



# Hybrid working

Shifting to the new  
normal

**EY** Lane4  
Workforce Transformation

# About EY Lane4

The combination of EY and Lane4 focusses on harnessing the power of people.

Powered by technology, EY puts humans at the centre of business transformation. Lane4 takes people beyond performance, giving them the skills and mindset to achieve things they never thought were possible.

We've come together to deliver on our purpose - to build a better working world.

We believe that organisations need to put people at the heart of their decision-making. Not only will this create long-term value for stakeholders inside and outside the business, but it will help ensure success across large-scale business transformations. At EY Lane4, we bring together some of the biggest and influential leaders around the world, drawing on their insight to shape how we support our clients with their people and transformation challenges.

Understanding the psychology of learning and knowledge retention is at the heart of our approach. Our people also bring a wealth of experience from performing at the highest level such as in Olympic sport, the military, the arts and business. This unique combination allows us to walk alongside leaders, acting as trusted advisors to challenge and support them throughout their transformation journeys.

However, at EY Lane4 it isn't just about senior leaders. We believe that everyone deserves access to world-class learning and development. Our global reach, digital learning solutions and innovative service delivery allows for consistent development across multiple levels of the organisation.

This means people can develop behaviours that will not only help them to perform at work, but in all parts of their life. It gives people the confidence and belief to try new things and truly thrive.

All this combined allows us to build a better working world.

# Contents

Introduction	1
Hybrid working: the 'best of both' opportunity	2
Top challenges hybrid working is likely to bring	4
How to successfully navigate the shift to hybrid working: the role managers and individuals must play	6
1. Level the playing field	7
2. Maintain a healthy hybrid team environment	9
3. Optimise people's engagement	11
4. Champion company culture	12
Conclusion	14

# Introduction

Hybrid working involves giving people more choice as to how, where and when they would like to work, offering a flexible blend of remote and in-office working. Despite a few leaders coming out firmly in favour of a return to pre-COVID-19 ways of working, evidence suggests hybrid working is the future most organisations will be choosing.

The pandemic shook up our ways of working, forcing some businesses to manage both critical workers on the frontline and staff at home, and other businesses to adapt to an all-remote workforce. The question of 'what's next?' is now on many people's minds.

Hybrid working is the clear preferred option. Specifically, research shows:<sup>1</sup>

- ▶ **89% of business executives** agree that hybrid working will become a permanent part of working life moving forward
- ▶ **68% of employees** desire to continue working from home for one to three days a week going forward
- ▶ **22% of employees** want to adopt full-time remote working permanently

Before the pandemic, remote working was becoming increasingly prevalent within various industries, with organisations and managers embracing the shift towards hybrid working to different degrees. Now things are different. It's less a question of 'can we do it?' and more a question of 'how can a company justify not making this shift?'

The pandemic proved that many jobs can be done remotely, prompting people to reflect on their previous working habits and routines. People will have learnt a lot about themselves and how they work best, namely: which habits feel sustainable and which don't, what benefits they appreciate about working remotely and what aspects of being in the office they've missed.

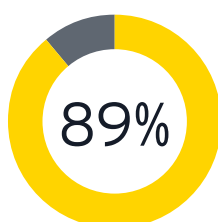
Hybrid working is about harnessing this shake up and giving people more autonomy to decide how, when and, crucially, where they work best. And, many organisations are seizing this opportunity to reset. The Financial Times recently noted that Lloyds Banking Group, Natwest, Aon, Virgin Media, Deutsche Bank, Revolut, PWC, and Centrica have all announced they are currently analysing their ways of working strategy and shifting to a hybrid working model.

But how do you get it right? How do leaders make sure that the shift to hybrid working is a win-win situation for individuals, managers, and the business? What does it take to make the 'best of both' dream a lived reality?

This white paper aims to provide practical 'how-to' insight from research around those big questions.

## Key takeaway

People's appetite for hybrid working is strong and many businesses are making plans to reset their ways of working. The hybrid model hinges on reaping the 'best of both' benefits from remote and in-office working. But, achieving a win-win situation for individuals, teams and organisations won't happen organically or by chance. A level of orchestration is needed and action must be taken to get this change right.



of business executives agree that hybrid working will become a permanent part of working life moving forward.



# Hybrid working: the ‘best of both’ opportunity

With the performance benefits of both remote and in-office working well-documented, the business case for resetting ways of working and unlocking the ‘best of both’ practices is strong.

The benefits of remote and in-office working are well-documented (see Table 1),<sup>3</sup> with research clearly showing the combined performance boost on offer to those who successfully reset to a hybrid working model.

Research also suggests that shifting to hybrid working sends a signal of support to people.<sup>4</sup> The shift is interpreted as a 'signal' that the company cares about people's welfare and wants to support them to accomplish their goals. Similarly, not shifting could signal a lack of trust and risks taking away benefits of remote working which people have come to value (such as increased autonomy and resources such as sleep and time). Even if benefits are gained from returning to pre-COVID-19 norms, in line with Conservation of Resources theory,<sup>5</sup> it's the loss of benefits that will be felt more keenly and have a stronger impact on people's motivation.

Table 1. The benefits of remote and in-office working

Benefits of remote working		Benefits of in-office working	
For individuals ...	For organisations ...	For individuals ...	For organisations ...
Increased flexibility	Access to global talent pool	Informal networking and relationship building	Increased cross-company Networking
Reduced commuting time and cost	Reduced carbon footprint	Faster and easier access to information	Increased social learning (sharing of ideas, knowledge, and advice)
Potentially improved work/life balance	Reduced office costs	Greater access to support (emotional and task-based)	Easier for leaders to pick up on how people are doing and what's going on for them
Increased productivity	Increased organisational productivity	Greater visibility	Team and organisation culture boosted (via increased informal moments)
Enhanced autonomy	Improved employee engagement	Quick access to technology and equipment	Increased creativity and innovation
Potentially improved wellbeing (e.g., more sleep, better food, ease of exercise)	Reduced absenteeism and turnover	Increased spontaneous collaboration	Improved onboarding experience for new joiners
Potentially fewer distractions and interruptions	Improved retention	Boosted career development opportunities	Ensured ergonomic workspaces for people
Higher job satisfaction	Higher organisational commitment	Distinct work/life boundary	

# Top tips for senior leaders

## 1. Be intentional around the signals you're sending people

The business case for hybrid working is strong. Consequently, leaders wishing to simply return to 'business as usual' will have to think carefully about the reasons they give for not allowing people to work in a hybrid way. Silence will only breed assumption. Leaders must communicate clearly what decisions around future ways of working have been taken and why.

## 2. Clarify what is expected and meant by 'hybrid working'

It could be argued that hybrid working is an opportunity for individuals and companies to get the 'best of both' of remote and in-office working; optimising the blend of environments available so individuals, teams and organisations can be at their best. However, the blend of hybrid varies (see table below) and it may be that some individuals would like to opt for high-intensity or all-remote working. Leaders therefore need to be clear about what's being put on the table under the banner of 'hybrid working': can individuals work all-remote if they choose? Or are the boundaries of hybrid working within a certain parameter (for example, between 1-4 days remote)?

Office optimal	0-1 day a week remote
Hybrid hopeful	2-3 days a week remote
Remote ready	4 days+ a week remote

## 3. Keep the decision at team-level, informed by intra-team requirements, data and wider strategy

As we'll discuss later in the paper, research suggests that managers greatly value having discretion over 'ways of working' decisions. Working pattern decisions should take account of both intra and inter team requirements, with organisation's providing data and architecture to make the decision process fair and equitable.

## 4. Get aligned as a senior leadership team

Despite the performance benefits highlighted, hybrid working is a contentious issue. Many senior leaders have strong differing beliefs, some never wishing to return to the office and others wanting everything to simply 'go-back' to pre-pandemic norms. What your leaders believe, communicate and role model will determine what people do. Conversations around the drivers behind people's beliefs

therefore need to be faced into. Otherwise, you could end up sending your workforce mixed messages.

## 5. Keep all ways of working changes under review

New ways of working shouldn't be decided on and then set in stone; they need to be kept under review with measures in place to gauge the impact the change is having. If new ways of working are being implemented, work out what indicators will be useful to track, how feedback will be gathered, and over what time period. With people having been cooped up in lockdown for so long, it's likely that normal behaviour patterns won't emerge for some time, so potentially leave 6-12 months for new ways of working to become established. Finally, don't forget to tell people about this review process, giving insight into how exactly new ways of working will be trialled.





# Top challenges hybrid working is likely to bring

While the benefits of shifting to a hybrid way of working are clear, embedding such a change successfully won't come without its challenges.

Specifically, the following challenges must be carefully navigated:

## 1. Levelling the playing field

We have a deep-rooted dislike of unfair treatment. Any perception that something is unjust, or someone is receiving a disproportionately better outcome than us triggers a powerful emotional response in our brain.<sup>7</sup> The shift to hybrid working is a potential hotbed of perceived injustice. People will want transparency and fairness in how decisions are being made and managers will need to treat people equitably.

## 2. Maintaining a healthy hybrid team environment

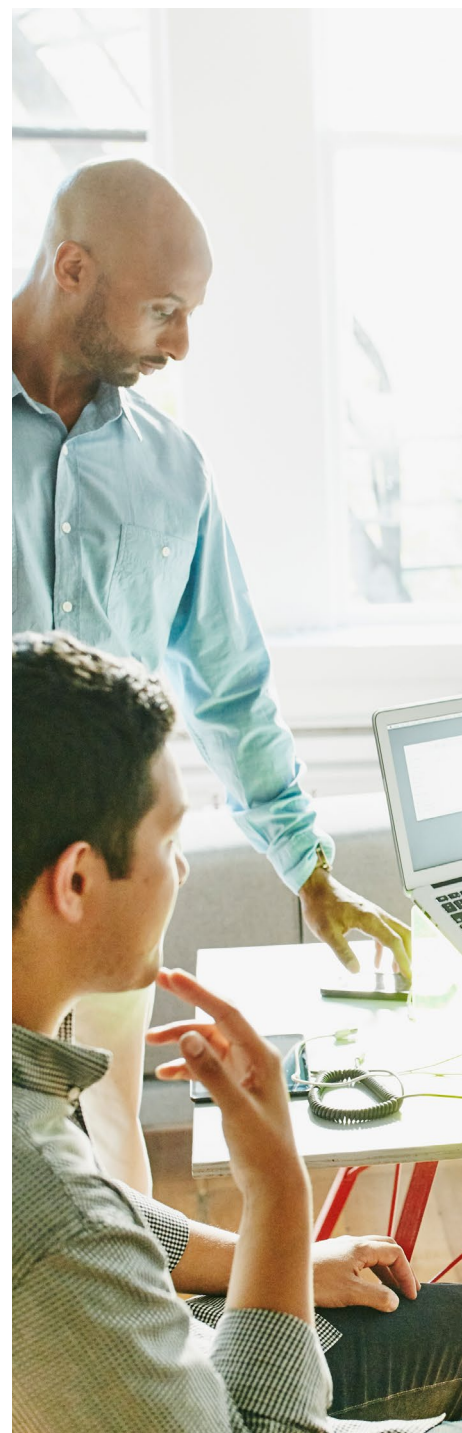
One of the biggest risks in a hybrid working model is that an 'us-and-them' dynamic begins to emerge between those who attend the office regularly and those who base themselves more from home. To keep people unified, biases will need to be kept in check and new norms established.

## 3. Optimising people's engagement

Keeping people engaged is the age-old challenge because our engagement levels naturally ebb and flow over time.<sup>8</sup> In a hybrid world, it will remain challenging for leaders to notice the subtle signs and gauge the overall 'mood in the camp'. Luckily, handling this challenge is nothing new, it's just a case of dialling up the leadership basics of communication, purpose, and goal setting.

## 4. Championing company culture

For many organisations who were predominantly office based, the pandemic will have diluted your company culture; removing the chance for certain rituals, routines, jokes, stories, grumbles round the tea machine, not to mention all the history and symbols people connect to when they enter and work in a shared space. Moving to hybrid working is a challenge because it requires acceptance from leaders that the future will be culturally different to what it was. That said, it also creates an opportunity to review what aspects of your culture are important to keep and which it's time to let go of.





# How to successfully navigate the shift to hybrid working: the role managers and individuals must play

Evidence shows the pivotal role managers will play in the shift to hybrid ways of working. However, getting managers equipped for hybrid working isn't the end of the story.

Individuals will also need to take ownership for becoming great hybrid workers.

Research shows that when it comes to unlocking the benefits of hybrid working, a lot hinges on managers.<sup>9</sup> Particularly following a disaster, it is the extent to which line managers are adequately prepared and supported to implement new ways of working that determines future performance.<sup>10</sup>

In this section, we'll explore how to equip your managers for the new demands they'll face, alongside what individuals must take accountability for to become great hybrid workers.



# 1. Level the playing field with ...

## Informed, equitable and fair decision making

Historically, managers have decided which employees can work remotely and to what degree. Hybrid working was therefore often an idiosyncratic deal, given by certain managers to certain people.<sup>11</sup> During the pandemic, government restrictions took this gatekeeping role away from managers, plunging everyone into all-remote working where possible.

But this gatekeeping role is about to return in full force.

With so many people proving that they can do their job remotely, the subsequent requests for a reset to hybrid working are inevitable. The question is: how best to prepare managers for the gatekeeping conversations that are on the horizon?



### Top tips for managers

- ▶ **Co-create and clearly communicate the decision criteria** – it's important that managers clearly communicate the data and organisational boundaries around hybrid working and give people the opportunity to co-create the gatekeeping criteria. Based on insight, teams should be involved in how viability for hybrid working will be assessed.
- ▶ **Stay attentive to the reactions of those not selected for hybrid working** – sometimes managers will opt out of the decision entirely to avoid facing the reactions of people whose roles require them to be office-based. However, this 'all-or-nothing' approach in the name of fairness, could restrict people's performance and feel out of touch, especially if hybrid norms are embedding elsewhere in the company. Here, the 'ask' will be for managers to face into these difficult conversations, reiterating the common criteria, ensuring people are clear around how certain decisions were made and what factors are considered.
- ▶ **Be clear that ways of working agreements will be regularly reviewed** – hybrid working is about supporting people to attain their work goals by giving them more autonomy to decide how, when, and where they work best. That said, it's important that people don't view the agreement as a long-term entitlement. Hybrid working agreements should be reviewed intermittently to check they are working for all parties (the individual, the manager, the team, and the organisation).

### Top tip for individuals

- ▶ **Consider all aspects of your role within the company** – while it's tempting to just focus on what you need to work at your best, (i.e. your goals, your situation, and your preferences), it's important to think about the role you play within the team and wider organisation. Consider all the benefits both in-office and remote working environments can bring.

### Insight: how managers typically make this gatekeeping decision

Research suggests that before COVID-19 several factors would influence manager decisions around remote working. Work-related considerations tended to top the list, with managers most heavily weighting whether the job role was suitable for remote work and the extent of face-to-face interaction required.<sup>8</sup>

Alongside role suitability, other factors weighed into consideration included: the individual's household characteristics, access to technology, judgements about the person's conscientiousness and trustworthiness, their past performance, and the organisational norms in ways of working.<sup>12</sup>

## Equal performance management

It can be tempting for managers to monitor those who work more 'out of sight' differently, over-compensating by ensuring their jobs are more rigidly defined, providing detailed direction on their tasks and requiring individuals to keep track of time and report on what has been achieved.<sup>13</sup>

The manager may feel this equitable adjustment is made to ensure those working in a flexible way remain productive. In fact, this attempt to take back control can undermine the benefits of remote working for both the individual and the organisation. Ultimately, making those who work more remotely feel excluded and penalised for working in alternative ways.

### Top tip for managers

- **Avoid the temptation to 'retrieve control' of those working more remotely** – when it comes to performance management, continue to treat everyone the same. People will perform better in their jobs, and experience less stress, if they feel they are being treated fairly within a team. In a hybrid working world, everyone needs to be managed by results and agreed-upon work plans, all jobs should be clearly defined, and feedback provided in a similar way for all workers regardless of where they work.

### Top tip for individuals

- **Trust managers are doing their job** – as an individual, it's important to remember that you never have full sight of another person's situation or how they are being managed. You never know what feedback is being given to them or what performance management practices are in place. As hybrid working becomes more prevalent, people will need to be managed more by results and less by what they are seen doing in the office. As individuals, the 'ask' here is to trust that managers are doing their job and effectively managing performance.

## Proactive sharing of knowledge and information

Regular, high-quality communication will be particularly important in a hybrid world.<sup>14</sup> Team members and managers need to ensure that just because people are out of sight doesn't mean they are any less in the loop.

In the office, it's so easy for conversations to continue informally after the meeting. Similarly, news and ideas travel fast when a manager returns to the desk following an important meeting or when a colleague from another department pops across spontaneously for a chat. Keeping everyone on the same page and up to date therefore won't happen by chance. New communication habits and practices must be set up to keep the whole team in the loop.

### Top tips for managers

- **Maintain frequent communication** – regular, high-quality communication is particularly important when the team is dispersed, otherwise people can begin to feel isolated or left out. Specifically, managers need to ensure they are regularly checking in with everyone, allowing every team member the time they need to solve problems, chat through updates, and talk through work or personal issues.
- **Establish new team 'hybrid habits' to keep informal communication flowing** – managers might be inclined to store up small pieces of good news, bad news, updates, or information until there's a formal catch-up. However, when managing a hybrid team, it's crucial to keep this informal communication flowing. From managers and team members, this will require a greater awareness of what's 'commonly known' within the group – with people frequently asking themselves

'is that knowledge, information or news useful for everyone to know?' To make this happen, new processes and rituals will need to be established within the team.

### Top tip for individuals

- **Proactively keep informal communication flowing** – regular, high-quality communication is a two-way street, every individual in the hybrid team needs to take responsibility for sharing updates and keeping their managers in the loop with what's going on. Send proactive updates sharing what you're focusing on, how your projects are progressing, challenges that have come up, and notifications of any accomplishments or key milestones reached. No matter where you are working from, don't hold back from sharing your informal news and continue to make the most of informal catch-up opportunities, like the virtual water coolers.



## 2. Maintain a healthy hybrid team environment by ...

### Consciously countering in-office biases

There are several beliefs and biases which will need to be proactively countered if the shift to hybrid working is to embed successfully. Specifically, these are:

#### **The perception that people who choose to work more remotely have 'opted out' of a career**

Historically, research suggests leaders and colleagues may have commonly perceived those who opt to work more remotely as having 'opted out' of a career, regardless of their actual career choices.<sup>15</sup> To create an inclusive workforce, where all talent can thrive, it's essential that working remotely doesn't put a false limit on people's career options or ambitions.

#### **The belief that remote workers are less productive (a.k.a. proximity bias)**

Before the pandemic, there was a stigma associated with working from home, with the practice often seen as a euphemism to 'shirking' and a prevailing assumption that people produce better work if they are physically present in the office.<sup>16</sup> Evidence shows remote workers are no less productive than their in-office counterparts, however, the false belief that remote workers are less productive has a spiralling effect on performance.<sup>17</sup> For example, when team members believe remote workers are less productive, they themselves put in less effort and cause team performance to drop.

#### **The 'presence effect'**<sup>18</sup>

Researchers have found that 'passive face time' (i.e. just being seen about the office), is enough for people to create inferences about what you're doing and how well you're doing it, even when they have no actual knowledge of your work performance.

More precisely, if someone is seen in the office during expected hours, studies show they are more likely to be viewed by others as 'responsible' and 'dependable'. And, if that person is also seen in the office outside of work hours, others are likely to view them as 'committed' and 'dedicated'.

#### **Top tip for managers and individuals**

- ▶ **Notice what assumptions you make about others** – whilst some of these biases may have dissipated following people's experiences of remote working during the pandemic, in the shift to hybrid working, it's likely these biases and beliefs will all resurface to some degree or other. For hybrid working to be successful, everyone in the company needs to take responsibility for proactively challenging these in-office biases. Notice what assumptions you are making about others and reflect on what facts those judgements are based on.

#### **Top tips for managers**

- ▶ **Keep everyone front of mind (not just those you have seen recently)** – when it comes to allocating resource to a new project or crediting people for a job well done, consciously recall those working more remotely. People in the office are more likely to be recommended for projects or have their 'above and beyond' efforts recognised, as others see them in the hallway or at their desk late, and they come to mind easily later. However, to shift to hybrid working it's crucial this uneven recognition is proactively countered. Everyone should be receiving suitable development opportunities and recognition for their hard work, regardless of where they tend to work.
- ▶ **Redefine 'presenteeism'** – hybrid working is a chance to redefine presenteeism. In the past the term referred to workers who show up to the office (or continue to work virtually) despite being unwell. However, the rise of remote working has prompted some thought leaders to suggest expanding the term to refer to 'showing up at an office when you could be more productive elsewhere'.<sup>19</sup> Ultimately, creating an environment of autonomy is about managers encouraging people to exercise good judgement selecting the best place to work given their short- and long-term goals.

#### **Top tip for individuals**

- ▶ **Don't fret about where you 'should be'** – hybrid working is about embracing responsibility for exercising good judgement around where is best for you to be, given your short and long-term goals. For hybrid working to embed successfully, in-office biases must be left behind; they shouldn't still be lurking in the driving seat of your decisions. Fretting about what other people will think, what looks good, or what others in the business tend to do, is a waste of time and energy. It will set the shift to hybrid working several steps back. Try instead to embrace a hybrid mentality, thinking positively about 'where's best for me to be today?', and 'will I be able to make the most of the benefits different spaces offer?' (for example, 'if I travel into the office, do I have time to connect with people?').

## Establishing new team protocols around unexpected requests

For some teams whose work and roles heavily overlap, there's a risk that team members who work in the office more frequently may find their visibility leads them to a greater workload.<sup>9</sup> For example, ending up with more spontaneous requests for support or being pulled into a project last-minute on a Friday afternoon. While these types of spontaneous projects can sometimes offer great career development and relationship building opportunities, sometimes these requests can add up to feel like a significant 'extra work tax' that gets landed on people for choosing to be in the office more.

In-office workers may then begin to resent those who work from home more and don't take on these extra team tasks. Meanwhile, those working more remotely may potentially resent those in the office for getting more chances to support with key projects or work closely with certain senior leaders.



### Top tips for managers

- ▶ **Co-create a new hybrid team charter** – regardless of how long your team has been together, shifting to embrace a more hybrid way of working will require boundaries and 'rules of play' to be re-established and re-contracted within the group. Facilitate an honest conversation which:
  - ▶ Revisits the team's purpose and company values
  - ▶ Surfaces the values of individuals (specifically, digging into why those values matter, how they show up at work and how they get trodden on)
  - ▶ Talk through the 'best of both' benefits available from hybrid working
  - ▶ Map out what work pattern team members would like to try out in the shift to hybrid working (and why)
  - ▶ Talk through what opportunities and challenges hybrid working may create for the team and establish protocols for navigating those challenges and maximising the hybrid benefits for everyone
- ▶ **Create a culture of support** – alongside establishing a new hybrid team charter, research suggests that it's vital to build a culture of support,

where everyone helps everyone regardless of where and when individuals work.<sup>9</sup> There's no special treatment on offer to an 'in-group'. No second-class support service running – everyone is included and treated the same. The most powerful way to create this culture of support is to reward supportive behaviour: call out and notice when people go above and beyond to help other people. Instil 'supporting others' as a core team value and everyday behaviour.

- ▶ **Offer coaching to everyone around work-life boundary management** – alongside encouraging a culture of support and establishing protocols for managing 'out of hours requests', research indicates that managers need to continue to support people to manage their work-life boundaries. Paradoxically, while 'better work-life balance' is often cited as a benefit of remote working, it can often lead to more work-life conflict.<sup>20</sup> Remote workers often feel more pressure to be 'always available' and without the commute it's easy to just do one more task, with work increasingly encroaching on non-work life and time. Boundaries between work and life need to be well-managed to protect people's wellbeing, with evidence indicating it's a topic on which people often value coaching.<sup>9</sup>

For some teams whose work and roles heavily overlap, there's a risk that team members who work in the office more frequently may find their visibility leads them to a greater workload.



### 3. Optimise people's engagement by ...

#### Connecting people to purpose

Having a purpose, a compelling reason why a team or company exists, has always been important. But with a hybrid workforce this sense of a common purpose becomes even more critical.

There's a risk that as people are given more autonomy in how, when and where they work, the workforce becomes siloed and disjointed. Everyone focuses in on their own piece of the puzzle and connection to the bigger picture they are contributing to diminishes. Leaders need to avoid getting into the situation where everyone is working hard for different outcomes.

##### Top tip for managers

- **Keep people connected to why they are there** – reiterating and discussing how people's work fits into the mission of the team and company is something managers can't over-do. As American naturalist Henry David Thoreau once wrote, "It's not enough to be busy, so are the ants. The question is, what are we busy about?" This type of busy drifting is a big risk with hybrid working, but the more people internalise the 'why am I here?' of their role, the more engaged they'll be and the better the 'what' and 'how' of tasks will get done. New joiners are also more likely to stay engaged if they have a clear understanding of the 'why' behind their role from day one.

##### Top tip for individuals

- **Focus on being effective, rather than efficient** – as management author Peter Drucker distinguished, being efficient is about accomplishing many tasks but being effective is doing the right things.<sup>21</sup> Consequently, while conversations around purpose may feel soft and cuddly, clarity on why your role exists, why the team exists, why the company exists, is what will help you be effective, rather than swamped in efficiency. Purpose should always be front and centre of thinking, guiding your focus and decision making. It's not 'fluff', it's what stops you getting stuck operating on autopilot.

#### Clear goal setting

Research shows people are more engaged on days when they make progress towards their goals and are more engaged at the end of the year if they've achieved their work goals.<sup>8,22</sup>

It may feel like management basics, but goal setting is so important to get right, especially now. Businesses are operating in an extremely ambiguous and fast-changing market, with many companies plunged into 'survival mode' by the pandemic.

In survival mode, it can be tempting for leaders to just focus on getting through the week or month. But, setting inspiring and meaningful long-term goals can't become a 'nice-to-have' for easier times, it's a must-have if you want to keep people engaged.

##### Top tip for managers

- **Set stretching goals people can get their teeth into** – with the pandemic raising the question of people's wellbeing up the agenda, it might be tempting to perceive setting stretching goals as unhelpful. This isn't the case. Co-creating clear, meaningful goals, which challenge people will reduce stress caused from ambiguity, build people's confidence, and fuel their motivation.

##### Top tip for individuals

- **Think holistically about your career** – hybrid working is a form

of goal support. It's about having more autonomy to decide where's best to work on any given day, in order to achieve your goals. To be a great hybrid worker, you therefore need to be good at balancing both long-term and short-term goals. For many people it can be easier to focus and get tasks done remotely, but progress towards long-term goals often requires the spontaneous opportunities and interactions that come from working in the office. As a hybrid worker, it's crucial to keep balancing specific plans and allowing time for unplanned events if you want to progress your career.

There's a risk that as people are given more autonomy in how, when and where they work, the workforce becomes siloed and disjointed.

## 4. Champion company culture by ...

### Intentionally helping people grow their networks

One of the biggest risks for organisations shifting to a hybrid way of working is a reduction in 'social capital'. The term 'social capital' refers to the networks of people across an organisation, with research showing that organisations with perceived 'strong cultures' are characterised by social networks that are dense and intricately woven across the business.

As many people will have experienced, in an all-remote environment your work world and the number of people you interact with can become very small. In a hybrid world, this network will expand but it still won't be as strong as if everyone was working in the office from 9:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m. every day of the week. Consequently, as organisations embrace more hybrid working, to keep the organisational culture strong, everyone will have to put extra effort into maintaining and growing their network, both with those they see regularly and those they don't.



#### Top tips for managers

- ▶ **Explicitly value the time people spend on building relationships** – be intentional and explicit about encouraging people to build their network, whether they are working remotely or in the office. Taking the time to catch up with work friends and colleagues spontaneously is time well spent performance-wise. These unplanned and unstructured relationship moments provide people with context about the business, sounding board advice, new ideas, collaboration opportunities, learnings in 'how to get things done' within the business and insight into where work is overlap is occurring. What may feel like 'time off the clock' is in fact often a rich addition to people's work, leading to better decision making and increased efficiency and effectiveness. Make sure your team gets how valuable that time is.
- ▶ **Set up cross-functional learning opportunities** – in a hybrid world, cross-functional learning sessions become another valuable way for managers to nurture the social learning fabric of an organisation. Empowering the team to pull on their external and internal networks to set these sessions up and run them 'dual-track' (so both in-office and remote workers can attend) is a great way to keep networks growing and fresh ideas circulating.

#### Top tip for individuals

- ▶ **Proactively build and strengthen your network across the business** – every individual in the business has a responsibility to cultivate and strengthen their network. In the past when everyone was working in the same space all the time, it was easy to just let this happen organically. However, the shift to hybrid working requires some new habits. There may be people you see more often as new patterns of working emerge (either face-to-face or on virtual calls). But there will likely still be others you don't see. Map out your informal and formal network, and then keep making the effort to have 'planned-unplanned time' with people just to say 'Hi' and catch up. Similarly, grow your network by intentionally looking out for new faces joining the business, reach out to them to connect, don't wait to bump into them at a big event.



**Table 2. Hybrid working summary: what's required from managers and individuals**

Level the playing field with ...	Transparent gatekeeping	<b>Managers:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▸ Co-create and clearly communicate the decision criteria</li> <li>▸ Stay attentive to the reactions of those not selected for hybrid working</li> <li>▸ Be clear that ways of working agreements will be regularly reviewed</li> </ul> <b>Individuals:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▸ Consider all aspects of your role within the company</li> </ul>
	Equal performance management	<b>Managers:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▸ Avoid the temptation to 'retrieve control' of those working more remotely</li> </ul> <b>Individuals:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▸ Trust managers are doing their job</li> </ul>
	Proactive sharing of information and knowledge	<b>Managers:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▸ Maintain frequent communication</li> <li>▸ Establish new team 'hybrid habits' to keep informal communication flowing</li> </ul> <b>Individuals:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▸ Proactively keep informal communication flowing</li> </ul>
Optimise employee engagement by ...	Connecting people to purpose <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▸ Why are they here?</li> <li>▸ How does what they/ the team do contribute?</li> </ul>	<b>Managers:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▸ Keep people connected to why they are there</li> </ul> <b>Individuals:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▸ Focus on being effective, rather than efficient</li> </ul>
	Setting clear goals	<b>Managers:</b> <p>Set stretching goals people can get their teeth into</p> <b>Individuals:</b> <p>Think holistically about your career</p>
Maintain a healthy hybrid team environment by ...	Consciously countering in-office biases	<b>Managers and individuals:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▸ Notice what assumptions you make about others</li> </ul> <b>Managers:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▸ Keep everyone front of mind (not just those you have seen recently)</li> <li>▸ Redefine 'presenteeism'</li> </ul> <b>Individuals:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▸ Don't fret about where you 'should be'</li> </ul>
	Establishing team norms and protocols	<b>Managers:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▸ Co-create a new hybrid team charter</li> <li>▸ Create a culture of support</li> <li>▸ Offer coaching to everyone around work-life boundary management</li> </ul>
Champion company culture by ...	Intentionally helping people build their networks	<b>Managers:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▸ Explicitly value the time people spend relationship building</li> <li>▸ Set up cross-functional learning opportunities</li> </ul> <b>Individuals:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▸ Proactively build and strengthen your network across the business</li> </ul>

# Conclusion

Whether the promises of hybrid working become a reality or an HR nightmare will come down to line manager attitudes and how well people are trained to manage hybrid teams.

However, it will also rely heavily on individuals becoming great hybrid workers, adopting fresh mindsets and work habits. Allowing people more autonomy in how, when and where they work, has potential to inject a fresh energy and motivation into a company, supporting people to be at their best and do great work. But this change, like all change, must be done with care and intention.





## References

1. [Research survey](#) commissioned by Robert Half. An online survey of 1,500 executives was conducted in November 2020, while the employee data cited in the report is an aggregate of results from online surveys conducted by Robert Half in Australia, Germany, Belgium, Brazil, France, The Netherlands, and the United Kingdom during the November 2020 – January 2021 period.
2. Financial Times (February 28th 2021) Employers aim for hybrid working after Covid-19 pandemic. [Article retrieved](#).
3. Donnelly, N., & Proctor-Thomson, S. B. (2015). Disrupted work: home-based teleworking (HbTW) in the aftermath of a natural disaster. *New Technology, Work and Employment*, 30, 47-61.
4. Casper, W. and Harris, C. (2008). "Work-life benefits and organizational attachment: self-interest utility and signaling theory models". *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 72, 95-109.
5. Hobfoll, S.E. (1989). "Conservation of resources: a new attempt at conceptualizing stress". *American Psychologist*, 44, 513.
6. Lautsch, B. A., & Kossek, E. E. (2011). Managing a blended workforce: telecommuters and non-telecommuters. *Organizational Dynamics*, 40, 10-17.
7. Whysall, Z. (2016). Managing Change: Insights from Neuroscience. Lane4 white paper, [retrieved from link](#).
8. Masuda, A. D., Holtschlag, C., & Nicklin, J. M. (2017). Why the availability of telecommuting matters: The effects of telecommuting on engagement via goal pursuit. *Career Development International*, 22, 200-219.
9. Lautsch, B. A., & Kossek, E. E. (2011). Managing a blended workforce: telecommuters and non-telecommuters. *Organizational Dynamics*, 40, 10-17.
10. Donnelly, N., & Proctor-Thomson, S. B. (2015). Disrupted work: home-based teleworking (HbTW) in the aftermath of a natural disaster. *New Technology, Work and Employment*, 30, 47-61.
11. Peters, P., den Dulk, L. and de Ruijter, J. (2010). "May I work from home? Views of the employment relationship reflected in line managers' telework attitudes in six financial-sector organizations". *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion*, 29, 517-531.
12. Kaplan, S., Engelsted, L., Lei, X., & Lockwood, K. (2018). Unpackaging manager mistrust in allowing telework: comparing and integrating theoretical perspectives. *Journal of Business and Psychology*, 33, 365-382.
13. Raffaele, C., & Connell, J. (2016). Telecommuting and co-working communities: what are the implications for individual and organizational flexibility? *Flexible work organizations*, 21-35.
14. Morganson, Valerie J., et al. "Comparing Telework Locations and Traditional Work Arrangements: Differences in Work-Life Balance Support, Job Satisfaction, and Inclusion." *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 25, 578-95.
15. Raffaele, C., & Connell, J. (2016). Telecommuting and co-working communities: what are the implications for individual and organizational flexibility? *Flexible work organizations*, 21-35.
16. Peters, P., Den Dulk, L., & De Ruijter, J. (2006). Requests for telecommuting: Exploring managerial decision making. In A. Gaudes (Ed.), *e-Networks in an increasingly volatile world* (pp. 213-237). New Brunswick: University of New Brunswick.
17. Dutcher, G., & Saral, K. J. (2014). The impact of beliefs on effort in telecommuting teams, SSRN. <http://ssrn.com/abstract=2153100> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2153100>
18. Elsbach, K., & Cable, D. (2012). Why showing your face at work matters. *MIT Sloan Management Review*, 53, 10-12.
19. Johns, T., & Gratton, L. (2013). The third wave of virtual work. *Harvard business review*, 91, 66-73.
20. Golden, T.D., Veiga, J.F., & Simsek, Z. (2006). Telecommuting's differential impact on work-family conflict: Is there no place like home? *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 91, 1340-1350.
21. Drucker, P. (2018). *The effective executive*. Routledge.
22. Amabile, T.M., & Kramer, S.J. (2011) The power of small wins. *Harvard Business Review*. 89. 70-80.



## EY | Building a better working world

**EY exists to build a better working world, helping to create long-term value for clients, people and society and build trust in the capital markets.**

**Enabled by data and technology, diverse EY teams in over 150 countries provide trust through assurance and help clients grow, transform and operate.**

**Working across assurance, consulting, law, strategy, tax and transactions, EY teams ask better questions to find new answers for the complex issues facing our world today.**

EY refers to the global organization, and may refer to one or more, of the member firms of Ernst & Young Global Limited, each of which is a separate legal entity. Ernst & Young Global Limited, a UK company limited by guarantee, does not provide services to clients. Information about how EY collects and uses personal data and a description of the rights individuals have under data protection legislation are available via [ey.com/privacy](https://ey.com/privacy). EY member firms do not practice law where prohibited by local laws. For more information about our organization, please visit [ey.com](https://ey.com).

### Ernst & Young LLP

The UK firm Ernst & Young LLP is a limited liability partnership registered in England and Wales with registered number OC300001 and is a member firm of Ernst & Young Global Limited.

Ernst & Young LLP, 1 More London Place, London, SE1 2AF.

© 2021 Ernst & Young LLP. Published in the UK.  
All Rights Reserved.

EYUK-000140237.indd (UK) 07/21. Artwork by Creative London.

EYSCORE 005394-21-UK  
ED None



In line with EY's commitment to minimise its impact on the environment, this document has been printed on paper with a high recycled content.

Information in this publication is intended to provide only a general outline of the subjects covered. It should neither be regarded as comprehensive nor sufficient for making decisions, nor should it be used in place of professional advice. Ernst & Young LLP accepts no responsibility for any loss arising from any action taken or not taken by anyone using this material.

**[ey.com/uk](https://ey.com/uk)**