

COMMUNICATING IN A HYBRID WORLD OF WORK



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LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Hybrid working describes the combination of some people working remotely with others who are together in person at the same physical location. For individuals, hybrid working means spending some time in the office and the rest of the time working elsewhere, usually from home. Hybrid teams involve some people in the office and others who work remotely.

You can add people from different remote offices into the mix as well. Who is based where can vary from day to day, as more and more people mix days in the office with time working remotely, from home or elsewhere.

At the end of the session, hybrid team managers will understand that communication is critical for hybrid teams, that trust is the foundation of an effective team and how important it is to be aware of conflict or friction and deal with it positively.

LOOK – watch the videos and reflect on the content and message.

THINK – activities and questions linking the videos to their own experience and workplace.

REMEMBER – a summary of the key learning points.

Each section relating to the videos will last around 15 minutes.

GROUP EXERCISE – At the end of the series of videos there is a practical exercise which will bring the learnings together. Delegates should be encouraged to record any personal development actions on their Personal Action Plan sheet.

FEATURED VIDEOS

- Miscommunication and rumour
- Building a foundation of trust
- Managing hybrid tension

FILM 1 – MISCOMMUNICATION AND RUMOUR

LOOK (play video, 5 minutes)

Give the group some background before you show the film. Mike the office manager sends out a message to the team but it's ambiguous and could mean two separate and completely different things, as he didn't check the meaning that people took from the communication. This leads to anxiety and rumours, which he's blissfully unaware of until it all crashes down around him!

THINK (10 minutes discussion)

Explain to the group that communication is critical for hybrid teams. It has to be "intentional" as casual or ad-hoc conversations will be reduced.

Ask the group to think about what might happen without upfront planning and clear communication? Answers you receive should include the following.

- Everything becomes ad-hoc, leading to misunderstanding, frustration and ultimately chaos!
- People in the office get a lot more communication than those who are remote, who potentially miss out, as they don't bump into people in the corridors/at the watercoolers etc.
- Everyone reverts to their own communication preferences, such as how they communicate (eg. frequent, short comms versus longer, more spaced out), when they communicate (time of day/last minute before meetings vs well in advance) and how/which technology or channel they use (e.g. detailed email versus short video catch up)
- People communicate emotional or contentious things via email or message, leading to miscommunication.
- If people don't have the information they need, then rumours and gossip will fill the void.

REMEMBER

The best way to avoid communication and rumour is keeping people informed and checking from them too. Reiterate the learning messages from the end of the film.

- Develop a communications plan showing who needs what and when, from you and other team members.
- Make sure that everyone knows which communication channels or technology your team will use and what should be used when.
- Use richer forms of communication for social interaction to support engagement and team building, or for anything contentious.

FILM 2 – BUILDING A FOUNDATION OF TRUST

LOOK (play video, 5 minutes)

Set the scene for the team before showing the video. Mike is all about business and fails to connect personally with Dev and build trust. This is compounded by his tendency to micromanage and a case of mistaken identity.

THINK (10 minutes discussion)

With remote members of hybrid teams, managers need to go out of their way to build trust, as this won't develop naturally through interactions in the kitchen or bumping into one another in the corridor.

Ask the group to discuss how you can build and maintain trust with your hybrid team? Responses should include the following points.

Listen

Trust is built by listening to each person and adapting to suit their preferences. There is also an element of trust that will vary from person to person, which is related to their personality, so some people will naturally be more trusting than others.

Small moments

Provide small moments, where you and your individual team member can connect on a personal note – not every conversation has to start with a project discussion.

Delivering

It grows and is maintained by delivering what you say you are going to deliver. Maintaining trust is as important as building it initially.

Fairness

It comes from the manager (and the organisation) treating everyone fairly and equitably, wherever they are based.

REMEMBER

Reiterate to the group that trust is the foundation of effective hybrid work. It takes ages to build but can be destroyed in an instant. Remind them of the key learning points at the end of the film.

- Focus on building and maintaining trust, as it builds slowly but can be destroyed in an instant.
- Foster an empathetic environment. Listen carefully so that each team member feels heard.
- Cultivate camaraderie, show appreciation and celebrate success, to build a sense of belonging as a hybrid team.

FILM 3 – MANAGING HYBRID TENSION

LOOK (play video, 4 minutes)

Set the scene for the team before showing the video. Everyone in the team is hiding something. They are being super nice to each other, but deep down there is a problem. The team are aware that something is up but Mike is not, and even once, he begins to feel that something is amiss; he just pushes it under the carpet and carries on regardless.

THINK (10 minutes discussion)

Explain to the group that when you're working in the office together, it's fairly easy to pick up when conflict is brewing. You can see it in people's facial expressions or even the way that they move or look at you. When some of the team members are onsite and the others are remote, it's much harder to detect that there is conflict, so you might find that disagreements get quite heated before they come to your notice.

Ask the group to discuss and feedback how you can make allowances for this difference as a manager and avoid damaging conflict. Answers should include the following points.

- Be aware of this difference and listen out for conflict or friction. It's important to be open to hearing unpalatable truths and welcome bad news, as otherwise these might be hidden away until the last minute.
- Remember too that conflict is just difference with a spot of tension added in. Where you have this sort of difference of opinion on things that people care about, it's important to listen to one another and enlarge everyone's perspective of the situation.
- You are likely to make better decisions once everyone has the full picture, not just their own partial view. So don't fear conflict, it can be useful especially if it is focused on the tasks, you are doing or the processes you are following.

REMEMBER

Complete the discussion by suggesting that conflict is always there, and different perspectives can help us make better decisions, so it's important to be aware of conflict or friction and deal with it positively. However, conflict can be more difficult to detect in hybrid teams, especially with remote team members. Remind the group of the key learning points at the end of the film.

- Be aware that conflict can be more difficult to detect and manage in hybrid teams, especially with remote team members.
- Lean in to what you are hearing from the team – good or bad.
- Diverse opinions lead to better decisions, so welcome a range of perspectives.

GROUP EXERCISE

The objective of this exercise is to get the group to discuss ways to communicate with their teams. hybrid working.

Start by asking the group to discuss the question ‘How can you create an “intentional” communication plan?’

Ideally their feedback will look something like this.

- The first step to being intentional is to create a communications plan for the team. Who needs to know what, by when, how often, in what format or by what channel, plus how should records be kept if appropriate.
- Decide too how often you will meet up in person as a team, if that’s possible, and plan social interaction to promote team building and team engagement in person or at least video calls.
- Finally, agree a team protocol for communications. What technology/channels will you use for which sorts of communication with one another? This means that team members won’t just communicate their own preferences, which will vary hugely across the team.