty coordinating participation from different time zones
- Challenging to engage the contributions of all participants from their different location
- Participants may be distracted
- Participants may multitask and get distracted / not pay attention

Running an inclusive hybrid meeting involves addressing various challenges such as dominance of one voice, difficulty in picking up social cues, and technical issues that can alienate remote attendees. To overcome these obstacles, several strategies can be implemented. Firstly, organisations should assess whether a meeting is necessary allowing for flexibility in communication without the need for immediate responses. Careful planning of hybrid meetings is crucial, considering the purpose, required decisions, pre-reading materials, and technological capabilities of the chosen meeting space to ensure productivity and inclusivity.

3.3 Conducting inclusive Hybrid Meetings

Inclusive meetings rely on both appropriate technology and modern meeting room amenities. From audiovisual equipment to virtual communication platforms and booking software, each component contributes to the effectiveness and enjoyment of meetings while fostering engagement and inclusivity of both in-office and remote participants.

The necessary equipment for hybrid meetings are:
- HD television or external monitor (use a room with a large screen)
- Microphones and external speakers
- High-quality router
- External cameras

It is important to test the technology in advance and decide whether any collaboration tools will be necessary. Some commonly used remote meeting management tools include:
- Google Docs
- Mind maps
- Virtual whiteboards
- Kanban boards
- Project management tools

Structuring contributions from all attendees and ensuring uniformity in technology usage, regardless of location,

can prevent remote participants from feeling ignored or disadvantaged, promoting equal participation and collaboration among all meeting attendees (Christian-Farman, L. (2023, October 2). 2). *What are hybrid meetings and how do you make them inclusive?* | Kadence. Kadence).

Here are some tips for inclusive hybrid meetings:
- Sharing discussion material in advance
- Having cameras on
- Speaking clearly and slowly
- Taking turns to speak - agreeing to a communication etiquette
- Using engagement tools or techniques such as pre or mid-meeting polls, remote-friendly icebreakers and virtual whiteboards
- Assigning in-person meeting attendees to be remote people's "buddy"
- Presenting materials via the remote technology instead of equipment such as flipcharts present in the room which are difficult for those attending remotely to see well
- Have a meeting moderator who will act as a second meeting facilitator for the people attending virtually. This person may handle any tech issues, post polls, share chat questions with the main meeting facilitator, set up recording, breakout rooms, etc

Furthermore, setting some ground rules can create more inclusion during hybrid meetings. Here are some best practices for hybrid meeting facilitators and attendees:
- When soliciting feedback or questions, start with remote attendees.
- Call on people by name when asking for their feedback or perspective.
- Make sure in-person attendees are in view (and stay in view) of remote participants.
- If physical materials are used, ensure remote participants can see them.
- Avoid side conversations.
- Require remote attendees to use the hand-raising feature when they want to talk and be mindful of giving them their turn to speak.
- Only allow one person to speak at a time.
- Silence phones and notifications during the meeting.
- Use the chat function only for questions and relevant links.
- Give your full attention to the meeting.

Meeting timings are also important and should be mindful of the fatigue associated with video calls, incorporating breaks to alleviate strain and scheduling meetings promptly to respect attendees' time.

3.4 Additional resources for implementation:

Useful Video: Discover hybrid meetings that feel inclusive, engaging, and productive.

1. **Embrace video calling**. Being present and seeing each other is an important part of keeping connected. Don't hide away or do other work during the meeting.
2. **Use headsets or earphones**. This will give better sound quality. Speak directly into the mic and remember to mute it when not speaking to limit background noise.
3. **Speak clearly and steadily**. This will help ensure everyone can understand you. And try to modulate your voice, to keep people interested and engaged.

4. **Establish etiquette guidelines**. Agree a system to give everyone a voice. Arrange 'hands up' signals to agree who speaks next and use chat functions to allow everyone to contribute.

5. **Repeat the question**. The chair or presenter should repeat questions they ask or before answering them, to ensure all participants are aware of the original question. Repeating the question in writing within a chat box could provide additional clarity.

6. **Use names and give context**. When responding to chat comments, repeat the relevant remarks and make clear who you're responding to. Don't just say 'yes, Jane that's right' because others may not have seen Jane's comment and it won't make sense to them.

7. **Keep slides simple**. Keep to a single thought per slide to help participants understand and focus on what's being discussed. It's better to have more slides with fewer things on them.

8. **Keep slides visual**. Your participants may be joining from a mobile device and wordy slides will be tough to read. Anchor your presentation on relevant, image-based slides.

9. **Engage participants regularly**. It's hard to simply listen online for a long time. Invite participants to give comments or ask questions, and use tools like chat or polls.

10. **Be explicit about actions and summarise**. Spell out clearly any actions that need to be taken and by whom. Summarise meeting takeaways and circulate notes promptly.

Sample template of a meeting agenda and minutes:

[Name of Meeting]
[ZOOM / Teams / Google Meet meeting link]

Date:Time:

In attendance:
Names and Surnames

Agreed Agenda:
- *[In bullets]*
-

MINUTES

In absentia:
Names and Surnames

Description of tasks / Actions to be taken

Topic	Person Responsible	Timeframe/Deadline

Decisions:
- Description of Decisions taken
- Any announcements that need to be made

Next meeting:
Date, Time & Location (Online, Hybrid, Face to Face etc.)

[ZOOM / Teams / Google Meet meeting link of next meeting]

3.5 Additional resources / Further reading:

Titles	Links
How to create an inclusive hybrid workplace: 5 tips to leaders	*How to create an inclusive hybrid workplace: 5 tips to leaders*
How to run an Effective and Inclusive Hybrid meeting	*How to run an Effective and Inclusive Hybrid meeting*
Tips for inclusive meetings for hybrid teams	*Tips for inclusive meetings for hybrid teams*
Your guide to evaluating employee engagement in a hybrid workplace	*Your guide to evaluating employee engagement in a hybrid workplace*
Hybrid burnout	*Hybrid burnout*
Hybrid employee engagement ideas	*Hybrid employee engagement ideas*
Hybrid meetings guide - Microsoft Research	*Hybrid meetings guide - Microsoft Research*
The real challenge with hybrid meetings	*The real challenge with hybrid meetings*
The challenges of hybrid meetings - and how to fix them	*The challenges of hybrid meetings - and how to fix them*
5 Challenges of hybrid work - and how to overcome them	*5 Challenges of hybrid work - and how to overcome them*

3.6 Reflection Questions

1. Based on what you covered in this module, make a note of the various barriers to digital inclusion present in your work environment and culture and identify specific challenges faced by your colleagues during hybrid meetings.

2. Identify potential strategies to introduce in your organisation for maintaining or improving collaboration in your hybrid setting.

    2.1.Consider the digital setup of your hybrid meetings:

    2.1.1. How will remote participants dial in? (e.g. ZOOM, Google Meet, Skype, Microsoft Teams?)

    2.1.2. Will participants need to brainstorm? What digital tools can they use for that?

    2.1.3. If your meeting requires additional materials, how will these be made available to both remote and in-person participants? For example, you might create a PDF that can either be printed out or accessed via computer

    2.2. Consider the physical setup of your hybrid meetings. How will you optimise your meeting space for both in-person and virtual participants?

    2.2.1. Think about the best sitting arrangement for those participating in-person from the same room

    2.2.2. Is the venue a quiet place? Avoid rooms with background noise. Use noise absorbing materials such as carpet.

    2.2.3. Consider having webcams on tripods around the room for a 360 degrees view

    2.2.4. Have your main presentation showing on a big screen in the middle of the room for everyone to see (directly or via camera)

The following checklist forms a best practice tool for preparing for and conducting inclusive hybrid meetings:

CHECKLIST FOR INCLUSIVE HYBRID MEETINGS

| Prior to the meeting:	
Is there a meeting agenda? Is the meeting purpose clear? What is the meeting's expected outcome?	
Did you collect input or questions from all participants before the meeting to co-create the agenda?	
Did you ask participants if they have any requirements in order to attend the meeting? If yes, have you made reasonable adjustments to accommodate them?	
Are all participants familiar with the software being used for the meeting? If not, did you take action to ensure they are familiar in order to run an inclusive meeting effectively?	
Is there any material (e.g. slides, facts, figures) that can be sent to participants in advance to help them prepare and feel included in the conversation?	
Has the meeting room been adequately equipped with the necessary technology (e.g. camera, video recording) to run the meeting in an inclusive, hybrid mode?	
During the meeting	
Ensure someone familiar with the required meeting technology is in the room or available to provide technical assistance, if needed	
Ensure that the audio is working	
Set some inclusive etiquette / rules from the start of the meeting, e.g. use of cameras, hand raising, use of the chat function, talking in turns, not interrupting, etc	
Ensure the meeting has a Facilitator and a Note-taker, capturing feedback from all participants and the agreed action points	
Do you have an activity to break the ice?	
Is everyone mindful of everyone's contributions regardless of physical location? Did the Facilitator ensure those attending remotely had the opportunity to speak?	
Did the Note-taker and Facilitator monitor and address the comments in the chat?	
Did the Note-taker and Facilitator recap before the end of the meeting to ensure the input from everyone was captured and the agreed actions/timeframes are clear	
After the meeting:	
Check the minutes for accuracy	
Circulate the minutes	
Ensure the agreed actions are being followed up	

3.7 Assessment activity

1. What is the primary goal of digital inclusion in the workplace?
    a. To increase the use of digital tools
    b. To ensure equitable, meaningful, inclusive and safe access to digital technologies for everyone
    c. To replace face-to-face meetings with virtual ones
    d. To enhance employee monitoring

2. Which of the following is NOT identified as a barrier to digital inclusion in hybrid work environments?
    a. High-speed internet access
    b. Technological limitations
    c. Lack of visibility
    d. Communication and social connection issues

3. What is a potential negative outcome of excessive visibility in remote work?
    a. Improved collaboration
    b. Increased work productivity
    c. Workflow disruptions
    d. Enhanced social connections

4. What is one major challenge of hybrid meetings mentioned in the chapter?
    a. Overcrowded meeting rooms
    b. Difficulty in picking up social cues
    c. Lack of topics to discuss
    d. Over-reliance on face-to-face interactions

True/False Questions

1. Proximity bias does not affect remote workers since they are not physically present in the office. (True/False)
2. Running inclusive hybrid meetings requires careful planning and appropriate technology to ensure productivity and inclusivity. (True/False)

Chapter 4:
Developing the skills to manage a hybrid workforce / Leading teams in a hybrid setting
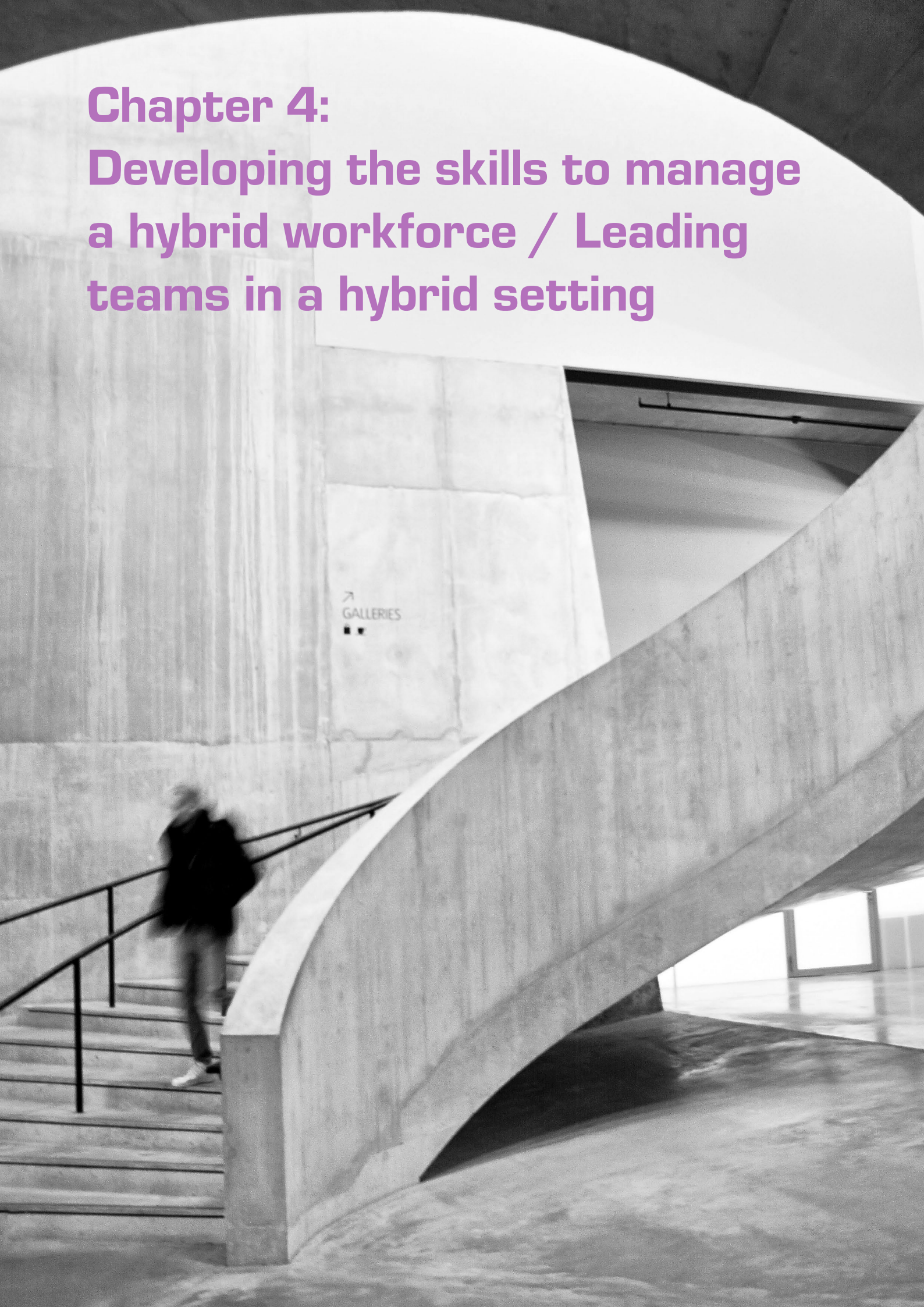
Chapter 4 is designed to help learners to develop their skills in managing a hybrid workforce. Accordingly, we will cover topics such as efficient communication and collaboration techniques to maximise employee engagement, and building trust between managers and their hybrid teams. Traditional models of leadership and management of course have their place in this increasingly common work context, but it is becoming more and more important for leaders to reflect on and improve their practices to make hybrid and remote settings more effective.

4.1 Implementable Strategies to Create and Sustain a Sense of Community in Hybrid Workplaces

Whenever the topic of hybridised or remote models of working is raised, one is never far from some variant of a reasonable question surfacing:

- But what about the sense of community in work?
- What about the social dimension of the workplace?
- How do I feel "connected" to colleagues I've either met infrequently, or maybe even never met in person?

These questions, in whatever specific form they take, are all very fair queries. Indeed, the experience of working from one's home and "detached" from colleagues could easily be perceived as an isolating experience. That being said, this is not necessarily always reflected in employees' experiences. Indeed, we are learning that hybrid and remote workplaces are proving popular with employees. In a 2023 "Remote Working in Ireland" survey by the Western Development Commission for example, 92% of the nearly 6,000 respondents indicated that the option to work remotely or in a hybrid format would be a key factor for them when choosing a new job.

By extension, we can assume that these individuals are happy with their remote workplace arrangements, which suggests at least somewhat of a sense of social cohesion. But what sort of methods are employers implementing to facilitate this?

It might sound reductive as the hybrid workplace is plagued with issues specific to its unique context, but one way to create and sustain a sense of community is by treating this form of workplace like what it is: a workplace. What does this mean? Any ordinary office features things like coffee dates, bulletin boards, "water cooler chats", desk neighbours, and team building events. One of the main secrets to a cohesive hybrid workplace is to mirror these types of interactions (as far as practically possible) in the digital space.

Coffee dates need little alteration to their format to occur remotely. Nor do they need, for that matter, to occur remotely at all. Where two or more employees live a negotiable distance from one another, encourage them to meet and chat during break times. Where this is not possible, video calls can facilitate this as a quick reprieve from the day's tasks. This is true also of "water cooler chats", which could involve managers randomising pairs of employees to take five minutes to get to know one another over video calls. The major challenge here is to try and ensure that these interactions feel natural and voluntary rather than forced, which can contribute to a feeling of awkwardness.

Longer term relationships, like those generated with "desk neighbours", are more difficult to reproduce in a hybrid context. One possible solution is to map out some aspiring leaders within the workplace who have some experience in the position, assigning them as mentor figures to newer, less experienced staff. By having new employees meet semi-regularly with established staff that are, nonetheless, distinct from the management structure, organic work friendships are given an opportunity to grow. Additionally, the staff involved in mentoring have a chance to experience what a role in management might look like for them, gaining crucial transversal skills which they can apply to advance within the workplace.

Bulletin boards are perhaps the easiest phenomenon to replicate. Many platforms designed to streamline remote and hybrid working boast their own internal "feeds'' similar to social media. These can be used to convey company-wide announcements, celebrate the personal and professional wins of staff (congratulating employees for sports victories, new roles, birthdays, etc.), or even to engage one's team in activities like quizzes or competitions. In a similar vein, and at the other end of the difficulty spectrum, are team building activities. Some of these events, such as wellbeing exercises (group meditation, workout sessions, etc.) or even classes / seminars (for example on cooking) can be conducted digitally. That being said, it could simply be a good idea to host an in-person team building event every six months or even quarterly. "Real world" bonds will naturally extend into the hybrid workspace.

In conclusion, the concept of creating and sustaining a sense of community in a hybrid workplace should not be treated as something alien and unknown. By taking established norms of community-building and adjusting their formats so that they can be accommodated in a digital setting, one can create a strategy to keep employees engaged. Furthermore, a workplace being hybridised should not preclude management from creating opportunities for in-person interactions, such as team building events and coffee dates.

4.2 Avoiding "Disconnected" Leadership, Improving Employee Engagement and Digital Wellbeing

By following some of the tips presented in the previous subtopic, a leader is well on their way to being perceived as invested in the engagement and wellbeing of their staff. But what other measures can be taken to ensure that there is as little of a feeling of "disconnect" between employees and managers as possible?

Source: Crummenerl, C. et al. (2020) The Future of Work: From remote to hybrid, capgemini.com.

When operating in a hybrid workplace, it becomes even more important than in traditional workplace contexts for managers to check-in individually with each of their staff. Depending on time constraints, create a schedule for five to fifteen minute one-on-one video calls with employees once per week. In a larger corporate setting this is naturally untenable, however one should at least attempt to use this approach with their own direct reportees (and they with their own teams, and so on). Distilling this culture of interactivity from the top-down is one surefire way to generate an impression of connected leadership; but this will prove fruitless without authenticity. Listen to staff during these opportunities for conversation and take onboard any feedback that you receive throughout. Crucially, any concerns relating to staff morale and wellbeing should be explored in these meetings, as although we are making every effort to remedy this, the hybrid workplace can be a lonely place for some individuals.

Aside from these check-in "coffee date"-type meetings, we've already discussed the possibility of hosting digital wellbeing events such as guided meditation sessions, exercise classes, etc. These activities are not only excellent methods of creating and sustaining a sense of community within the workplace, but can go a long way in supporting employee engagement and wellbeing. Another similar idea could be to institute a series of extracurricular activity "clubs" in the hybrid workplace. Perhaps a half hour book or movie lovers' club, once per week, could be suggested as a way for employees to blow off some steam and connect over shared interests?

One of the most significant obstacles to employee digital wellbeing (and wellbeing in general) in the hybrid workplace, however, has become the subject of intense scrutiny; even inspiring legislative changes in a number of countries. The "right to disconnect" is increasingly being regarded as a fundamental tenet in this new age of remote and hybrid working. To be a "connected" leader, IE, one who is conscientious of the needs of their employees, it is paramount that this right be enshrined within your organisation. Establish at the outset of any hybrid or remote working arrangement that employees are only "on the clock" for the normal duration of a

working day, and that there is no expectation that any work in excess of this be carried out. Reaffirm this at every opportunity. Avoid contacting staff outside of the regular nine-to-five working day (or whatever hours are typical in your context), and discourage the use of personal technology / devices to keep up with work-related emails, calendars, etc. Being a connected leader also means knowing when to be the exact opposite, disconnecting when appropriate to give your employees the space they need to healthily detach from work.

4.3 Effective Methods of Communication and Collaboration in Hybrid Workplaces

The Covid-19 lockdown rendered some models of hybrid communication and collaboration obsolete, crowning new leaders in this area that are now ubiquitous. As such, you are no doubt familiar with some of the leading software solutions where digital communication and collaboration are concerned. Below, we will provide a list of examples, hopefully shedding light on some more unfamiliar tools.

Remote Video Conferencing Software:

The remote video conferencing software with the strongest presence in today's hybrid workplace is Zoom, with Microsoft Teams also seeing extensive use. In addition to these household-name services, however, a number of alternatives exist. Older platforms that have experienced declines in popularity, such as Skype, are nonetheless still available and worth considering if the more mainstream options do not fit your specific needs. Additionally, Discord, a software originally developed to facilitate communication between gamers, has an engaging UI that allows seamless video conferencing, audio calls, and text chats, as well as the option to integrate "bots" that can provide additional functionality.

Shared File Management Solutions:

The aforementioned Microsoft Teams ecosystem offers a range of useful file management solutions to help hybrid teams communicate and collaborate effectively. Google's offering meanwhile, Google Drive, provides similar functionality but it is arguably more popular due to its accessibility. Like with video conferencing, however, alternatives exist. Services like FreedCamp, Asana and Teamwork are used by project managers to communicate and collaborate across physical boundaries, but their many features can be leveraged to promote hybrid communication more generally. By having access to a shared reservoir of files, a universal calendar, and a list of assignable tasks, these file management solutions could truly become the nerve centre of a company's hybrid communication and collaboration.

Learning Management Systems:

As previously discussed, hybrid workplaces are just that: workplaces. Accordingly, all the regular features and functions of employment should continue to operate despite the physical divide. Training and professional development are no exception. To communicate and collaborate effectively when it comes to training is no easy task, but luckily there are a number of software solutions that you can implement; learning management systems chief among them. These innovative platforms are designed to facilitate hybrid and remote education, sometimes referred to as distance learning, and are used by a diverse suite of individuals and organisations; from sports clubs to universities.

Resources for Idea and Content Generation:

Collective and collaborative idea and content generation is paramount in hybrid workplaces that seek to leverage the power of brainstorming with staff. Whether to workshop new ideas, pilot or assess the quality of a set of resources, or any other activity that requires some unified thinking, these applications ensure that everyone's ideas are brought to the table. Consider implementing Mentimeter activities to conduct anonymous live surveys

with colleagues during meetings, or using a collaborative digital "whiteboard" which employees can populate with information in real time.

4.4 Building Trust and Confidence Between Managers and their Hybrid Teams

Many of the issues that arise in hybrid and remote workplace arrangements stem from a difficulty with trust and confidence between managers and their teams. In some ways, this is natural and to be expected; after all, when one is used to being physically present to monitor their staff, they may be inclined to think that unsupervised employees will not complete tasks to a satisfactory level. On the other hand though, employees can feel understandably frustrated by the experience of being micromanaged in a hybrid or remote context, as they believe their history of hard work should speak for itself and will not appreciate the feeling of suddenly not being fully trusted to do their job. Both of these perspectives on the difficulties with trust and confidence in the hybrid workplace, as well as the many other perspectives that can manifest for both parties, are completely valid and should be handled with respect and care.

A good place to start, like in most human interactions, is with honesty! As a manager, confide in your staff that the hybrid workplace is new to you, and that you need them to work with you to develop a strategy that ensures remote work is handled appropriately and on time. As an employee, constructively express difficulties you may be experiencing with feelings of a lack of trust or confidence, and be open to taking onboard the response of your manager. By encouraging this culture of openness on the topic of trust and confidence, the experience of proactively improving the hybrid workplace will gradually become much more comfortable for all parties.

Managers seeking to improve trust in the hybrid workplace should consider allocating "stepping-up" opportunities that demonstrate confidence in their staff. Ask employees to take the lead on a challenging task which you know they can achieve, thereby granting them a workplace win, boosting their confidence, enhancing their skills and, above all, demonstrating your trust in them. This is a win-win in that it cultivates higher competence in staff while also contributing to more positive relationships in the workplace.

Above all though, and it is no small task, managers must walk a fine line between micromanagement and a laissez-faire attitude when it comes to the hybrid workplace in order to promote trust and confidence with staff. Using the communication and collaboration tools discussed previously, establish a company strategy to ensure tasks are being regularly and constructively supervised without staff feeling that this oversight is excessive or invasive. Constructive supervision should be presented as a mutually-beneficial experience which allows management to keep the workflow operating efficiently while also enabling feedback that will positively impact staff.

4.5 Tools and Skills to Recruit, Retain, and Develop Talent in a Hybrid Workplace

As with some of the previous sub topics discussed, the tools and skills required to recruit and develop talent in a hybrid workplace are almost identical to those which a manager should apply in any traditional workplace. In terms of hybrid-workplace-specific alterations, the following should be kept in mind:
- As previously stated, hybrid and remote working arrangements are extremely popular. Highlighting the hybrid nature of your workplace throughout the recruitment phase is a surefire way to attract talent.This necessitates, of course, having a proper hybrid work strategy that you can outline when recruiting new talent.

- Onboarding of staff should occur in the physical and digital work landscapes, as new talent will have to adjust to your company's particular hybrid ecosystem.
- Gauging employee performance and thereby isolating the skills that may require development in a hybrid workplace context requires having a remote supervisory / coaching strategy in place.

Retention, however, is a different story. While onboarding and development can be altered for a hybrid workplace context relatively easily, retention of remote staff is particularly challenging. Everything in this sense begins with hybrid workplace culture, which comprises three crucial dimensions: sense of belonging, employee engagement, and managerial support.

Many of the tips and techniques that you can use to establish a positive hybrid workplace culture have been elaborated on thus far, and subtopic 4.2 "Avoiding 'Disconnected' Leadership, Improving Employee Engagement and Digital Wellbeing" is especially useful in this regard. The basic formula, however, is as follows:

1. Leverage interpersonal interactions to create a sense of belonging (such as by celebrating staff victories)
2. Regularly assess employee satisfaction and encourage team building through the use of remote events
3. Provide a foundational bedrock of support for staff and determine that they are equipped with the necessary equipment and support to do their jobs

4.6 Reflection Questions

1. Do you believe it is possible to create and maintain a sense of community in a hybrid workplace? What sorts of tools and tips would you recommend to an employer trying to achieve this?
2. Identify and present to your colleagues 3 digital tools or apps that could support them to communicate and collaborate effectively in a remote working context.
3. What additional methods can you think of to improve confidence and trust between managers and their staff in a hybrid workplace?

4.7 Assessment Activity

Welcome to the assessment quiz of Chapter 4: "Developing the skills to manage a hybrid workforce / Leading teams in a hybrid setting". This quiz is designed to test your understanding of the challenges and strategies discussed in the chapter.

What is the most effective method of creating and sustaining a sense of community in a hybrid workplace?
a. Reducing team meetings to once per month
b. Mirroring traditional office interactions in the digital space
c. Encouraging employees to work independently without communicating
d. Eliminating social activities and focusing on work

Which of the following methods facilitates natural interactions between staff in hybrid workplaces?
a. Assigning mandatory video calls
b. Organising random video chat pairs for short conversations
c. Sending daily motivational emails
d. Holding weekly in-person meetings for all remote employees

What is one recommended way to replicate the concept of "desk neighbours" in a hybrid workplace?

a. Assigning employees to fixed desks in the office

b. Scheduling regular team-building retreats

c. Mapping out aspiring leaders as mentors for new employees

d. Organising weekly group lunches

What key office features can be recreated digitally to ensure effective communication in a hybrid workplace?

a. Bulletin boards

b. Desk neighbours

c. Team Building events

d. Watercooler chats

Which alternative software for remote video conferencing was originally developed for communication between gamers?

a. Zoom

b. Microsoft Teams

c. Skype

d. Discord

4.8 Additional Resources

Titles	Links
How to Manage a Hybrid Team - Harvard Business Review	*How to Manage a Hybrid Team - Harvard Business Review*
How to Approach Leadership in a Hybrid Work Environment - CCL	*How to Approach Leadership in a Hybrid Work Environment - CCL*
How to be a High-Performing Leader in a Hybrid Workplace - EY	*How to be a High-Performing Leader in a Hybrid Workplace - EY*
**Hybrid Working	Practical Guidance - CIPD**	*Hybrid Working	Practical Guidance - CIPD*

Chapter 5
How to avoid proximity bias

The rise of hybrid work models offers flexibility and benefits but also presents new challenges. One of these challenges is proximity bias, the unconscious tendency to favour employees who are physically closer. This chapter equips you with the knowledge and tools to identify and prevent proximity bias in your hybrid workplace. This chapter explores the impact of proximity bias and investigates the factors that contribute to it. Lastly, it provides practical strategies to foster a fair and inclusive environment where all employees, regardless of their location, feel valued and have the opportunity to thrive.

5.1 Understanding proximity bias in the hybrid workplace

What is proximity bias?

Proximity bias is the unconscious tendency to favour employees who are physically closer. In a hybrid workplace, managers might subconsciously associate frequent in-office presence with greater dedication, productivity or commitment. This can lead to overlooking the valuable contributions of remote team members who do not have the same level of physical visibility. For example, a manager might be more likely to remember an in-office colleague who stays late working on a project simply because they see them physically present. However, a remote employee working equally late at home might not receive the same recognition.

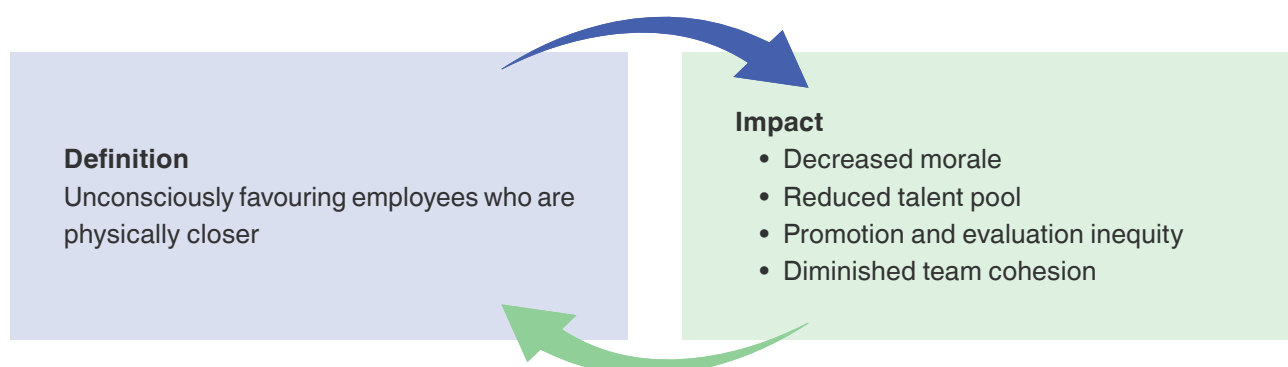## Impact of proximity bias in the hybrid workplace

Proximity bias can have a significant negative impact on a hybrid workplace. Some of the main concerns are:
- Decreased morale and motivation for remote employees who feel undervalued or passed over for opportunities (such as promotions, training, etc).
- Reduced talent pool as qualified candidates may be discouraged from applying to companies perceived to favour on-site workers.
- Inequity in performance evaluations and promotions, hindering career growth for those working remotely.
- Diminished team cohesion due to unequal participation and communication between remote and in-office team members.

5.2 Identifying causes of proximity bias in the hybrid workplace

Understanding the factors contributing to proximity bias can help us combat it. Thus, next are presented potential factors that can lead managers to proximity bias, so that they can consider them during their professional activity.

Factors contributing to perceptions

Definition
Unconsciously favouring employees who are physically closer

Impact
- Decreased morale
- Reduced talent pool
- Promotion and evaluation inequity
- Diminished team cohesion

Physical presence and perception of effort: Managers may subconsciously associate being physically present in the office with working harder or being more dedicated. They might be more likely to see someone working late at the office than someone working late at home.

Availability heuristic: People tend to rely on readily available information when making judgments. Since in-office employees are physically present and more readily available for interaction, managers may overestimate their workload or contributions compared to remote workers.

Informal interactions and idea sharing: Spontaneous conversations and idea sharing that happen organically in a shared physical space can leave remote workers feeling out of the loop. They may miss crucial information or opportunities to contribute their own ideas.

Scenarios leading to proximity bias in hybrid workplaces

Many scenarios can lead to proximity bias in hybrid workplaces. A manager might assign a project to a worker they see in the office every day based on a perceived closeness or ease of communication, rather than selecting the most qualified person for the job, regardless of their location. Managers might be more likely to mentor or sponsor employees they see in person more frequently, creating an uneven playing field for remote workers who lack the same level of informal interaction and exposure to leadership. During evaluations, managers may also unconsciously rely more heavily on recent interactions or observations of in-office employees, leading to a biassed assessment compared to remote workers whose contributions may not be as readily apparent.

The following three scenarios highlight proximity bias in different professional areas:

Scenario 1: A marketing agency adopts a hybrid work model. The creative director, who works primarily in the office, frequently brainstorms with the in-office design team for upcoming campaigns. A remote copywriter known for her innovative ideas often misses these brainstorming sessions leading her work to be overlooked for project leads.

Scenario 2: A software development company uses a hybrid work model. The project manager who rarely works remotely assigns new features to a developer he sees working late at the office every evening, assuming this signifies dedication. Meanwhile, a talented remote developer who manages their time efficiently and consistently meets deadlines is not considered for new challenges.

Scenario 3: An accounting firm uses a hybrid work model. The manager, who prefers in-person communication, assigns complex tax reports to the senior accountant he sees in the office most days. A remote accountant, with expertise in tax law, is consistently assigned simpler tasks, hindering their career progression and development in the firm.

By implementing clear communication, using technology and fostering inclusive practices, these scenarios demonstrate how proximity bias can be mitigated in hybrid workplaces.

5.3 Strategies to prevent proximity bias in hybrid workplaces

A hybrid work environment free from proximity bias can be reached by implementing proactive strategies. Next are presented some of these strategies that can support reaching this goal.

Awareness and education initiatives

Training for managers and human resource professionals: Train managers and human resource professionals to recognise proximity bias and its potential consequences. Equip them with strategies to mitigate its effects in their decision-making and interactions with the team. Training can cover case studies, self-assessment tools and techniques to ensure fairness in areas like project allocation, performance reviews, learning and development opportunities and promotions.

Open discussions and transparency: Encourage open conversations about creating a fair and inclusive work environment for all employees, regardless of location. Foster a culture where team members feel comfortable raising concerns about potential bias. Conduct surveys or hold focus groups to understand employee perspectives and identify areas for improvement.

Implementing fair and inclusive policies

Objective performance criteria: Develop clear and objective performance evaluation criteria that focus on results, contributions and achievements rather than physical presence. This ensures a fair and unbiased assessment of all team members. Consider using metrics that track measurable outcomes relevant to the role, such as project completion rates, client satisfaction scores or quality of work delivered.

Transparent promotion process: Establish a transparent promotion process based on merit and documented achievements. Outline clear criteria for career advancement that are accessible to all employees, regardless of their work location. Make sure promotion criteria and application processes are clearly communicated and readily available to all employees.

Inclusive communication protocols: Ensure clear communication protocols that guarantee equal participation for all team members in meetings and discussions. Use technology to facilitate participation by remote workers and avoid situations where in-office colleagues dominate conversations. Consider strategies like:

- Rotating meeting leaders to ensure all voices are heard.
- Encouraging the use of video conferencing for all meetings, regardless of location.
- Implementing tools like chat functions or hand-raising features in video conferencing platforms to allow remote participation.

Cultivating a culture of equality and equity

Virtual team building activities: Organise virtual team-building activities and social events to foster connection and a sense of community among all employees. This helps break down physical barriers and create a more inclusive work environment. Consider activities like:

- Online games or trivia nights that can be enjoyed remotely.
- Virtual workshops on topics relevant to your specific professional field.
- Social gatherings (such as virtual coffee or virtual lunch break) using video conferencing platforms where employees can connect informally.

Recognition and appreciation programmes: Implement programmes that recognise and celebrate the contributions of both in-office and remote employees. Public recognition can boost morale and demonstrate that all employees are valued regardless of location. Consider:

- Highlighting the achievements of remote workers in team meetings or company newsletters.
- Implementing peer-to-peer recognition programmes where employees can acknowledge each other's contributions.
- Offering awards or bonuses that celebrate outstanding performance, regardless of location.

Open communication and feedback: Encourage open communication and feedback from all team members regardless of location. Create a safe space for remote workers to share their ideas and concerns. Use surveys, anonymous feedback tools or dedicated channels for communication, ensuring all voices are heard and valued.
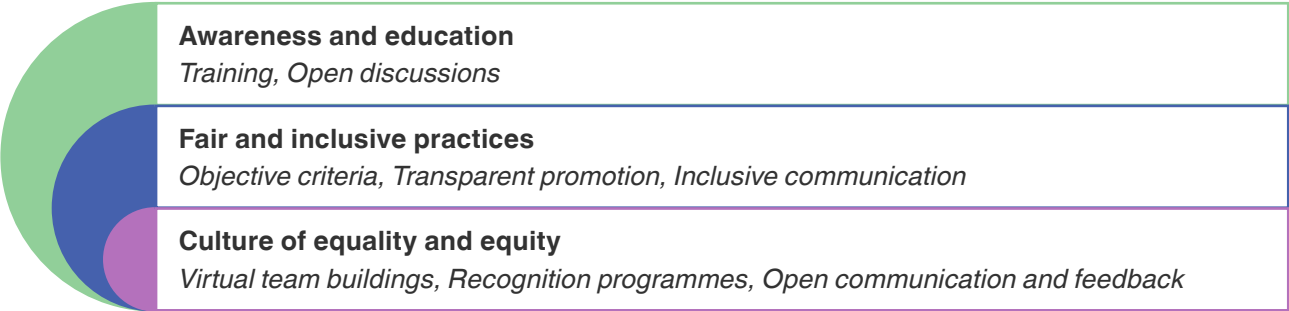
Promoting remote work best practices
Regular check-ins and feedback: Schedule regular check-ins and one-on-one meetings with remote employees to stay connected, provide feedback and address any concerns. This helps managers stay informed about remote employee contributions and fosters a sense of connection. Consider offering different communication channels for check-ins, such as video calls, phone calls or instant messaging, to cater to individual preferences.

Collaboration technology tools: Use technology tools that facilitate seamless collaboration and communication across locations. Consider video conferencing platforms (e.g., Zoom, Google Meet), project management software (e.g., Trello, Asana) and instant messaging tools (e.g., Slack, Microsoft Teams) to keep everyone informed and connected. Invest in training for both managers and employees on how to effectively use these tools for collaboration.

Remote work resources and training: Provide resources and training to remote workers on effective virtual communication, time management and best practices for working remotely. Equip them with the tools and skills they need to thrive in a hybrid environment. Offer training on topics like:

- Using video conferencing etiquette to ensure clear communication and participation.
- Using project management tools effectively to stay organised and on track with tasks.
- Maintaining a healthy work-life balance while working remotely, including techniques for preventing burnout and establishing boundaries.

Awareness and education
Training, Open discussions

Fair and inclusive practices
Objective criteria, Transparent promotion, Inclusive communication

Culture of equality and equity
Virtual team buildings, Recognition programmes, Open communication and feedback

Strategies to prevent proximity bias in hybrid workplaces
Proximity bias can be a significant hurdle in hybrid workplaces. By implementing the strategies outlined in this chapter, managers and human resource professionals can create a fair and inclusive environment where all employees, regardless of their location, can feel valued and motivated and able to thrive. Fostering a culture of awareness, transparency, open communication and valorisation brings a significant contribution to mitigating proximity bias and ensuring an efficient hybrid work model in any professional area.

5.4 Additional resources/ Further reading

Titles	Links
Society for human resource management	[Society for human resource management](#)
What is proximity bias and how can managers prevent it?	[What is proximity bias and how can managers prevent it?](#)
Proximity bias explained: everything you need to know	[Proximity bias explained: everything you need to know](#)
How to avoid proximity bias	[How to avoid proximity bias](#)
How proximity bias is hampering the career prospects of remote workers	[How proximity bias is hampering the career prospects of remote workers](#)
How to prevent proximity bias	[How to prevent proximity bias](#)

5.5 Reflection Questions:

1. Do performance evaluations focus on contributions and results or do they rely on physical presence and in-office interactions?   Is the promotion process in the organisation transparent and based on merit and documented achievements, accessible to all employees regardless of their location?

2. Are clear communication protocols established to ensure equal participation for all team members in meetings and discussions, including remote workers?

3. Have open discussions been facilitated about creating a fair and inclusive work environment for all employees, regardless of their location?

4. Are regular check-in meetings scheduled with remote employees to provide feedback and address concerns?

5. Are collaboration tools (video conferencing, project management software, instant messaging) readily available and used to facilitate communication and teamwork across locations?

6. Are resources and training offered to remote workers and on site workers on effective virtual communication, time management, and best practices for working remotely?

7. Are virtual team-building activities and social events organised to foster connection and a sense of community among all employees?

8. Are recognition programmes implemented that celebrate the contributions of both in-office and remote employees?

9. Have team members received training on proximity bias, its potential consequences and strategies to mitigate it?

5.6 Assessment activities

1. What is the main concern regarding proximity bias in a hybrid workplace?
    a) Increased office space requirements.
    b) Reduced employee satisfaction for those working remotely.
    c) Improved communication between teams.
    d) More opportunities for team-building activities.

2. Which of the following is not a contributing factor to proximity bias?
    a) Clear and objective performance evaluation criteria.
    b) Availability heuristic - relying on readily available information.
    c) Physical presence being associated with greater dedication.
    d) Informal interactions and idea sharing in a shared workspace.

3. A manager consistently assigns complex projects to in-office employees they see working late nights, while overlooking a remote worker with strong qualifications. This scenario is an example of:
    a) Fair workload distribution.
    b) Effective time management practices.
    c) Proximity bias impacting project assignments.
    d) Lack of trust in remote employees.

4. How can communication protocols help mitigate proximity bias in meetings?
    a) Prioritising in-person presentations over remote participation.
    b) Encouraging video conferencing for all attendees.
    c) Limiting participation time for remote workers.

d) Focusing discussions on topics relevant only to in-office employees.

5. Which of the following is the best strategy to promote a culture of equality and equity in a hybrid workplace?
   a) Encouraging in-office social gatherings for team bonding.
   b) Offering additional benefits to on-site employees.
   c) Assigning mentors based on physical proximity.
   d) Implementing recognition programmes that celebrate contributions from all employees, regardless of location.

Chapter 6:
Best practices -
case studies

In recent years, the landscape of work has transformed significantly due to technological advancements, changing employee expectations, and unprecedented events like the global pandemic. As organisations strive to adapt, hybrid work has emerged as a promising solution, offering flexibility and agility to both employers and employees. However, successfully implementing hybrid work requires careful planning, clear communication, and a holistic approach considering the needs of all stakeholders.

This chapter explores best practices and strategies encountered within companies that have successfully implemented hybrid work, drawing from case studies, research, and expert insights. It delves into key considerations for navigating hybrid arrangements at both individual and organisational levels. From collaborative planning and providing necessary tools to supporting employee well-being and fostering communication, this chapter offers a comprehensive framework for organisations looking to embrace hybrid work effectively.

6.1 Best practices and strategies for navigating hybrid working arrangements for individual managers and work teams

Implementing hybrid work effectively within companies requires a multifaceted approach, combining top-down directives with bottom-up initiatives. Engaging employees extensively in developing hybrid work plans is essential. Collaboration among employees, regulators, HR, legal and compliance teams, and chief operating officers is crucial to navigate compliance challenges and ensure the new work model meets diverse needs. organisations must decide whether to establish formal rules for all or allow each team to set its own guidelines regarding work hours, leave, and goals, based on shared principles.

Investing in appropriate technology is vital to support employees working from any location. Providing necessary tools and materials ensures all employees can perform their duties efficiently, whether at home or in the office. Implementing platforms to facilitate transitions between office and remote work, supporting new employees, and maintaining connectivity are essential to this strategy. For instance, companies can offer starter packs, intranet platforms, and connection points to support seamless integration and communication.

Clear communication of the hybrid work strategy is imperative. Developing a toolkit that explains hybrid working principles can alleviate employees' concerns and clarify expectations. Managers need training to focus on outcomes rather than physical presence, ensuring performance evaluations are based on actual contributions.

Support and training are crucial for both managers and employees. Managers should be guided on managing key stages of the employee lifecycle in a hybrid environment, shifting their focus from monitoring presence to evaluating productivity. Employees, on the other hand, need to understand the new requirements and expectations associated with hybrid work.

Employee well-being is also a critical area. Companies must implement plans to prevent overworking, burnout, and isolation. Encouraging purposeful time in the office through social events, meetings, and team-building activities helps maintain social and professional cohesion. Facilitated communication between employees and teams allows them to share best practices and address challenges such as mental well-being and work-life balance.

A progressive and adaptive approach is recommended for implementing hybrid work. Starting with a trial phase can help refine the strategy before a full-scale rollout. Introducing hot-desking can break the awareness of hours worked by each employee, and transforming office spaces can better support team working and hybrid setups. It is also important to adapt the base model to fit the needs of different locations, groups, or countries,

incorporating employee feedback, and adhering to local regulations.

Raising awareness about flexible working forms and allowing employees to request flexible arrangements from the outset of their employment can foster a more inclusive work environment.

Leaders should model flexible working practices to encourage widespread adoption.

6.2 Noteworthy Case Studies

A number of organisations, both small and large, and operating across the public, not-for-profit and private sectors, have successfully implemented hybrid work models, achieving significant improvements in employee engagement, retention and overall organisational efficiency. This demonstrates that hybrid work can be successfully implemented in a variety of contexts, provided that the key issues are addressed. These include the transition to new working methods, the management of hybrid teams, the maintenance of engagement, the support of wellbeing, the focus on outcomes, and the embedding of effective practices (with the exception of certain positions that require an office space with specific equipment or constraints, such as research transitioned to and benefited from hybrid work models.

Blood Cancer UK, a charity focused on blood cancer and its issues, implemented an agile work policy to enhance efficiency and staff well-being. The shift from physical presence to measurable outcomes proved to be highly effective as it empowered employees to adopt work models that suited them best, increasing their productivity. The charity saw a notable increase in support for blood cancer patients, particularly through its seven-day-a-week support line and employee engagement rose significantly, with 95% recommending the charity as a workplace, up from 41% in 2018. Retention rates also increased from 70% to 94% by 2021, partly due to flexible work policies that broadened the talent pool. This strategy not only improved employee well-being but also underscored the importance of treating employees with trust and respect, resulting in a reduction in sick leave to an average of 1.3 days per employee.

Similarly, the Financial Services Compensation Scheme (FSCS) adopted a "Smarter Working, Your Day, Your Way" approach, allowing employees to choose their work location, time, and manner. Initially, there was resistance, but the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated the effectiveness of remote working. Fundraisers found it easier to arrange virtual meetings, and the telephone support line team reported reduced fatigue due to eliminated commuting. FSCS emphasised IT infrastructure, ensuring employees had the necessary equipment and training for remote work. Agile working principles guided decisions, prioritised well-being, and ensured accountability, embedding agile working practices into the organisation's culture.

Finally, the Standard Chartered Bank implemented the "Future Workplace Now" initiative, offering a range of flexible working options to accommodate different roles and needs within the organisation. Employees could choose full flexibility in hours and location or opt for fixed hours and specific days at home or in the office. By the end of 2021, 73% of employees across 28 markets adopted flexible working arrangements, with a majority opting for a hybrid approach. The initiative, set to be fully rolled out globally by 2024, enhanced personal productivity, well-being, reduced travel costs, carbon footprint, and improved organisational resilience. The bank's commitment to flexibility is seen as a strong differentiator in attracting and retaining talent in a competitive market.

All of these case studies provide compelling examples of successful hybrid work implementation and demonstrate that hybrid work models can enhance productivity, employee satisfaction, and organisational efficiency by focusing on outcomes, investing in technology, and prioritising employee well-being. They therefore offer valuable insights and practical tips for other organisations looking to adopt or refine their hybrid working practices.

6.3 A collection of valuable resources

Implementing hybrid work can be supported by a variety of strategies and practices, it may be useful to use or try some of the following approaches to implement hybrid work or address issues related to it:

1. **Building a Strong Hybrid Work Model (top-down + bottom-up initiative)**
   - Conduct surveys/reunions and work with regulators to address compliance and local challenges.
   - Provide necessary materials and tools for employees to work from any location, ensuring inclusion of all.
   - Make the change progressive by starting with a trial phase, expanding it if successful, and transforming office spaces for better hybrid support.ù

2. **Reducing Employees' concerns to stabilise the model**
   - Provide a hybrid work guide and training materials with clear expectations to employees.
   - Facilitate transitions with starter packs, consultation documents, and intranet platforms.
   - Address risks like overworking and isolation with accessible health platforms and support contacts.
   - Create clear guidelines: either formal rules applying to all or full flexibility with specific rules decided by each team for itself, based on an initial set of principles.
   - Train both employees (to help them understand new requirements and adapt) and managers (to ensure they focus on actual contribution, correctly evaluate it and have guidance for managing key stages of the employee lifecycle), also regarding the potential new technological tools that are going to be used

3) **Ensuring Engagement & Communication within the company**
   - Facilitate communication for best-practices sharing and team-building activities.
   - Encourage accountability by allowing autonomous workload management.
   - Establish purposeful in-office time for social and professional cohesion through regular meetings and events + build group trust.

Employees may find it difficult to organise themselves in terms of the tasks they're responsible for. The existence of different types of work with varying needs could therefore help them. For example, they could work on tasks that require high concentration at home and come to the office for collaboration and social time. It is the manager's job to make them aware of this kind of information, either verbally or through a guide.

6.4 Additional resources for implementation

Useful videos:
- 4 Ways to Make Hybrid Work Better for Everyone | The Way We Work, a TED series
- The Best Practices for Hybrid Work - YouTube

WORK MODES

LEARNING

acquaring knowledge of a subject or skill through education or experience.

COLLABORATION

working with another person or group, in person or virtually via technology (or a combination of both to achive a goal.

FOCUS

an individual's work involving concentration , and attention devoted to a particular task or project

SOCIAL TIME

interactions that create trust, common bonds and value, collective identity, collegility, and productive relatinships.

THE FUTURE OF WORK IS HYBRID

TWO WORK MODELS

HYBRID OFFICE
PRACTICED BY GOOGLE, APPLE, MICROSOFT

REMOTE FIRST
COURSE PRACTICED BY PAINTREST, LINKEDIN, SHOPIFY

% EMPLOYEES WORKING FROM THE OFFICE

1-5 DAYS IN THE MONTH	44%
6-10 DAYS IN THE MONTH MORE	29%
THAN 11 DAYS IN THE MONTH	27%

PREFERRED DAYS TO ARRIVE AT THE OFFICE: TUESDAY, WEDNESDAY, THURSDAY

100% OF EMPLOYEES ARE NOW STARTING YOUR WORKDAY BETWEEN 7:30 A.M Y 9 A.M

13-24% INCREASING PRODUCTIVITY UNDER THE HYBRID WORK MODEL

54% EMPLOYEES SAID THEY MIGHT CONSIDER RESIGNING IF THEY ARE NOT GIVEN THE FLEXIBILITY OF THE HYBRID WORK ENVIRONMENT

$11,000

ESTIMATED SAVINGS PER EMPLOYEE/YEAR UNDER THE HYBRID WORK MODEL

6.5 Further reading:

Titles	Links
Best practices to build a sustainable hybrid work model	*Best practices to build a sustainable hybrid work model*
6 Ways To Create A Successful Hybrid Work Model	*6 Ways To Create A Successful Hybrid Work Model*
Hybrid work: 7 best practices to manage teams	*Hybrid work: 7 best practices to manage teams*
4 Best Practices for Building a Successful Hybrid Work Culture	*4 Best Practices for Building a Successful Hybrid Work Culture*
9 best practices for hybrid work	*9 best practices for hybrid work*
9 Hybrid Workforce Best Practices:	*9 Hybrid Workforce Best Practices:*
Getting real about hybrid work	*Getting real about hybrid work*
An update on flexible and hybrid working practices	*An update on flexible and hybrid working practices*

6.6 Reflection Questions:

1. Based on this chapter, note the barriers to successful hybrid work in your current environment/culture and identify specific challenges faced by your colleagues during the transition to hybrid work. How do these challenges differ for remote and in-office employees?

2. How do you currently evaluate your team's performance: based on outcomes or physical presence? If it's the latter, what changes could shift the focus to outcome-based evaluations and productivity?

3. Identify potential strategies to introduce in your organisation for implementing and/or improving an hybrid work model and its management.

    3.1. Reflect on your team's physical and virtual setups:

        3.1.1. Do you organise social events and team-building activities often? Are they effective in maintaining cohesion among employees and if not, what could you change to improve its results?

        3.1.2. How are all participants accessing necessary work tools (e.g., laptops, VPN, collaboration software), and are there digital tools that could enhance productivity and communication for your team?Consider your communication and feedback strategy regarding the/within the hybrid work model:

            3.1.2.1. What mechanisms do you currently have in place to gather employee feedback on hybrid work practices? How could you involve your team more effectively in the planning and refinement of hybrid work policies?

            3.1.2.2. How clear and accessible are your communications regarding hybrid work policies and expectations?

            3.1.2.3. What improvements could be made to ensure all employees understand the hybrid work framework and their roles within it?

        3.1.3. Evaluate support and training:

            3.1.3.1. What training programs do you currently offer to support managers and employees in a hybrid work environment?

            3.1.3.2. Identify potential areas where additional training or support could be beneficial.

            3.1.3.3. Do you have any initiatives in place to support employee well-being in a hybrid work setting? If not, consider strategies to prevent overworking, burnout, and isolation.

The following checklist forms a best practice tool for the successful implementation of hybrid work within the workplace:

CHECKLIST FOR BEST PRACTICE IMPLEMENTATION OF HYBRID WORK

Prior to the implementation of hybrid work:	Yes/ No (*if no, how can you improve it?*)
Have you gathered input on work patterns and employees' preferences, as well as assessed specific needs of different locations and departments through surveys and/ or focus groups?	
Did you involve all relevant stakeholders, including employees, managers and HR, legal and compliance teams in the planning discussions ?	
Did you establish clear communication channels and company core principles for both remote and in-office employees, along with toolkits and guidelines to address common concerns and highlight your expectations?	
Did you identify and provide access to necessary digital tools and platforms for a seamless transition to hybrid work to all team members?	
During and after the implementation of hybrid work:	
Did you develop comprehensive training programs for managers and employees, to educate employees on new requirements and offer continuous training for managers to focus on outcome?	
Did you provide ongoing support and resources through consultation documents and intranet platforms?	
Did you foster social cohesion by ensuring purposeful in-office and remote time for social and professional means, including regular team-building activities, both virtual and in-person?	
Did you promote flexibility and accommodate individual work preferences and needs by adapting office spaces for hybrid work and ensuring facilities support both remote and in-office employees effectively?	
Did you prioritise employee well-being by preventing overworking, burnout, and isolation, and by facilitating communication and best-practice sharing among teams, monitoring well-being, and providing accessible health support, whether it be platforms or contacts?	
Did you implement feedback mechanisms to gather input on hybrid work practices from employees? To celebrate and share successes?	
Did you regularly review and refine hybrid work policies based on feedback and evolving needs? Did you update employees on any changes made?	

6.7 Assessment activity

1. **Which factor is NOT essential for the successful implementation of hybrid work?**
   a. Investing in appropriate technology and tools.
   b. Clear communication of hybrid work strategies.
   c. Continuous monitoring of employee locations and number of hours of work
   d. Support and training for both managers and employees.

2. **How can organisations support new employees in a hybrid work environment?**
   a. By requiring them to work from the office full-time for the first six months.
   b. By limiting their access to remote work tools until they complete their probation period.
   c. By assigning them a dedicated office space.
   d. By providing starter packs, intranet platforms, and connection points.

3. **Why is it important to combine top-down directives with bottom-up initiatives when developing hybrid work plans?**
   a. alt creates a model for the implementation of hybrid work, applicable everywhere and at any time.
   b. blt allows for a more inclusive and relevant plan for employees by engaging them at all levels.
   c. clt reduces the need for technology investments.
   d. dlt simplifies the communication process within the organisation.

4. **Which measure is suggested to prevent overworking, burnout, and isolation among hybrid employees?**
   a. Organising social events, meetings, and team-building activities.
   b. Encouraging regular travel for work.
   c. Implementing hot-desking across all office spaces.
   d. Requiring multiple daily check-ins from remote employees.

5. **Which of the following is NOT mentioned as a vital investment for supporting hybrid work?**
   a. Providing necessary tools and materials for employees.
   b. Implementing platforms to facilitate transitions between office and remote work.
   c. Hiring additional management staff to oversee remote employees.
   d. Offering starter packs and intranet platforms to support integration and communication.

True/False Questions

1. Engaging employees in developing hybrid work plans is crucial for ensuring the new work model meets diverse needs. (True/False)
2. Managers should focus on monitoring the physical presence of employees rather than evaluating their productivity in a hybrid work environment. (True/False)

Annex 1

Answer Key to Assessment Activities

Chapter 1:	Chapter 2:	Chapter 3:	Chapter 4:	Chapter 5:	Chapter 6:
1- B	1- D	1- B	1- B	1- B	1- C
2- C	2- A	2- A	2- B	2- A	2- D
3- C	3- D	3- C	3- C	3- C	3- B
4- E	4- B	4- B	4- A	4- B	4- A
5- D		False	5- D	5- D	5- C
		True			True
					False

Annex 2

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