



Hybrid working guide 2022

Tips for employers and managers on how to
effectively implement a hybrid working model

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Intro

A hybrid working model, with teams in different places at different times, brings challenges that are distinct from those that mass homeworking brought upon us during the pandemic.

Employers who intend to “go hybrid” or are already working this way will need to think carefully about their working practices, people policies and the implications for their organisation and its teams.

In this guide we look at the ways employers and managers can effectively implement hybrid working.

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How to hybrid successfully

Hybrid working can bring the best of office and remote working together. But before you can reap the benefits, you need to be sure any changes to the way you work are clearly communicated to your teams.

We at Reality HR, have extensive experience of hybrid working. It's the model we use ourselves, and we have steered many clients through setting this up in a way that benefits both their people and business productivity.

Here are some tips from our team on how to hybrid successfully.

Is it fully hybrid or an office first model?

You may be undecided on what will work best for your business and your team. Does "hybrid" for your organisation mean some people mostly at home and some mainly in the office? Or do most people split their time between the two? Are some roles better suited to one or the other?

You may prefer your employees to be in the office and only work remotely or from home when they need to (but with agreement from their manager).

If you have a preference, it's important to be clear with your employees how many days, or hours they need to be in the office each week.

In this situation, it's important to be clear why your people need to come in and why on a particular day. For instance, you may need all employees together on a Monday because you have your weekly team meeting. Or, you need everyone in the office on a Wednesday because it's the only day part-time and full-time staff are working together.

If your hybrid policy is too broad, people become too comfortable and end up not going into the office at all. A successful policy should state what type of hybrid working model you will be implementing and how it will work. Ensure all staff know their expectations in relation to this and it is communicated clearly.

Think about inclusion

Including employees in the planning process of their working arrangements increases both their engagement, productivity and wellbeing. So, as you tweak your hybrid working plan, be sure that any changes reflect their feedback, thoughts and experiences. To do this you could ask employees to fill in a survey or have a Q+A session to offer feedback on what works and what doesn't.

They may have experienced challenges while working from home during the pandemic or will want to work from home on a particular day of the week because of commitments. If you don't ask for their input, you may have some resistance to any changes you implement.

Consider where employees are most productive

When reviewing or creating your hybrid policy, think about whether your employees are in the right place to carry out certain tasks and where they do their best work, but don't forget that they may feel more supported by having their colleagues around them sometimes. If they are in customer service or sit at their desk on calls all day, then working remotely may be best for most of the week as to not disturb their colleagues while on the phone.

Some meetings are most effective when people can talk live and in person, but shorter meetings or 1:1s can be more suited to Teams or Zoom. Identify essential in-person meetings and give employees enough notice if they are needed to be in the office on a particular day for example.

Make it formal

Any changes to the way your employees work needs to be formally communicated to them verbally and in writing. Of course, your employees need to understand your policies before you can put them into practice.

This may also be a formal change to the terms and conditions of employment at your company so the contractual location in your contracts of employment may need to be updated, in consultation with your employees, but not always.

You should communicate your hybrid working policy clearly so there is no confusion among your team. Present it at a team meeting, post the changes on your workplace communication channels and host drop-in support time for people to ask questions or speak to your HR team.

Trust your employees

When moving to a hybrid policy, you will need to have trust in your employees to complete and manage their workload.

Businesses that have successfully implemented hybrid workplaces have moved from a controlled style of leadership to a more modern, people-centric style. This gives employees more autonomy and trusts them to get the job done from anywhere, measuring output rather than input.

Also, by offering flexibility it allows employees to prioritise their personal lives and as a result this increases employee wellbeing, engagement and retention.

Ensure equal opportunities

When your team are scattered, it may become easy to overlook those who don't get as much face to face time with managers. It's important that you ensure all employees are considered for projects and promotions, and keep track of their work and progress to ensure no one is left behind.

Depending on the nature of your business, it may not be possible for all employees to work from anywhere. So, to stop people leaving your company to seek more flexibility elsewhere, you should ensure you consider alternative ways for flexible working. This might mean letting them choose their schedule or number of work hours. Where you are unable to offer the same flexibility the reason for this should be clearly explained to the employee.



Frequently asked question

Should I have a hybrid working policy?

We recommend a hybrid working policy is updated and reviewed regularly, especially if you are unsure of what the future will look like for your business.

If you already have a flexible working policy in place, you could consider adapting this to extend it to hybrid working.

Points to include in a hybrid policy include eligibility of employees (some roles may be more suitable for hybrid working than others), what is the split between homeworking and working at the office and office arrangements (such as booking a hot desk), risk assessments and whether you wish to provide any support for setting up home offices. You should also think about expectations of employees and your managers.



Hybrid working and employee contracts

Employment contracts are required to include place of work, whether that be your home or the office. During the pandemic, a quick shift to remote and then hybrid working meant contracts weren't updated because of these exceptional circumstances.

Now, many employers are seeing the benefits of hybrid working and wanting to make it permanent. Here, we look at whether that requires changing your employee's contracts.

Do I need to make changes to employment contracts?

The short answer is no. Hybrid working can be agreed on an informal basis without the need to change an employment contract. You can agree with your employees that everyone will work from home on Fridays, for example, or whatever home-office split works for each employee. This could be for a trial period or a permanent way of working.

Contractual rights over time

A reason to go down the informal route might be because it gives you more freedom to call people back to the office if things don't work out as planned. There is a risk an employee could try to claim it was custom and practice, but whether a tribunal would actually find this to be true remains difficult to assess, and we wait to see case law in this area.

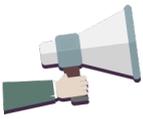
If hybrid working becomes a permanent arrangement for your business, you might want to review your employment contract terms and how hybrid working will affect them. But in any event you need to think about hours of work, salary and benefits, any expenses which can be claimed, and how confidentiality and data protection will be maintained.

Hybrid working requests

Where an employee makes a formal request for hybrid working through a flexible working policy (and the request is accepted) this will amount to a formal change to terms of employment.

You should review your flexible working policies to ensure you handle requests fairly.

In this case, you may decide that updating the employment contract with clear information about what is expected of hybrid working would be a good idea. This could include whether attendance in the office will be required for a set number of days (and on particular days); or whether the arrangement is going to be flexible enough to allow the employee to decide when to come in. Also, if the employee needs to come into the office for things like client meetings, appraisals and training.



Frequently asked question

How should I handle flexible working requests?

All employees have the right to request flexible working - and that may include splitting time between home and the office.

If you receive flexible working requests from your employees it's important to remember that flexibility can be offered in a variety of ways – so don't be put off if your people want to change their working patterns. Examples include; part-time hours, job sharing, compressed hours (working the same amount of hours over fewer days) or flexi time to adapt and finish times to suit.

If you receive a request, you will need to have a process in place that ensures you are taking into account all legislation not just flexible working. Be mindful of equality and discrimination and be consistent with your flexibility across the board and remain unbiased.

You should consider how the request could work in practical terms, and assess the advantages and disadvantages of the application.

You may wish to hold a trial period, to enable you and the employee to consider whether the change works for them and for the company. All details of the trial should be set out in writing, including start and finish dates and clear measurable objectives.

For support with managing flexible working requests, speak to one of our team at info@realityhr.co.uk.



Get in touch to find out how we can help
01256 328428

Rebuilding employee relationships in a hybrid environment

With businesses going through so much change in the past two years, employees may have a tough time relating to their managers, and vice versa.

Rebuilding trust is important, but this can be harder in a hybrid working model when people are split between the office and working remotely.

Employees are more likely to leave companies when they don't feel supported or appreciated, so here are some suggestions on what you can do as a manager to improve relationships with your team.

Keep up contact

It's possible that your employees' lifestyles are now different than they were before the pandemic, this could be financially, or from a wellbeing perspective.

If things have changed for them at home or at work, it may affect their performance, so it's important you are in regular contact, especially when you may not see each other often.

Employees are likely to create a bond with a leader they trust, who genuinely cares about their wellbeing and listens. This means you should regularly feedback on performance, listen to any issues and work with them to find a solution. Try to schedule weekly catchups (and stick to them) when they are in the office, virtual, or over the phone, so they feel supported.

This will help you develop a better understanding of their needs and goals and improve your relationship with them.

Foster collaboration and social interaction

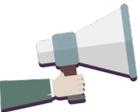
One thing missing from the office in a hybrid working model is social interaction. When sat together, it's easier to bounce ideas around and have spontaneous team meetings. It's also nice to chat to colleagues about something other than work – the office atmosphere was a key motivator for people to move back to the workplace and it's vital for wellbeing and employee engagement too.

In a hybrid world it's important to allow the time and means for socialising and collaboration such as team meetings, 'break-out' areas, after work drinks or virtual meetups, that allow all your staff to be included and have open communication. Try to limit in person social gatherings that might leave remote workers out.

Equal opportunities for in-office and remote employees

Failure to communicate with employees while they work at home may leave them feeling out of the loop on the days they do not return to the office. They may even feel isolated and unsupported.

This could lead to resentment of employees in the office if they feel they are being favoured over them. Make sure your processes for promoting employees and even assigning tasks are the same for both remote and in-office employees. Face-to-face time in the office might make you think of certain employees first, but they may not be the best fit for a project or role. Remembering this will go towards maintaining good relationships with your people.



Frequently asked question

How can I support hybrid employees' health, safety and wellbeing?

When you manage a hybrid workforce, you need to make sure your remote employees are getting the same level of support as those in the office. Your employees may be suffering from burnout, anxiety or even Covid-19 which could affect their mental health and in turn their work, and you want them to feel comfortable speaking to their manager about any issues.

An estimated 70 million working days are lost to mental health issues in the UK each year, while employers suffer increased staff turnover, sickness absence, decreased motivation, and lost productivity.

Ensure you check in with your employees to ask them about their wellbeing, how they are coping with hybrid working and that they are aware of any support and resources available to them. This will help employees feel valued.

You also need to have the right tools to communicate with your staff about mental health issues, and deal with them when they arise. We recommend you have a well-developed and implemented Wellness Action Plan (WAP) that can help you understand what is required from them to increase wellbeing or support the individual through the recovery process. Download a free WAP template [here](#).

An Employee Assistance Programme may be beneficial to employees if they are struggling with their mental health. This involves confidential support and could include face-to-face (or virtual) counselling, e-mail and phone support 24-hours a day. Speak to our team if you would like to learn more about this service.

Employees are now also looking for more flexibility, including freedom to choose where they work, which can have a positive effect on wellbeing. Trusting them to do this shows you believe they will stay productive and do their best work wherever they are – this will only improve your relationship.

How psychometrics can help with hybrid working

Hybrid working is part of the new normal for many businesses, and that's good news for some – but not for all. Some of your employees may love the hustle and bustle of the office and some may hate it.

Your team will inevitably be a mixed bag of ages, experiences, motivations and personalities. And when it comes to working preferences, they'll have different ideas too.

So, how can you ensure you create a productive work environment for everyone, when this will look different depending on each person's colour energy preferences?

Understand your people

Managers who fail to acknowledge that the hybrid way of working isn't going to suit everyone aren't going to succeed by forcing people to change. You will end up creating a workplace full of unhappy, disengaged, and underproductive employees who are more likely to jump ship as soon as they find a better fit elsewhere.

Insights Discovery can help you understand why people behave the way that they do, what they are looking for in a workplace environment, and how that helps them to be their most productive selves.

Insights is a psychometric tool that looks at how we communicate and interact with each other according to our personality types. We all have a combination of four colour energies – fiery red, cool blue, sunshine yellow and earth green – but we each have a natural preference for some which influences our motivation and behaviours. Your combination of those creates a unique “you”.

The Insights Discovery tool will help you to understand why some may prefer elements of homeworking and others may enjoy being in the office.

Communication preferences

Communication is vital for collaboration and team working, but the style, type and frequency of communication that each person enjoys can be different based on their personality types. Insights helps explain this:

People who lead with Insights Sunshine Yellow are typically more extroverted and tend to prefer a busy, lively environment with plenty of social interaction. When it comes to hybrid working, this is more difficult to achieve remotely so you may find they struggle with motivation and productivity without other people to bounce ideas off, while working from home. As a manager you should keep in regular contact with these employees and ensure there are plenty of opportunities for informal meetings or virtual get togethers.

Those with a preference for Fiery Red tend to have extroverted tendencies too, but they are usually more “task focused” than their Sunshine Yellow colleagues, and may prefer a more direct type of communication, with a focus on targets and goals.

People who lead with Cool Blue are likely to be more introverted, with a logical, analytical approach to work and a preference for clearly defined procedures and regulations. This group are likely to enjoy working from home, or alone while in the office, so managers should ensure there are structures and support in place to ensure that their input and contributions are not lost.

The final group, those who lead with Earth Green, are also likely to be more introverted, with a preference for a calmer, slower paced work environment, which allows them to build strong relationships with those around them. Managers need to ensure this group have plenty of opportunities for one-to-one conversations, where they aren't rushed to provide an answer as their natural style is often reflective and considered.

Regardless of whether your team members are more introverted or extroverted, the switch to a hybrid approach will have forced everyone to adjust to new, sometimes uncomfortable ways of working.

Ensure everyone has the chance to speak

One challenge of hybrid working is ensuring everyone's voice is heard – either online or in person. Some people may be slower to contribute to discussions (in particular, those who are more introverted) and disinclined to do so if they feel they might be spoken over or if their ideas may be openly criticised. It is the role of the manager to ensure that everyone is given equal opportunity to contribute to discussions by encouraging open conversation, asking questions and encouraging follow-up and feedback after meetings.

Look at your management style

Consider how you interact with each of your team members, and how you can adjust your style to suit their preferences and get the best from the whole team. This can be as simple as recognising that those leading with Cool Blue may prefer a pre-arranged agenda for your 1-2-1s, whereas those who lead with Sunshine Yellow will be happy to go with the flow.

You may need to build in time for a personal chat at the start of your 1-2-1s with your Earth Green team members, whereas those with a preference for Fiery Red may be happier to get straight down to business!

Remember, that the most fruitful of conversations should always be tailored to the individual.

Social connections and team building

Social connections are a big part of being in the office together but do remember that people who lead with Earth Green or Cool Blue typically enjoy a calm peaceful environment and might enjoy homeworking because they work well by themselves. However, to avoid them becoming isolated, you need to encourage them to engage with their colleagues, so include everyone in any team meetings or social activity – wherever they are located.

It's essential to look for team-building opportunities and encourage employees to interact socially. Why? Building better relationships among your hybrid teams will benefit them when it comes to working on projects together – recognising and appreciating everyone's differences highlights the range of skills, thought processes and approaches available in the team. This will also build company culture and help employees working from home avoid feeling isolated and lonely.

Support your people

One of the challenges of hybrid working is that you may not see every team member on a regular basis. This can make it hard to get to know them as individuals, to understand what they need to be productive, and how you can best support them. The personal Insights profile provides lots of opportunities to maximise the value of regular 1-2-1 meetings and help you to develop the right supportive environment.

The last 2 years have been a time of change, uncertainty and disruption, and your people may have been forced to make compromises of one sort or another and without communicating with them you won't understand how they are coping.

Regular 1-2-1s are a great opportunity for you to check in with each team member, but there are some simple things you can look out for too. Each colour energy can be over-used in times of stress and pressure, and show up as "bad day" traits. Talking to your team members about what their bad days look like can help prevent stress and burnout.

Insights Discovery will equip you and your team with the knowledge and skills you need to overcome the communication challenges you'll face as a hybrid team.



Frequently asked question

Can Insights help with other business challenges?

Absolutely! Whether it's a series of virtual workshops designed to help your teams work more productively, or a longer term programme based on leadership, culture or change, Insights can deliver the breakthroughs you've been searching for.



Get in touch to find out how we can help
01256 328428

How to encourage better work-life balance

Technology has allowed us to work harder and faster – but not always better. In fact, being continuously connected to work does not mean we are more productive; it can impact the quality of our work and can contribute to employee burnout.

Whilst it better enables remote and hybrid working, 3 in 10 employees say tech blurs boundaries between work and home life, according to a CIPD survey.

So how can you pull people away from their laptops, tablets and smartphones?

Here are some thoughts from our team on how to encourage better work-life balance:

Set boundaries

How many of us check emails first thing in the morning and last thing at night? 74% of UK employees according to research by the HR Director. Although your employees may feel like they are more productive around the clock, all of this time can affect other important parts of their lives, such as sleep, exercise and socialising, which all play a vital role in wellbeing. The pressure to be ‘always on’ and available is not good for anyone’s health.

Encouraging your staff to schedule “tech-free time” may be one of the best steps you can take to support your employees’ wellbeing, reduce their stress, and increase the quality of their work.

Switching off from technology completely is almost impossible. And setting unrealistic goals can lead to further feelings of stress. So instead of forcing employees to turn off their phones at certain times, set boundaries for when they can respond to and send emails – e.g, not after work or on weekends.

Designate time away from tech during the workday

As well as in the evenings and on weekends, you should encourage your employees to take time away from their screens during the workday. Suggest that they take a phone-free walk, read a book, work away from the computer, connect with a colleague over a cuppa, or spend some quiet time reflecting. Remember, you must make it clear that these breaks are acceptable and encouraged.

During extremely busy and stressful periods, things like coffee breaks and regular exercise are usually pushed to the side to make way for work. While these may seem like simple sacrifices that may increase the chances of a presentation being completed or a piece of content being delivered ahead of time, lack of proper self-care can have a big impact on employee productivity, creativity and overall wellbeing.

Start by encouraging your team to use their full lunch break to get away from their work area. Create some healthy competition with fitness challenges and exercise trackers in the team; who will walk, cycle or run the furthest each month? Facilitate the use of wellbeing apps that, whilst still technology, support people to relax, to meditate, and to be mindful. Your employees will thank you and you’ll quickly begin reaping the benefits.

Encourage the ‘right to disconnect’

A right to disconnect reassures employees that it is fine for them to disconnect from work outside of normal working hours. They can turn off their phones, ignore emails and enjoy their free time away from work without being disturbed – unless there is an emergency or agreement to do so, for example while ‘on call’.

If you want to create a culture where people feel free to disconnect within your business, you need to have a policy or rules outlined in your employee handbook, and you need to regularly talk about it, so people believe it is really ok to switch off. This clear guidance tells employees where, when, and how they have the right to switch off from work and increases the chances that they’ll take advantage of it.

Don’t forget to role model it too, at least some of the time. Culture and ways of working come from the leaders of the organisation. Don’t make employees feel guilty by working outside of office hours yourself, instead establish a policy that gives them the discretion to decide whether to respond to an after-hours email or task, or leave it until the next day. Consider that some people actually prefer to send emails in the evenings or on the weekend.

Offer flexibility

Give your people as much flexibility as possible for them to determine when and how they do their work. They may actually prefer to work outside of your regular work hours – and if this suits their role, then allowing it will help them to manage their work-life balance better and perhaps take some time away from tech during the day to focus on other things. Flexibility has shown to increase productivity at the times individuals do work, so completing their task and then properly switching off becomes easier.

Providing your people the autonomy to set their own hours will encourage them to both connect and disengage with their work on their terms.

Encourage annual leave

The importance of annual leave can often be neglected and over-looked, it gives employees the opportunity to take a break from the demands of the workplace, switch off, rest and re-energise. However, many employees will still be tempted, or even expected, to check their devices for calls and emails during their holiday.

Make sure you have good levels of resource and contingency in place so there is enough cover when someone does take leave – so they can hand everything over, switch off their devices and not feel a need to stay in touch.

Well-rested employees are happy and productive employees. Consider offering enhanced holiday entitlements or the opportunity to buy more days, if this works for your organisation.

Lead by example

It’s not just about telling your employees they should disconnect – it’s even more critical for managers to lead by example. Most employees share the mindset that if the boss is working, we should be too. If you truly want to create a culture that encourages a healthy work-life balance, you need to be seen to be leaving work at work! Then employees will follow suit. If you do feel the need to work late (or early) try to avoid actually hitting send on your emails to the team until they start work – or use tools such as delayed emails which won’t land in anyone’s inbox until they log on.

We hope you have found this guide useful – please do get in touch if you would like further support or check out our website for our other downloadable guides.

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