

MANAGING HYBRID TEAMS

WORKSHOP GUIDE



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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 should be aware of the likelihood of proximity bias when making decisions. They will consider each member of the team, remote too, one by one, when deciding whom to include in meetings, new projects, informal discussions, and one-to-ones and think about working from home at least one day a week and find out what their remote team members might be struggling with. They should also see that not all work has to be done together and at the same time and learn to make the most of the time they're together with the team (whether on video calls or in-person meetings) and be productive when apart.

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

PRACTISE – 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

- Out of sight, out of mind
- Embracing asynchronous working
- Managing hybrid performance

FILM 1 – OUT OF SIGHT, OUT OF MIND

LOOK (play video, 5 minutes)

Give the group some background before you show the film. Mike is in the office all the time and sees this as a real (indeed almost heroic) commitment to the company and team. This means that others who would prefer to work from home more, rather than have a long commute, also come in. It also ensures that Mike doesn't have a current, real-life experience of being remote in a hybrid team!

THINK (10 minutes discussion)

Explain to the group that proximity bias is an unconscious bias, which means that people tend to give preferential treatment to those immediately around them. In a hybrid working arrangement, this means that those in the office are more likely to be on their manager's mind when considering new project roles, promotions, or even just thinking of who to include in discussions.

In hybrid meetings, there isn't a level playing field anyway, with remote people finding it harder to see and hear what's going on. On top of this, unless people are aware of this bias, they are likely to favour those in the room who they can see, even when they don't mean to, as that's the nature of an unconscious bias. This affects work beyond meetings too – remote team members miss out on informal encounters with other people, as would happen around the kettle/ coffee machine/ water cooler in the office.

Ask the group to think about how they can take steps to avoid this situation in their role as a manager? Answers should include.

- Be aware of the likelihood of proximity bias when making decisions.
- Consider each member of the team, remote too, one by one, when considering whom to include in meetings, new projects or informal discussion and 1-2-1's.
- Think about working from home at least one day a week if you don't already and find out what his remote team members might be struggling with. You might find you can accomplish a lot without those typical office interruptions!

REMEMBER

Reiterate that out of sight too often means out of mind, because of proximity bias. It's easy to forget about remote workers as you can't see them;

- Level the playing field so everyone can take part.
- Support remote workers to connect with those in the office: team, manager and senior leadership. Plan regular 1-2-1s.
- Model the way. Consider working remotely at least some of the time yourself. Don't disappear – be involved in email, conversations and chat
- Focus on your own wellbeing.
- Check in frequently to know you're doing the correct work

FILM 2 – EMBRACING ASYNCHRONOUS WORKING

LOOK (play video, 5 minutes)

Set the scene for the team before showing the video. Mike is sceptical of the benefits of asynchronous working and wants his hybrid team to “show up and grind it out” together. The overall picture is exhausted people, zoomed out due to too many back-to-back meetings, losing focus, while their work piles up and things fall between the cracks. Fortunately, Linda and her team can show him how it can be an effective method of operating.

THINK (10 minutes discussion)

It’s sensible to share a definition first. Asynchronous working means each individual has agreed patterns of working that suit them and the team as a whole, and they are supported by their manager.

Ask the group to discuss and feedback on how asynchronous working can benefit their team. Responses should include the two following points.

1. Effective hybrid working does not involve sitting on video calls all day, but instead mixing video meetings or phone calls, where appropriate, with working separately and being productive, sharing with others through asynchronous technology. This means that people have the time to actually do the work they need to, rather than just talking about it in meetings.
2. When people are working on deliverables individually and passing them between each other, the precise timing of individual work becomes less important. This allows for flexibility. They decide core ‘office hours’ when people should be available for each other. They agree who will be in the office on which days.

REMEMBER

Reiterate to the group that not all work has to be done together and at the same time. Make the most of the time you’re together with the team (whether on video calls or in-person meetings) and be productive when apart.

- Agree as a team which work will happen together in meetings and what can be done apart.
- Find patterns of working that suit individuals plus the team as a whole and provide support.
- Review and learn from your experience.

FILM 3 – MANAGING HYBRID PERFORMANCE

LOOK (play video, 4 minutes)

Set the scene for the team before showing the video. Mike is delighted with the new remote monitoring software system that he has been pressing for. Now he can check what people are doing by looking. However, he soon discovers the pitfalls of his system and focussing purely on Linda shows him that effective hybrid performance starts with clear communication and support.

THINK (10 minutes discussion)

First explain that the video is a funny exaggeration of reality! Online tools such as Slack, Microsoft Teams and task list apps, have a legitimate purpose in helping you set expectations and monitor progress wherever your teams may be.

So, a policy of hybrid surveillance is not the answer to managing performance! Ask the group to discuss the actions Mike & Linda took and what would work well for them and their teams. Answers should include the following points.

- In the past, managers like Mike, relied on casual drop-by check-ins, hallway conversations, or pre-meeting chatter to keep up on what their team members are working on, how they're doing, and the day-to-day operations. In a hybrid workplace they may feel out of the loop or disconnected.
- Linda takes time to explain the objectives and asks each team member what they have understood. She focuses on their output over input and acts as a facilitator, connecting them to other people and offering support whenever it might help.
- To help remedy problems, managers should prioritise and increase the frequency of ongoing performance conversations when employees are remote permanently or a mixture of both in office and remote.

REMEMBER

Complete the discussion by suggesting that when the team are working remotely or in a hybrid way, their performance will be harder to observe. Instead of assessing performance via time in the office (or virtual meetings), you should consider outcomes, contribution, and value. A good way to make it easy for your team members to do a great job is by acting as a facilitator supporting them.

- Give clear expectations, check understanding and agree objectives with each team member, particularly new starters.
- Monitor and support progress, focusing on their output over input.
- Become a facilitator – connecting individuals to each other and to the organisation in a productive and healthy way.

GROUP EXERCISE

The objective of this exercise is to get the group to discuss benefits of hybrid working.

Record their answers and include the following points if they are not included.

- Hybrid work patterns can include many of the positive features of remote working, such as a better work/life balance, improved well-being and productivity.
- Balances business needs with client needs and employee preferences.
- Marks the end of the traditional office working pattern for many, and identifies what work, tasks and rituals are best performed at the office versus remotely, reimagining old processes for an online world.
- Reflects changing societal views on the impact of travel and sustainability.
- We are all different – each person will have their own drives, barriers, and needs to assess when choosing a preferred hybrid working pattern.
- There are a variety of work environments and ways to structure the times of the working week to benefit all – the office, home, on the road, utilising a local third-space.

Conclude by suggesting that managers like Mike, who believes his seat of power is the office and that getting back and surrounding himself with employees is key to staying the boss have a lot to learn! Linda is productive whilst working remotely, but shows us that going into the office can make it easier for to connect with colleagues, as well as collaborate and communicate effectively with other members of the team.