



Harnessing Hybrid Working:

A Guide to More Effective Collaboration



Introduction

The world of work was transformed in 2020 and will continue to evolve as more employees and organizations move towards hybrid working.

The debate as to whether people work more effectively remotely or in the office is essentially redundant. The conversation shouldn't be focused on which is better or worse; it should acknowledge the benefits, address the challenges and look for ways to harness effective collaboration in the new work environment.

This guide aims to help you move forward in your hybrid journey, focusing on three areas:

1. Current Data & Trends

How are organizations approaching their hybrid operation? What are employees' most and least preferred aspects of hybrid working? How does this vary across different age groups? We look at this (and more) in order to assess the current landscape.

2. Areas for Consideration

Recognizing that hybrid working is here to stay, we look at what considerations should be made from the perspectives of DE&I, the Employee Experience and team dynamics.

3. Practical Approaches for Maximizing Collaboration

Supplementing research and data with practical client experiences, we share a case study of us working with an organization to maximize hybrid team dynamics, sharing our top tips along the way.

Part 1

Harnessing Hybrid Working: Data & Trends

Over half of organizations polled in a recent survey⁽¹⁾ are now operating a hybrid at-will approach to working (employees can choose which day(s) to come into the office). 11% followed a hybrid split-week (the company assigns specific days for on-site and remote work by team or function), 8% adopting a manager-scheduled hybrid system (managers choose which day(s) their team comes into the office) and finally 25% a hybrid mix (a combination of all three options).

In 2022, the UK CIPD⁽²⁾ published the results of their most up to date research on flexible and hybrid working practices. Data showed that the expectation is that 40% of the workforce will work from home on a regular basis (at least once a week) and 21% will work from home all the time.

Our own WTW research⁽³⁾ illustrates the percentage of employees working in a remote/hybrid model is set to rocket to 56%, from just 9% three years ago.

Furthermore, employees are ‘voting with their feet’ and are actively seeking organizations that allow them the greater flexibility of working where suits them best, in line with their lifestyles and personal commitments.

It is clear that the pandemic has gone some way in breaking down barriers and changing attitudes towards the traditional office-only approach. In addition, more organizations are placing greater emphasis on exactly how people can work well together, whether that be physically, virtually or a combination of both.

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Because employees can shape their own experience, they'll be better adjusted in terms of health and wellbeing, which leads to higher performance.

Claire Campbell, Institute for Employment

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Determining Work Styles

WTW's Work Styles were introduced for colleagues in early in 2022. Work Styles is a flexible approach based on the idea that the work itself drives where and how the work gets done. WTW Work Styles are defined as:

- Office – employees work entirely in the office
- Hybrid – employees have a mix of remote and in-office working
- Remote – employees work predominantly outside of the office

Employees work with their managers to determine which of the work styles best reflects where and how they will work most effectively.

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The world has started recognizing the inevitable; there's going to be significant change, and there's a chance to bring about a change for the better if we do things right.

HubStar

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Key Advantages

44% Less time commuting

37% Lower cost of going to office

33% Better manage household commitments



Key Disadvantages

33% Lack of social interactions

30% Feeling disconnected

30% Harder to build relationships

Source: WTW Data

Hybrid working also has its own unique set of potential challenges. WTW research suggests that the benefits mentioned above are potentially counterbalanced by reduced social interaction, with some feeling disconnected and saying that they find it harder to build relationships with colleagues virtually than when working face-to-face with them.

Our data from hybrid workshops echoes this theme, with many saying they often felt 'out of the loop' and missed face-to-face social interaction. There were also themes around how much more difficult it felt to be able to learn and grow from each other.

Challenges such as these risk employees feeling disconnected from the team and can lead to concerns that working remotely may have a negative impact on their career.

Leaders may also find managing teams more difficult. CIPD research⁽²⁾ found that employee conflict due to the challenges of communication and team relationships was one of the top issues faced as a result of the shift to increased home or hybrid working.

Remote work has been a mixed experience for employees



Helps me achieve better work/life balance

70%



Makes managing team more difficult

56%



Receive fair evaluation while working remotely

65%



Feel disconnected from team

52%



Resources provided to work remotely meet my needs

63%



Worry that working remotely will have negative impact on career

44%



Source: WTW Data

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An employer that's going to put its foot down about flexible working is more likely to shoot itself in the proverbial foot.

Alison Coleman,
senior contributor for Forbes.

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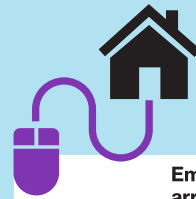
What do employees want?

It appears that employees want to have a choice in where they work. Recent survey data reveals that just 20% of workers want to go to the office full time. Another survey conducted by Wakefield Research⁽¹⁾ shows that almost half of employees would be likely to look for another job if their employer doesn't offer a flexible working model.

In early 2021, the phrase ‘The Great Resignation’ was coined by Anthony Klotz, a Professor of Management at University College London, to describe the mass exodus from roles as people rethought their career choices and working arrangements. Many critics implied that unless organizations adapt in line with the changing attitudes of employees and jobseekers by offering hybrid working options, they potentially risk losing out on talent to those that do.

WTW data⁽³⁾ suggests, however, that a greater proportion of employees are still most keen on an always/mostly in the office approach, with the option of working at home, rather than an equal split, or an always or mostly remote approach.

Majority of employees prefer remote or hybrid work despite feeling disconnected



Over half of employees want to work remotely most or part of the time

	Employer-mandated work arrangements		But what do employees prefer?
	Before the pandemic	Currently	
Always or mostly onsite	74%	59%	42%
Equal split	12%	15%	22%
Always or mostly remote	14%	26%	36%

Source: WTW Data

Different employees experience remote work differently



Younger employees, males and higher earners are more likely to feel disconnected



Age ranges

Feel disconnected

18 – 40 years old	56%
41 – 56 years old	48%
57 – 69 years old	40%



Gender

Male	56%
Female	45%



Salary

\$100,000 or more	62%
\$50,000 – \$99,999	50%
Less than \$50,000	43%

Source: WTW Data

How do different groups experience hybrid working?

Hybrid working affects different groups of employees in different ways. Recent data from LinkedIn⁽⁴⁾ shows that Gen Z are less likely than any other group to apply for roles that are fully remote. When WTW looked at how different employees may experience working remotely, they found that younger employees, males and higher earners are more likely to feel disconnected.

It is these differences between groups in how desirable working remotely may feel that feeds into the likelihood of which demographics are most likely to spend more time working away from the office and the need to consider diversity, equity and inclusion (DE&I) in strategies connected with hybrid working.

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We have been constrained in our lives by geography for decades. The work-from-anywhere model has set us free.

Professor Choudray of Harvard.

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Part 2

Considerations for Collaboration

Hybrid Working Through a DE&I Lens

The trend for more flexible styles of working will open many new roles to a wider candidate pool. It may also be a welcome addition to current employees who are more socially affluent, older groups who can afford a suitable space to work from home, or those with additional caring responsibilities. Organizations are therefore likely to see a disproportionate split of groups of employees who choose to spend their time in the office. Consideration is needed to ensure that allowing greater flexibility around where and when someone can work doesn't negatively impact on DE&I perspectives.

DE&I Hot Spots

- Are you dictating where new employees must work or tuning into their individual behavioral needs? Think about your strategy in relation to individual needs rather than a forced one-size-fits-all approach. Be flexible to people's needs.
- Are you making sure that those working from home more frequently are still presented with the same opportunities for development? Take time to monitor the balance of in-office versus remote employees who are engaged with your development programs. Ensure you fully test programs so that they are impactful for an online audience.
- Are you ensuring that high-potential programs are open to all and not favoring those who managers see in the office more frequently? Look to implement objective data such as assessment data into decision-making processes. For example our new solution Wave-i was developed to provide a data-driven solution for identifying potential that has been fairness tested.
- Are you mindful of balancing flexibility and fairness? Typically, organizations may see a rise in the primary caregiver, often female, choosing to work remotely. With many issues already affecting the gender pay gap, organizations should monitor the impact, if any, hybrid working may have on this.

Hybrid Working Through an Employee Experience Lens

Every year, WTW survey over 500 companies, totaling nearly 10 million employees globally. From this, they have identified a smaller set of 30 high-performance companies who not only perform strongly financially but achieve above average employee survey scores. By comparing their results to the global average, we can identify which characteristics of EX they do particularly well at, and this research has formed the basis of the 'High Performance Employee Experience (HPEX)' model.

Excellence How to excel	Inspiration "I'm totally inspired by what we do"	Drive "We're transforming, agile & ahead of the market"	Growth "I'm achieving my potential"	Trust "I trust leadership & they trust us"
Emphasis How to get ahead	Inclusion "I really fit in here, and we respect human differences"	Voice "I have a say in what we do"	Capability "I'm developing my capabilities"	Collaboration "We help each other, and work across boundaries"
Essentials Basics all companies need to get right	Understanding "I get it"	Organization "We're efficient, flexible, and continually improving"	Fair Pay "I'm rewarded fairly for my performance"	Support "I feel supported, and have a good boss"

Source: WTW Data

EX Hotspots

To focus how EX should be considered for hybrid working, we focused on the key drivers for retention:

Retention

#1 TOTAL REWARDS

Growth

Fair Pay

Capability

#2 PURPOSE

Inclusion

#3 PEOPLE

Trust

- **Growth** – Are you ensuring, and do your people feel confident, that opportunities to grow and develop are equal to all in the new work environment?
- **Fair Pay** – Do your people feel reassured that compensation is still fair and they are not disadvantaged by working remotely?
- **Capability** – How have you adjusted your performance evaluation measures to ensure they remain objective, effective and fair in this new work environment?
- **Inclusion** – How are you maintaining your culture and ensuring employees have a sense of belonging in this new environment?
- **Trust** – How are changes to policies and procedures being communicated to ensure trust remains in your organizations leaders and purpose?

Hybrid Working Through the Lens of Team Dynamics

A poll of 500 HR Directors and Heads of L&D⁽⁵⁾ found that just over half (53%) believed that managing teams remotely required a different skillset from managing a team in person. 54% of those surveyed felt that additional manager training was required in order to do this.

For hybrid teams, there is a risk that the demographic mix of in-office versus at-home team members can create what's known as 'fault lines' within the group (Lau & Murnighan, 1998⁽⁶⁾), which can become an important determinant of subgroup conflict. Those frequent 'water cooler' type conversations can ultimately lead to valued team members being made to feel 'out of the loop' or ultimately being left out of key decisions. Conversely, the perceived availability of in-office team members may lead them to feel 'put upon' if they receive a disproportionate number of queries or requests for support "since you're here".

Unconscious forms of bias such as proximity bias can also result in those who are less often visible in the office being treated differently. The fact is that most people will bond better over a real lunch than a virtual sandwich.

Team Dynamics Hot Spots

- **Quality vs Quantity** – Are you regularly assessing the quality and quantity of team communication?
- **Feedback** – Are you reviewing and providing feedback at a team and individual level about how the team is functioning?
- **Culture** – How are you creating a culture in a hybrid environment where all team members feel comfortable?
- **Support** – Are you encouraging (and leading) regular communication between team members, both work and non-work related?

Sarah Jackson, visiting professor at Cranfield University School of Management, recently told the Financial Times that workers who are not visible get forgotten.

“What the research shows is that interesting projects are divvied up and go to the person sitting there in the office.”

Top Tips for Maximizing Collaboration

At Saville Assessment, we partner with a number of clients on helping teams and groups of people work together more effectively. This includes:

- Supporting people to adapt to a new virtual or hybrid working environment
- High-stakes projects where successful collaboration is vital
- Bringing new groups of people to work together effectively
- Delivering engaging and action-oriented team workshops

Maximizing Collaboration – Client Case Study

We were recently asked to run a series of 'Thriving as a Hybrid Team' workshops for an organization that had just implemented an organizational wide approach to hybrid working. As part of the move to this new working style, the organization's leaders were keen to ensure that the team's split of members working from different locations didn't result in the culture, performance or wellbeing of team members being compromised.

Prior to the workshop, team members were asked to complete the 13-minute online Wave Focus Styles behavioral questionnaire, in addition to a short anonymous qualitative survey designed to collect the team's thoughts and feelings about working remotely versus working in the office.

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I think sometimes people in the team who mostly work at home, or on a part-time basis, get 'forgotten' by others, so perhaps we need to come together more as a team and show more respect, understanding and consideration to one another.

A Hybrid Workshop participant

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Each team member received their own Wave Work Roles Report to bring to the workshop. The report allows individuals to understand how they work by providing them with greater awareness on their most and least preferred work styles.

During the workshop session, the trainers reflected on the team's pre-workshop survey data and supported the team to think further about their own Work Roles and how their own style relates to hybrid working. One of the main challenges that the group noted before their session was how to ensure a good flow of communication across the virtual team. The Work Roles data allowed everyone to understand how to connect with colleagues more effectively by leveraging similar and contrasting work styles.

To assist with what actions the team could take to enhance performance, communication and wellbeing, the team explored their group analytics. For example, Relators actively communicate and improve social interaction. The group's least preferred role was 'Relator' which highlighted their need to pay extra attention to communicating well; as a result clear actions were put in place to help build better connection for all.

Other areas highlighted were strategies for how the team can learn from each other, to more easily know what other team members were working on, and how to build in better, more inclusive social interaction.

For managers of teams, building an awareness of your team members' Work Roles can help you to better consider where individuals may need additional support when working in a hybrid role. For example, colleagues who prefer Supporter or Relator roles may find working solo away from the office more difficult than perhaps a colleague who is more of an Analyst or a Finisher.

// **There is a misconception that running a distributed team is challenging. But having people all over the world enriches our decision-making. We find that our team members, with the flexibility they have, can be more productive and lead more fulfilling lives.**

DevOps software supplier
GitLab

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Work Roles group analytics dashboard

Top Tips for Effective Hybrid Collaboration

1. Help individuals understand their own working style

Increased self-awareness can have several benefits, particularly when it comes to working in a more hybrid way. It can highlight our own strengths and increase understanding of what it is we need to help ourselves work well.

- Do you provide opportunities for your employees to understand more about how to maximize their strengths and what they need from work?

Using behavioral assessments as part of development initiatives allows employees to better understand themselves in relation to how they work. Our Coaching and Development Reports help foster better self-development and can highlight aspects of an individual's working style that may be impacted by working in a hybrid way, such as communication style. Highlighting strengths and developing challenge areas can help individual employees get the most from their working style.

2. Foster better communication within and across teams

One of the challenges of hybrid working can be ensuring good communication within teams and across different work functions. Poor communication can impact on work goals, result in poor performance and lead to siloed working. It can also result in decreased social inclusion and affect the wellbeing of individuals.

- Have you considered the impact that working in a hybrid way will have on team communication and how different functions of the business will work together?
- Have you invested in sufficient technological infrastructure to allow employees to communicate well?

Teams that work in a hybrid way need to have open communication channels and build in new mechanisms for how they will communicate. Look at putting workshops in place, designed specifically around helping hybrid teams thrive and then follow a set of actions to open and keep good communication flowing across the team.

For example, do teams need help knowing which Microsoft Teams status to use or how to indicate time in their calendars when they are open to interruption? Can your team members take turns attending different business function meetings so they can more easily know what's going on across the wider business?

3. Look at your team dynamics

Understanding your own working style and how this relates to others is important when it comes to working well in a hybrid way. Understanding how overall team dynamics look can help teams build action plans for how hybrid working should work.

- Do your teams understand what they need to do to work well together in a hybrid way?

When we work with teams who want to understand and perform better in a hybrid way, we recommend workshops based around our Work Roles report data. As part of our hybrid team workshops, members of a team gained understanding of each other's working preferences and took time to consider ways that the team could optimize their performance within a flexible working environment. This effectively enhanced how people collaborate across boundaries.

4. Managers need to know how to manage hybrid teams

Hybrid teams cannot be managed in the same way as non-hybrid teams. When managers are face-to-face and working alongside their teams, they can easily see what's going on. They can hear conversations, read facial expressions, have informal 'water cooler' chats, etc.

- Have you invested time in training managers how to manage virtual teams?

Remote leadership requires training so that managers can be aware of what to 'watch for' when it comes to checking in on remote team members. Invest in training for your managers to ensure managers know and understand the nuances of managing hybrid teams.

5. Watch out for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

Hybrid working can open roles to new candidate pools, opening up employment to a wider range of employees and increasing diversity. It can also help employees at different life-stages, such as working parents, achieve a better work-life balance. However, it's important to recognize that organizations need to pay attention to how they are developing and identifying potential to ensure that decreased visibility in a physical office doesn't lead to increased visibility of certain groups.

- Will hybrid working attract or penalize different groups of employees?
- Are you utilizing objective data in your decision making around development, potential, etc?

Transparency is critical to alleviating bias in how employees progress through the organization. Take the time to implement processes for succession that are well clarified and utilize objective data.

Making Hybrid Work

Saville Assessment's solutions can help you transform workforce collaboration. Our Work Roles toolkit includes assessments for understanding individual work styles and group dynamics, as well as the materials for delivering your own team development workshop or having us deliver it for you.

For more information on how to make hybrid work, please contact us at info@savilleassessment.com.

Sources

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About Saville Assessment, A WTW Company

Our integrated approach to talent solutions helps organizations achieve their business objectives. We decrease risks and increase good opportunities associated with talent assessment and development. Representatives in over 80 countries equip us to support projects all over the world. Whether early-careers recruitment or leadership development, local authority or multinational corporation, we help all our clients unlock potential and achieve results. Learn more at www.savilleassessment.com