# THE HYBRID WORK MODEL

## playbook:

Make hybrid work successful with these
research-backed insights, tips, and strategies

**Howspace**

# IN THIS EBOOK

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The hybrid work model playbook

# INTRODUCTION

There is no one-size-fits-all approach to the new world of work. Some employees love working from home—swapping a one-hour commute for a morning jog and enjoying more family time. Others are happiest at an office or co-working space full-time, with plenty of social interaction throughout the day. Many want the best of both worlds and the flexibility to choose when and where they work.

How we work best varies dramatically according to our personal preferences.

That's where the hybrid work model comes in—combining office and remote work. Some companies have been working in a hybrid environment well before COVID-19, but many others are struggling to iron out all the particulars with this model. How do you nail the balance between remote and in-office work? How do you encourage collaboration and engagement within teams no matter where individuals are located? And how do you sustain inclusion for all employees?

Just as organizations across the globe went fully remote at the start of the pandemic, many organizations now need to build a successful hybrid work model—or risk losing their employees.

We put together this ebook, including our original research and best practices, to help you make a smooth transition to hybrid work and effectively engage people in different environments.

Ilkka Mäkitalo
CEO, Howspace

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# THE HYBRID WORK SURVEY IN A NUTSHELL

We ran a global survey to better understand people's views and plans around hybrid work and to help solve their main challenges.
The 18-question survey was built in Howspace and open to both Howspace customers and partners as well as non-customers.

The survey sample was 303 team leaders, consultants, and employees across a range of industries and organization types and sizes in 31 countries between July 1, 2021 to August 6, 2021.

## Breakdown of survey respondents

- 85 team leaders
- 109 consultants
- 145 employees
- 94 from micro companies (1-9 employees)
- 59 from small companies (10-49 employees)
- 81 from medium-sized companies (50-249 employees)
- 105 from large companies (250+ employees)

The survey results are incorporated throughout the different chapters of this ebook.

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# KEY TAKEAWAYS

**Decision-making around the hybrid work model**

- The majority of respondents developed a new working model by discussing the ideal working environment in a post-pandemic world within their organization.
- The majority of respondents plan to take a virtual first, synchronous by default approach to work post COVID-19.
- Large companies (250+ employees) have the strictest policies for remote work, while small to medium-sized companies (between 1-250 employees) predominantly plan to offer complete freedom and flexibility around remote work.
- 20% of respondents who work as employees do not feel that leadership is taking action based on their feedback for how, where, and when they'd like to work.

*"The term 'hybrid' encompasses several concepts and creates messy conversations. It's not only about remote vs. in-person, but also about how they interact."*

*"Having been in the business of guiding organizations to their next best step toward growth and sustainability for a while, I see too many leaders and consultants settle for simplistic solutions. I would encourage us all to dive into the complicated situation we face, appreciate its complexity, and do the hard work of finding the essential aspects of simple, elegant solutions."*

*John Losey -  Facilitator and Owner of IntoWisdom Group*

## Transitioning to hybrid work: The benefits and challenges

- 94% of respondents feel well-equipped to transition to a hybrid work model, and 66% already have the tools and processes in place.

- Among all company sizes and for leaders, consultants, and employees alike, respondents claimed that the flexibility to choose where and when to work was the biggest benefit of the hybrid work model, followed by becoming more sustainable.

- The three biggest challenges of hybrid work, according to survey respondents, are:
  1) Not feeling connected to colleagues,
  2) Maintaining a strong and consistent organizational culture, and
  3) Feeling overwhelmed with more meetings and messages.

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*"The pandemic has been of great help in introducing a digital approach. Even customers and colleagues who have been negative about this have in a short time absorbed the technology in a good way."*

*Torbjorn Edvall - Business Advisor, Almi Nord*

*"My physical health has never been better. I can manage my time in a way I have never been able to do before, my commute to work has given me three hours per day back into my life, and I use them to be more physically active and physically present with my family."*

*Rebecca Fry - Manager, People Enablement at AIG*

*"The biggest challenge is how to make people understand that being remote doesn't equal being alone. We still need social interaction and collaboration. And Zoom fatigue isn't about Zoom per se, it's more about the fact that many don't have the skills for connecting with others remotely. Most people are tired of feeling isolated and alone if they cannot be heard or seen during meetings, webinars, trainings, etc. and there is still plenty that needs to be learned about using technology as part of social collaboration. We still need the F2F interaction—but we need it both in-person and online as well."*

*Heidi Wahl - Virtual Training Specialist/Founder of ViltOn Learning*

**The most crucial things respondents need to learn about hybrid working:**

> ❝
>
> **How to communicate things that used to be communicated informally before and after meetings, during breakes etc. Previously there were plenty of remote people, however there was no consideration of them by the office people.**
>
> Summary of "What are the most crucial things about hybrid working that you need to learn at your organization?" - discussion

*This is a machine-made summary by Howspace AI of 211 answers.*

## Learning in the hybrid work environment

- 70% of respondents would prefer a blended learning approach (a mix of learning both synchronously in-person and asynchronously online) in a hybrid work environment.

- 76% of respondents consider social learning in a work context (learning alongside others and supporting one another) to be very important.

## Collaboration in the hybrid work environment

- 79% of respondents feel they are able to effectively collaborate with colleagues in a virtual environment.

- Respondents' preferences for how to share their thoughts and opinions with others in their organization varies, with the majority preferring to share verbally during small in-person meetings.

- 74% of respondents' preference for in-person or virtual meetings depends on the purpose of the meeting.

*"I love meeting in person with my team. But our connection is already created through virtual meetings that we dedicate to strengthen our culture, purpose, and mission and in the way we communicate with each other in team meetings. When we see each other, everything is even better, but the value is already created—it only gets stronger."*

*Anonymous survey respondent*

## TOP QUESTIONS RESPONDENTS HAD AROUND HYBRID WORKING INCLUDE:

- How can we achieve the proper balance of remote and in-person work, and reap the benefits of both?

- How can we create more engagement and a sense of belonging throughout the whole company?

- How do we set clear principles and expectations for working at the office?

- How can we make sure that people who participate virtually in a meeting or workshop get the same experience as people who are participating live?

- How can we make sure that the people who work more remotely are not considered as "second class" employees?

- How can we limit the number of meetings and plan the most effective meetings and workshops?

# WHAT IS A HYBRID WORK MODEL AND WHY IS IT RELEVANT TODAY?

**What we talk about when we talk about hybrid work**

A hybrid work model allows some employees to work on-site while others work from different locations (home, or anywhere else). It's about adapting work to how teams operate best and creating experiences that are as inclusive and reach as many people as possible.

Hybrid work is not just a physical location issue—it's important to discuss both place and time. The hybrid work model is represented in the anywhere, anytime quadrant below.
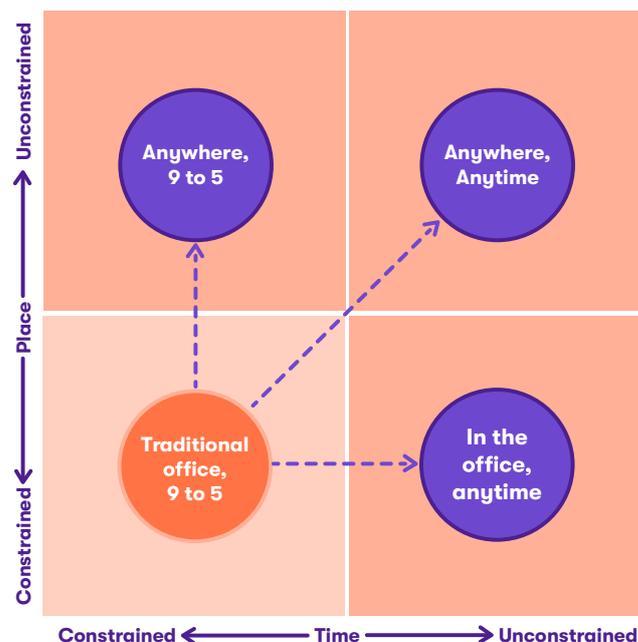


Original image source: Harvard Business Review

When considering the future of work, location shouldn't be leaders' main focus. Rather than focusing on in-person versus remote, what we really should be focusing on is how we can keep our people engaged and productive in different environments. Companies that find new ways to engage their employees and customers are more likely to keep and attract new talent and meet and even exceed their customers' expectations.
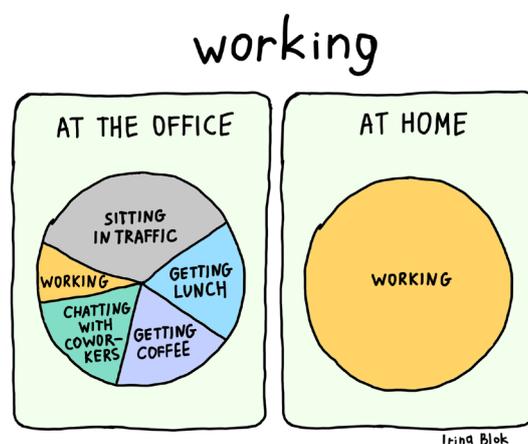
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## Many leaders are out of touch with their employees

The push for going back to the office is largely being driven from the top. Yet employees overwhelmingly expect flexible options. While the majority of global workers struggled through pandemic work conditions and considered leaving their employers, most business leaders said they were "thriving," according to a Microsoft Corp. survey of global workers.

And we all saw what happened with the backlash against Apple's return-to-work policy. In a letter to Apple CEO Tim Cook, employees stated outright, "Over the last year, we often felt not just unheard but at times actively ignored. It feels like there is a disconnect between how the executive team thinks about remote/location-flexible work and the lived experiences of many of Apple's employees."

During COVID-19, many leaders questioned how to "control" employees working from home and make sure they are not "wasting company time." This concern points to a lack of trust and highlights a rigid way of doing remote work—that it must conform to the traditional 9 to 5. While managers might suspect their employees are lying on the couch watching Netflix or online shopping during work hours, the reality is usually the opposite.



Original image source

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With so many people "rage quitting" their jobs, there's a lot at stake for leaders when it comes to implementing a hybrid work model.

While many of us understand that hybrid work is inevitable, 68% of organizations have no plan or detailed vision in place for hybrid work, according to a study by McKinsey.

## We will not go back to "normal"

Even the term "remote work" now seems outdated. Matt Hancocks, Senior Director Analyst at Gartner says, "As enterprises normalize working from home, concepts like 'distributed workplace,' 'hybrid workforce,' 'flexible work' and 'work from anywhere' are much more apt for the current environment."

While some refer to "getting back to normal" post-Covid, the reality is that our work lives pre-pandemic weren't "normal." So instead of looking back, we can pause and begin to craft fluid organizational models that empower people to work in ways that best suit their wellbeing and productivity.



Original image source

As Sonya Renee Taylor says, "We will not go back to normal. Normal never was. Our pre-corona existence was not normal other than we normalized greed, inequity, exhaustion, depletion, extraction, disconnection, confusion, rage, hoarding, hate and lack. We should not long to return, my friends. We are being given the opportunity to stitch a new garment. One that fits all of humanity and nature."

# THE MAIN BENEFITS OF THE HYBRID WORK MODEL

Hybrid work benefits employers and employees alike. Employers get to invest in their people and in growing their business instead of office space. And employees can improve their overall wellbeing, reduce costs associated with commuting, and gain access to more career opportunities without being limited by their geographical location.

Let's dive deeper into the key advantages of hybrid work.

# 1. Increased productivity

A hybrid model can offer flexibility and empower employees to work to their strengths, which in turn boosts productivity. And according to our survey results shown below, flexibility was the number one benefit of hybrid work.

**What do you see as the biggest benefits of hybrid working?**
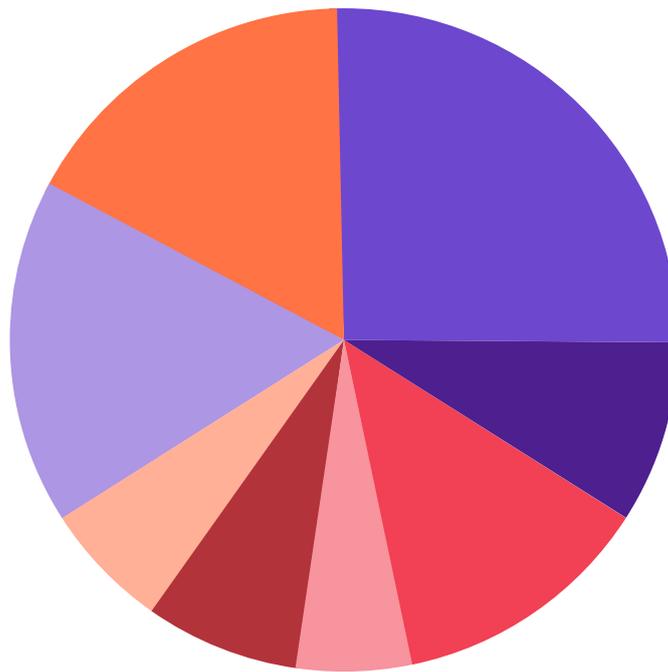
- (242) Having the flexibility to choose where and when I work
- (83) Feeling more comfortable being myself at work
- (116) Better overall sense of wellbeing
- (46) Better organizational culture
- (73) Better opportunities for innovation
- (52) Better company reputation
- (164) Becoming more sustainable and reducing our organization's carbon footprint
- (156) Reducing costs (company or individual-level)

By encouraging a culture that views remote work as a positive alternative to completing deep-focus tasks in the office, teams can find a good balance of creativity and collaboration. Employees who need peace and quiet to focus or who thrive in an office setting can be given the choice to work where and when they're most productive.

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It's important to note that remote work doesn't only mean working from home—home-working doesn't necessarily suit everyone all the time. When employees want or need to work elsewhere, they can travel to a café or co-working space nearby where they can interact with others. And companies could subsidize employees working in professional working spaces close to them. Through the UK start-up Flown, for example, companies can buy time in bulk from rental places to support their employees.
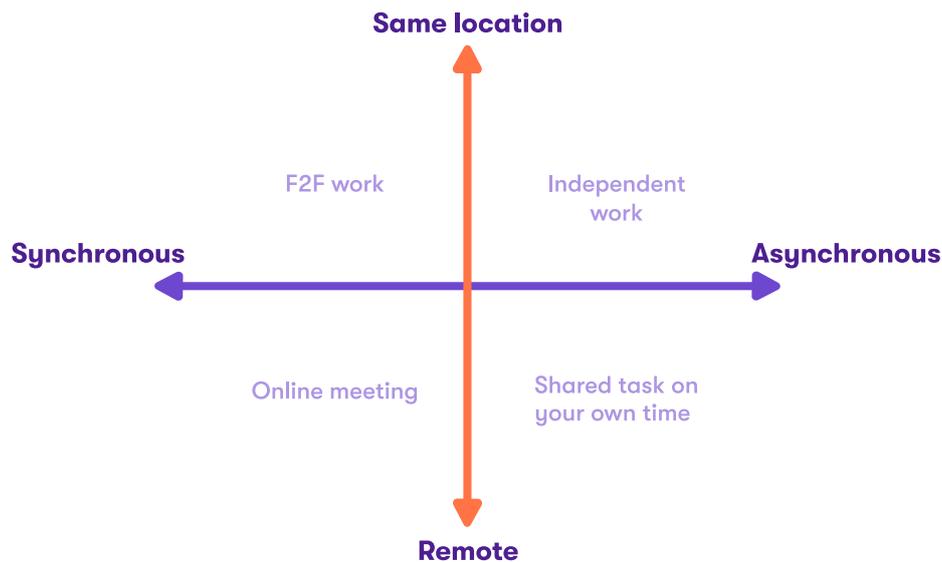
According to Gartner, organizations must invest equally in four different work modes if they are to enable a successful hybrid environment.

## Synchronously:

- Working together, together: when teams are colocated, contributing to meetings in a shared space.

- Working together, apart: when teams are distributed, but participating in virtual meetings.

## Asynchronously:

- Working alone, together: when teams are in shared spaces, but not working at the same time.

- Working alone, apart: when teams are distributed, and individuals are conducting deep-focus work alone at home.

**Same location**

F2F work          Independent work

**Synchronous** ←————————————→ **Asynchronous**

Online meeting      Shared task on your own time

**Remote**

*Adapted from the work of John Losey, IntoWisdom Group*

With four modes to choose from, leaders should be thoughtful in designing collaboration opportunities and developing employees' skills in each area. Hybrid work uses digital tools to support synchronous interaction between in-person and remote participants, and these tools should facilitate participation, collaboration, and communication. For asynchronous work, focus on transparency as much as possible.

**Which activities are best suited to the different work modes?**

Relationship building and networking activities, as well as hands-on training programs and active "games" often work best in a shared physical space. But that doesn't mean they're impossible to facilitate in a virtual setting—we just need to think outside the box. For example, try adding a physical element to virtual relationship building activities such as cooking or eating together. You can also ask people to share photos of their workday, mood, or remote work environment with the other group members. Adding a personal touch increases trust and engagement within the group.

Activities including information sharing, introducing new tools and technology, and reflections on learning and content can easily be done asynchronously.

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> Activities like break-out groups, introductions, brainstorming, idea sharing, and decision making could be done together at the same time, and can be in-person just as well as virtual.

Organizations with the biggest productivity increases during the pandemic have supported and encouraged "small moments of engagement" among their employees, according to McKinsey. These small moments are where coaching, idea sharing, mentoring, and collaborative work happen. This productivity boost stems from training managers to reimagine processes and rethink how employees can thrive at work.

## 2. Improved employee satisfaction and culture

Autonomy is the key to employee satisfaction: If you provide full autonomy and decision-making on how, where, and when your team members work, employee satisfaction will skyrocket.

Autonomy is important for on-site workers, too. Employees who return to the office after over a year of setting their own schedule will need to feel that they are trusted to get work done without a manager standing by.

At Howspace, mutual appreciation and positive assumptions are guiding principles. When we don't see each other every day, it's easy to make assumptions about other employees—we keep these assumptions positive, trusting that everyone is doing their best and making responsible decisions. If we don't understand an intention, we might ask a question such as "Can you help me understand what you are doing and why?" Doing this sometimes takes a little courage, but the cultural benefits are huge.

## 3. More possibilities for continuous learning

Many organizations are performance-driven—but too often, the result is there's not enough time for learning because employees are too busy performing. An output-focused approach does not enable the long-term development of your employees, and high productivity can mask an exhausted workforce.

Leaders should be humble enough to recognize that learning doesn't happen only in training courses. Create everyday opportunities for learning and reflection. When the workday comprises back-to-back meetings, it's difficult for anyone to generate enough mental capacity to reflect or process information. Encourage your employees to take time for self-development, learning, and reflection.

The beauty of the hybrid work model is that employees can choose to work whenever they please, meaning they can schedule time for learning and improvement more easily than if they were fully remote or office workers.

## 4. Improved mental health

According to data from Microsoft, one in five global survey respondents say their employer doesn't care about their work-life balance.

While work and life may rarely be in perfect balance, work-life fit is a vital aspect of any healthy working environment. And hybrid work enables each employee to fit their work and life together in a way that works for them. This reduces stress and helps prevent burnout.

Think of it this way: Work leaks into your life, but rarely does life leak into your work. So if the weather is beautiful now, go outside and enjoy it—you can finish your work later.

Fully remote work reduces human interaction, which can adversely affect your employees' mental state. Therefore, it's important to create opportunities that optimize communication and foster mental well-being. This will also strengthen the connections that make teams thrive.

As leaders look to sustain productivity gains while empowering employees to make work-life fit decisions under a hybrid model, they will need to design and facilitate conditions that encourage communication and team building.

When planned carefully and strategically, the hybrid work model has the potential to take your organization to a new level of productivity.

## 5. Reduced carbon footprint

Another major benefit of hybrid work, according to our survey results, is the ability for organizations to reduce their negative impact on the environment.

Reducing the need for people to commute to work can dramatically reduce your company's carbon footprint. When employees can spend more time at home or commute shorter distances to work from local cafés or co-working spaces, you can help ease congestion on cities' traffic.

### How Wärtsilä Energy benefited from the hybrid model during a strategy process

By running strategy work the hybrid way, Wärtsilä Energy — a global leader in sustainable energy solutions—was able to work towards their ambitious goal of leading the transition towards a 100% renewable energy future.

*"Due to the COVID-19, we were not able to get together and spend days in strategy workshops with different groups. We had to be efficient and work within small, 1–2 hour sets now and then. We had to create and facilitate a different journey than before and keep that process up for quite a long time.*

*We wouldn't have been able to run this through without Howspace. Our mission statement is 100% renewable energy, and we were even able to live that mission true. Think about how much we saved the planet by not flying around the world to get together to work on the strategy. We are really here to save the world,"* describes Wärtsilä's Talent development lead, Kati Järvinen.

## 6. Reduced costs for employees and employers

While cutting costs is not usually the main motivation for companies to transition to a hybrid model, it's still an important advantage to keep in mind.

Companies can save about $11,000 for each employee that works in a hybrid manner, according to an EY study. And employees also appreciate saving on public transportation, gas, and lunches out when working from home.

# COMMON CHALLENGES OF HYBRID WORK AND HOW TO OVERCOME

There's no denying that the hybrid work model is more challenging compared to a fully virtual or in-office model. Next, we'll take a closer look at the most common challenges with hybrid work and how to overcome them.

## Creating clear expectations and guidelines for remote and office work

Most companies built workforce policies around in-person employees, as 90% of employees worldwide were on-site prior to COVID-19, according to Accenture. With the world of work dramatically changing, it's time to rethink these guidelines.

A big question on leaders' minds is how to determine the right balance between on-site and off-site work, and how to know when to push one or the other. But as we've seen with the backlash against Apple's new hybrid work policy, dictating specific days for employees to be on-site likely won't bode well for all organizations.

Companies including GitLab and DropBox now take a "virtual first and asynchronous by default" approach. But what's the right approach for your company?

## The solution:

The best way to craft a remote work policy that works for your organization is to make decisions together with the company.

According to our survey, most organizations discuss the ideal working environment in a post-pandemic world together to make new working model decisions:

**Within your organization, have you discussed the ideal working environment in a post-pandemic world?**
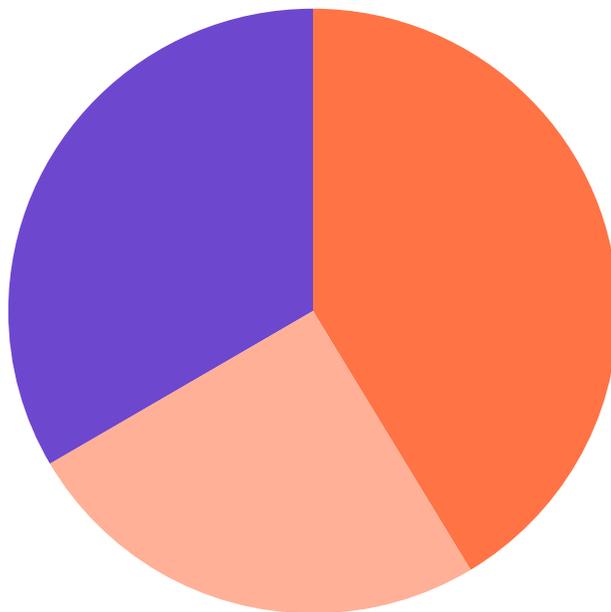


- 🟧 (127) Yes, that's how we developed the new working model
- 🟧 (74) Not yet, but planning
- 🟪 (101) Post-COVID working model decisions are being made within the leadership team

Employees will have different preferences for how and when they'd like to work. Simply find out their preferences and enable managers to understand and accommodate those preferences.

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**Dan Price** · 3rd+
Founder/CEO, Gravity Payments
3w · 🌐

+ Follow

Instead of making a top-down CEO decision, we asked our 200 employees where they want to work.

Only 7% wanted to go back to the office full time.
31% wanted a home-office hybrid.
60% wanted full-time remote work.

So we told everyone: do what you want.
This stuff isn't hard.

👍 👏 ❤️ 106,533 · 2,980 comments

As Steve Grace, founder of The Nudge Group, puts it, "The main issue most organizations or managers have with hybrid working or remote working is centred around trust. But, in my opinion, if you're worried about whether your staff are being productive when they're working remotely, you've got a hiring issue.

Treat people like adults, let them work the way they feel is best for them, give them the flexibility to suit the different stages in their life, and you'll see this will result in happier and better performing team members."

The role of the office also has to change with the hybrid work model. Agree within your organization what its new purpose could be. When people choose to go to the office now, they should feel it's worth the commute.
It should be seen as a place for collaboration, connection, and creativity.

## Fostering connections among employees

Humans are social creatures. As much as some of us might love working from home (perhaps with furry coworkers), social connection is still vital. The biggest challenge with hybrid work is not feeling connected to colleagues, according to our survey results.

**What do you see as a biggest challenges of hybrid working?**
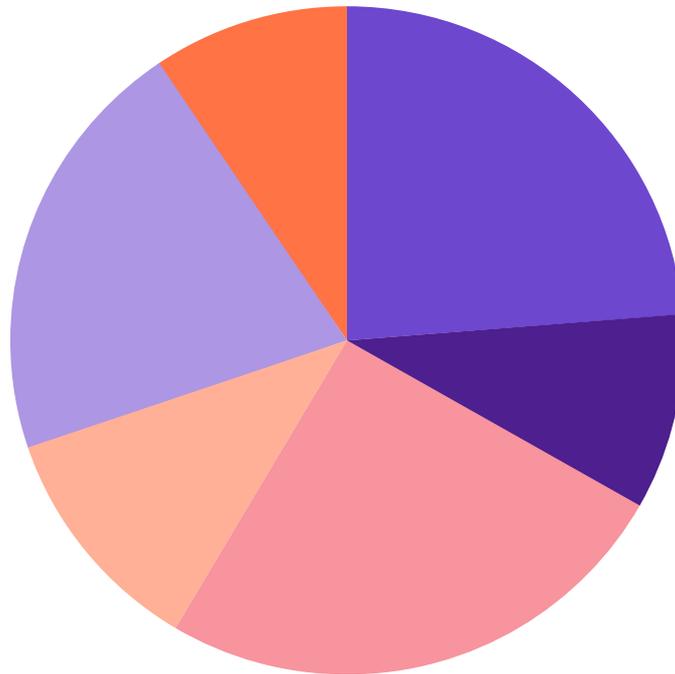


- ■ (156) Maintaining a strong and consistent organizational culture
- ■ (63) Unconscious bias: Remote employess being seen as second-class citizens
- ■ (166) Not feeling connected to colleagues
- ■ (74) Dealing with unclear expectations and guidelines for remote working
- ■ (138) Feeling overwhelmed with more meetings and messages (Zoom fatigue, Slack, email, etc.)
- ■ (61) There aren't many challenges: I like the hybrid working model

Before COVID-19, it may have seemed impossible to create meaningful connections at work in a virtual world. But by going through the pandemic together, we experienced a shared vulnerability. Work became more human as we saw each other's homes, pets, and children in video call backgrounds.

Still, human interaction can be missed when working remotely, which puts pressure on the mental state of employees. But after a year of video calls—both at work and in our social lives—casual connections through virtual coffee chats and happy hours might feel a bit stale. How can we foster strong connections in a hybrid environment?

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## The solution:

It's important to create moments and opportunities that optimize human interaction and mental well-being. Without developing these habits, it's easy to lose the bonds and human connections that make teams thrive.

Research shows that people who interact with their coworkers more closely than before experienced stronger work bonds as well as higher levels of productivity and better overall well-being.

**Try these approaches to foster more spontaneous interactions:**

- **Buddy systems:** Assign a "work buddy" to new employees who will act as a mentor and have regular one-to-one meetings during their first weeks or months at the company.

- **Walk & talks:** Have walking meetings or catch-ups with your team, and encourage your team members to book these with each other. Walk & talks help you achieve two important goals: exercise and social connection. Plus, they help combat the Zoom fatigue we've all experienced.

- **Music quizzes:** Music truly does bring people together—and so does a bit of healthy competition. A music quiz works best when there is a theme to follow. It could be movie soundtracks, 90's hip hop, or space-related tunes. All you need is an account on your favorite music streaming service, a chat function, and someone to prepare and host the quiz. The host plays 30 seconds of the song and asks a related question, and everyone types their answers to the chat.

- **Open office hours:** To help foster more spontaneous conversations in a way that doesn't disturb people's work, leaders and employees can add open (virtual) office hours to their calendars or status bars. During designated time slots, anyone can then jump on a call with that person to bounce ideas off each other, talk through a challenge they're facing, or just have a friendly check-in.

- **Virtual coworking:** Individuals can join a group video call to each work on their own projects. By keeping cameras and microphones on, people get the sense that they're sharing the space with others, and it can help some people to boost accountability and productivity.

Make sure to review your approaches regularly with your team to avoid putting energy into activities that aren't actually working for people.

Considering that people have different energy levels when it comes to social interaction, balance is key here. As a leader, you don't want employees to feel completely drained or utterly isolated.

We need to keep the social aspect in mind in all meetings—not only sessions that are meant for social connectivity. When we join an in-person meeting, we often get to know the new participants at the beginning just by looking around and chatting. But in the virtual setting, we often forget to create that room for connection.

By paying attention to meeting design and asking check-in and check-out questions, we can incorporate relationship building in all our interactions. For example, simply asking how others are doing as people—not just employees—gives room for everyone to openly share their thoughts.

Building connections among a distributed workforce requires being intentional. Having a shared virtual space where employees can communicate with each other, share ideas, support one another, and feel part of a community is key.

# MAINTAINING A STRONG AND CONSISTENT ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

The most successful companies have a strong organizational culture based on commonly shared values that are supported by strategy and structure. An organization's culture tends to emerge over time, especially in periods of rapid change.

In light of the rapid change brought about by COVID-19, it's not surprising that maintaining a strong culture was named a top challenge by our survey respondents.

## The solution:

When it comes to planning new hybrid arrangements, make sure they accentuate your company's values and support its culture. How? Work together with everyone in the company to create a new work model that's engaging, fair, inspiring, and meaningful.

Because culture is an essential part of the entire organization, the entire organization's wisdom is needed to understand how it can and should change.

Rather than just running one survey to collect employee feedback, nurture constant feedback to maintain a strong team culture. Engage your employees through continual dialogue to help them move from awareness of the change, through understanding it, to embracing it.

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By increasing feelings of psychological safety, trust, and of belonging to something important, you'll strengthen the best parts of your company culture.

## Reducing unconscious bias and building an inclusive hybrid workplace

Unconscious biases are assumptions our brains make without us being aware of them. Many employers have underlying "proximity bias," meaning they believe on-site employees are more productive than remote employees. Despite the global lockdowns and rise of remote work during COVID-19, it's still possible to carry this bias in the transition to hybrid work.

Remote workers can be affected by other types of bias too, like affinity bias, attribution bias, and gender bias. Remote employees often feel that they have less advantage in terms of career advancement, for example.

If organizations don't keep diversity, inclusion, and equity top of mind when planning a hybrid work model, they risk creating new inequities or worsening existing ones. At the core of this challenge is ensuring the workplace is an even playing field for all employees in terms of compensation and advancement.

### The solution:

Leaders need to be aware of these biases and proactively nurture a fair and inclusive workplace. We all have biases, so it's not a failure to admit these to ourselves or our team. Don't be afraid to challenge your own assumptions and adjust your mindset.

One way leaders can prevent bias in the hybrid workplace is by regularly checking in with their team. Only through regular honest conversations and feedback loops can you gain insight into what challenges your team members are facing and what's on their mind. By promoting open dialogue and enabling employees to have difficult conversations, you'll build trust among your team and reinforce your company values.

Note that if an employee is feeling marginalized, it often isn't easy for them to speak up. It's important for leaders to strengthen the feeling of [psychological safety](). One way to promote open expression is by allowing employees to share their opinions anonymously. After they see all anonymous comments, employees can then discuss topics in smaller break-out rooms. When employees feel comfortable opening up in a safe space, you'll get more honest feedback to work with.

Here's an example of a question you can ask in a digital platform and collect anonymous answers for:

# What conversations aren't happening and what's the impact?
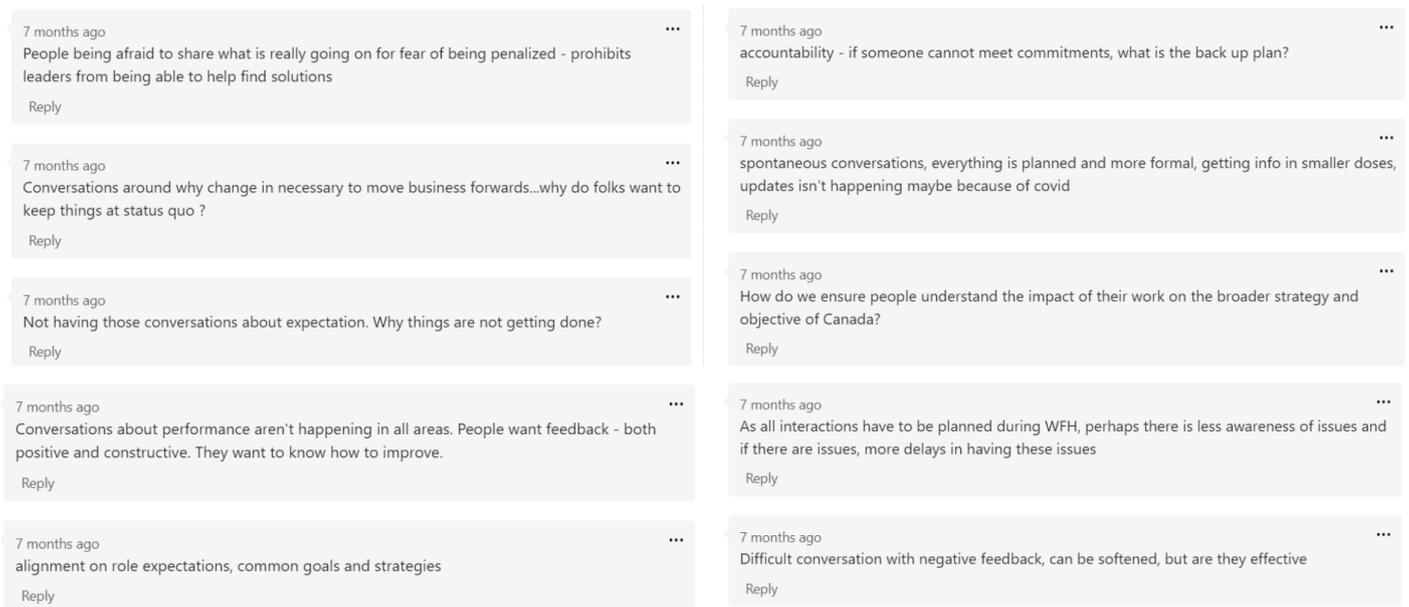
7 months ago
People being afraid to share what is really going on for fear of being penalized - prohibits leaders from being able to help find solutions

Reply

7 months ago
Conversations around why change in necessary to move business forwards...why do folks want to keep things at status quo ?

Reply

7 months ago
Not having those conversations about expectation. Why things are not getting done?

Reply

7 months ago
Conversations about performance aren't happening in all areas. People want feedback - both positive and constructive. They want to know how to improve.

Reply

7 months ago
alignment on role expectations, common goals and strategies

Reply

7 months ago
accountability - if someone cannot meet commitments, what is the back up plan?

Reply

7 months ago
spontaneous conversations, everything is planned and more formal, getting info in smaller doses, updates isn't happening maybe because of covid

Reply

7 months ago
How do we ensure people understand the impact of their work on the broader strategy and objective of Canada?

Reply

7 months ago
As all interactions have to be planned during WFH, perhaps there is less awareness of issues and if there are issues, more delays in having these issues

Reply

7 months ago
Difficult conversation with negative feedback, can be softened, but are they effective

Reply

*Image from a Howspace customer's workspace*

## Dealing with digital overwhelm

Feeling overwhelmed with more meetings and messages was another top challenge with hybrid work, according to our survey results.

Zooms and virtual meetings (which are needed from time to time for coordination) are playing too heavy of a role as part of hybrid work. According to data from Microsoft, weekly Teams chats per person are up 45% since Feb 2020, and the weekly meeting time on Teams has risen by over 148%—way more than double than what it was in 2020. We need to learn new ways of working where not all working hours are spent in back-to-back meetings and the 'real work' is done on weekends and evenings.

As Keith Ferrazzi, chairman and founder of Ferrazzi Greenlight said, "What most companies did this past year is export every meeting of 15 people into a virtual room of 15 tiles and follow the same old rules. There's not enough stopping to think: Do we even need a meeting to solve this problem?"
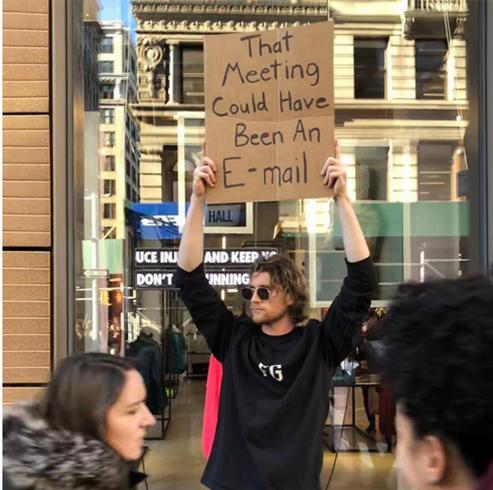


©Seth Phillips/Dude With Sign

Plus, 74% of team members in traditional meetings are conflict avoidant, according to Ferrazzi Greenlight research. "They do not speak up with the courage and candor that is necessary to mitigate risk in projects or spark the bold thinking that ignites innovation," says Ferrazi.

The hybrid model calls for new ways of collaborating that allow for a balance of focused work and opportunities to discuss ideas and opinions together.

## The solution:

Finding new ways of working can be done by adapting a facilitator's mindset—understanding how human relationships work and designing the work to best suit these habits and needs. We can take an exploratory approach and ask ourselves "How can I best accomplish this goal?" rather than automatically booking a meeting, for example.

If leaders and experts facilitate dialogue and talk about which are the best ways to work, it provides the opportunity to build relationships to a whole new level as individuals gain more understanding about each other and their life as a whole.

Use meetings as the last resort—rather than the default way—to discuss things together as a group. You can free up your team's schedule by eliminating some meetings and making other meetings, such as status updates, asynchronous instead.

Pay close attention to how you set up your meetings, workshops, or processes. "Well begun is half done," as Aristotle said. When everyone understands the purpose of the session ahead of time, participants are more likely to engage in meaningful discussions on the topic. And as Gregory Bateson said, "Without context, words and actions have no meaning at all." Make sure participants understand the reason why they're present and what they're trying to achieve. You can set the context and agenda well beforehand, and ask participants to do some pre-work to tune into the topic.

## Try this tip 💡

Don't assume everyone is on the same page at the start of a meeting or workshop. Start your session (either face-to-face or virtual) by creating a clear context or working agreement. By taking time to get started all together or co-creating the agreement with participants, you'll increase engagement and help set the tone that it's not a sit and listen session, but an active participation session.

More and more organizations are favoring asynchronous collaboration. For example, Brian Casel, founder of software product [ZipMessage](#) says, "My team constantly struggles with "Zoom Fatigue" and we found excessive zoom calls with team and customers is both draining and unproductive.

We've moved most of our asynchronous conversations to ZipMessage so that we can still have face-to-face conversations, without having to book live Zoom calls all the time.

The result is: Higher value conversations and input from our team, since they have the space to consider their response before posting. Plus, a lot more time on everyone's calendars to focus on their work and get a lot more done each day."

Not every person feels comfortable sharing their thoughts out loud or in meetings. In fact, people's preferences for sharing their opinions with others varies quite a bit, according to our survey results:

**When do you feel most comfortable openly sharing your thoughts and opinions with others in your organization?**
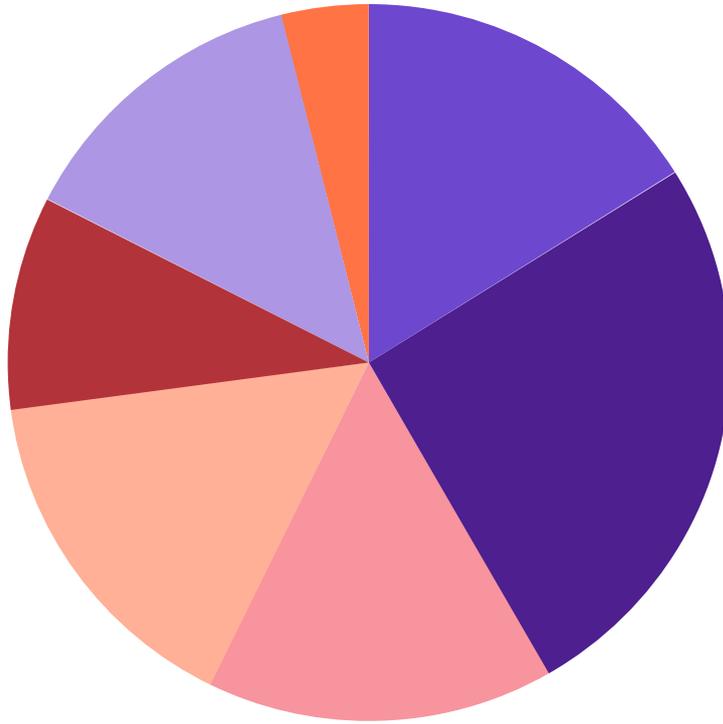


- ■ (65) Verbally, during in-person meetings (the size of the meeting doesn't matter)
- ■ (103) Verbally, during small in-person meetings (8 or fewer people)
- ■ (62) Verbally, during small video calls (8 or fewer people)
- ■ (63) Verbally, in-person, one-to-one
- ■ (38) Verbally, during a video or phone call, one-to-one
- ■ (55) In writing, asynchrosnously (so I have time to formulate my thoughts)
- ■ (16) In writing, asynchrosnously and anonymously

A digital collaboration environment enables you to create a transparent dialogue between a limitless amount of people, no matter where they are. This makes it easy for everyone—even the shyest ones—to take part in discussions and voice opinions at any point.

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## Try this tip 💡

Have a "silent conversation" with a group on a topic:
Ask group members to first share their own thoughts in writing in a joint chat, and encourage them to "listen" to others' thoughts (for example, through likes) and to respond to others' comments. You can further lower the threshold by keeping the conversation anonymous so everyone can feel comfortable sharing their ideas openly.

## Learning in a hybrid organization

Very few organizations do not aspire to be "learning organizations"—i.e. organizations with an innate capability to learn and evolve in an agile way. According to Harvard Business Review, a learning organization is an organization skilled at creating, acquiring, and transferring knowledge, and at modifying its behavior to reflect new knowledge and insights. Organizations capable of this are superior to their peers when it comes to retaining and nurturing talent, staying on top of competition, and developing innovations.

That's why it's crucial for every organization to also focus on learning in the hybrid era. As the name suggests, hybrid learning is a learning method where some participants are physically present in a shared space, while others join virtually at the same time.

## What's the difference between hybrid and blended learning?

Blended learning is often used interchangeably with hybrid learning, but they are not quite the same. It's a small but significant difference because it relates to where participants are physically when the peer interactions take place.

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Blended learning is a method that combines online and in-person elements, along with some self-directed learning. A blended learning program can include in-person training sessions, online learning materials and assignments, and regular peer-to-peer discussion, which can all take place within a [social learning](#) platform. Micro-learning—where content is delivered in easily-digestible, bite-sized chunks—is a key component of blended learning.

Blended learning is by far the preferred learning method, according to our survey results:

## How would you prefer to learn at work in a hybrid enviornment?
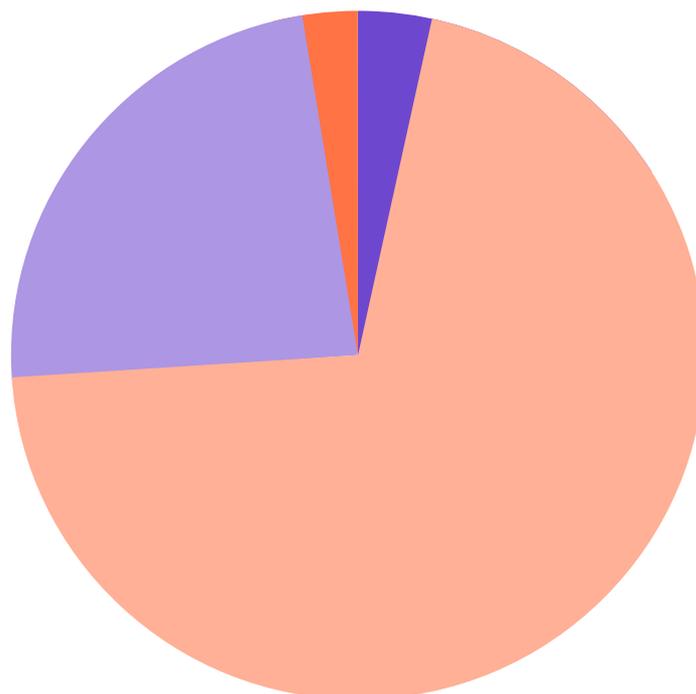


- (10) Fully in-person
- (209) A mix of learning both synchronously in-person and asynchronously online
- (69) Fully online, a mix of synchronous and and asynchronous
- (8) Fully online, asynchronous

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And social learning is extremely important to many of us:

**When it comes to learning at work, how important is social learning to you? (i.e. learning alongside others and supporting one another)**
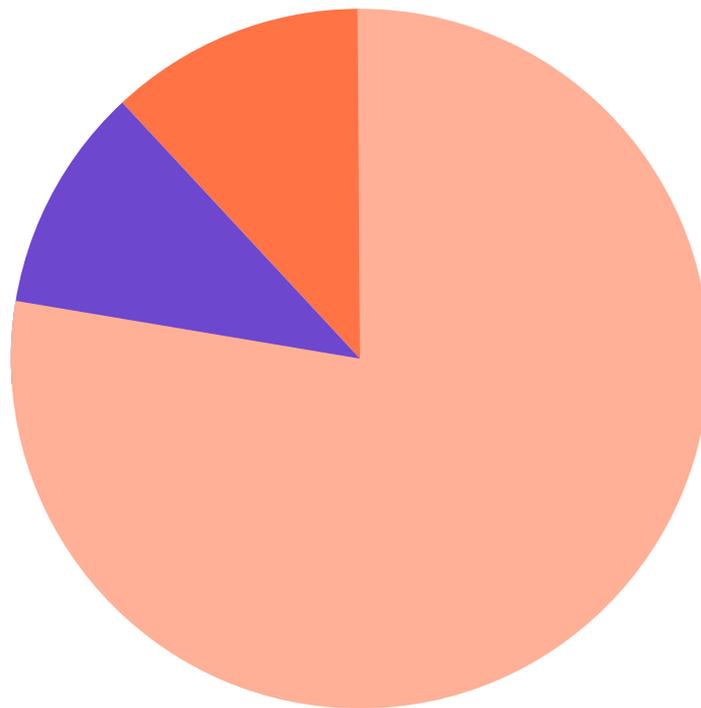


- 🟧 (211) It's very important for me
- 🟪 (28) It sounds good, but I haven't had this experience before
- 🟧 (33) I'd rather learn completely on my own

In a blended learning environment, participants are all in the same location for face-to-face activities. In a hybrid learning environment, however, facilitators use digital tools to support synchronous interaction between in-person and remote participants.

No matter which methods you use, aim to find the right balance and don't limit yourself with set ratios or equal splits. Instead, consider your training objectives and the value you're bringing to learners.

## When does it make sense to use a hybrid learning model?

When planning your organizational learning and training programs, consider:

- **Purpose:** What are you aiming to accomplish with your learning or training program?

- **Costs:** What's the budget for the program?

- **Travelling distance:** Are you expecting participants to travel? If so, from how far?

For example, if most of your participants are in the same city, planning a hybrid learning program won't take anything away from those who decide to join in person. And you won't feel the need to squeeze your training into one long day to maximize the time of people travelling from far away. At the same time, you'll give everyone the flexibility and freedom to choose how to join. It's a win-win.

On the other hand, if participants are scattered around the world and it's either impossible to meet in person or it doesn't make financial sense to fly everyone in, planning a fully virtual session might be your best bet.

Fully in-person training sessions might be the right choice if your main objective is team building and fostering relationships between colleagues, or if you're organizing sensitive crisis management training.

*To sum it up:* *Why not take the hybrid learning approach if you can? If some participants are able and willing to join in person and you have the budget and means to make that work, then go for it.*

# STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESSFUL HYBRID MEETINGS AND LEARNING PROGRAMS

Whether you're planning a hybrid meeting, workshop, or learning program, follow these four strategies to ensure success.

## 1. Think of the remote participants first

When it comes to hybrid sessions, a common concern is that those joining virtually will feel like "second-class" participants. How can you make sure every voice is heard and provide an equally wonderful experience for all participants—regardless of their location?

Unfortunately, it's easy to forget about the online participants when those in-person tend to dominate the conversation. To ensure remote participants feel heard and involved, organize everything in such a way that they are top of mind.

Put away the Sharpies and post-it notes, and plan all collaborative work like brainstorming, answering questions, and submitting tasks to be done digitally—whether people are in the classroom or joining remotely. All participants can use their phones or laptops and work within the same online platform.

## Try this tip

Use a shared document to have participants anonymously journal (off-camera while listening to music), then have participants read other people's responses, and answer reflection questions on camera.

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## 2. It takes two: Pair up with another facilitator

Especially when facilitating large groups, it's a good idea to share the responsibility.

One facilitator can take the lead with the in-person participants, and another can focus on the remote participants. This way, both groups will receive the needed guidance and get timely answers to their questions. And it won't feel like double the work for one facilitator trying to engage all participants while simultaneously dealing with any technical problems that arise.

Having two facilitators is not meant to divide in-person and remote groups, but rather ensure they have a shared learning experience and feel equally supported.

## 3. Rethink face-to-face learning methods

Trying to duplicate the face-to-face environment in a hybrid setting doesn't quite work. For virtual and hybrid workshops, a whole new mindset is required.

Don't be afraid to let go of content that worked for exclusively in-person sessions, but that doesn't serve learners in a hybrid environment. For example, you might have previously run three-day training programs to maximize the time of those travelling to be there. But can you rethink that model?

> ## Try this tip
>
> Split a full-day workshop into two morning or afternoon workshops, and ask people to do some asynchronous work in between those two workshops. This way, you'll likely be able to accomplish more work, while ensuring everyone can attend from different countries and time zones. Participants will also be more likely to take responsibility for their own learning.

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Putting the participant experience first, you might choose to take a blended and hybrid approach, spacing out your workshop or training program over time so you can make a bigger impact on learning outcomes and create post-session sustainability.

Besides live sessions, planning ongoing asynchronous activities that are integrated into participants' day-to-day work is crucial for the learning to stick. By using one centralized platform for collaboration, you connect all participants and allow them to learn from each other.

## 4. Facilitate separate in-person & virtual break-out groups

Since group work is key to engage people, you don't want to drop it in the hybrid environment. For synchronous break-out sessions, having separate groups for remote and in-person participants will make things a lot easier. When doing so, make sure that all participants record their work in the same online platform. That way, neither group will miss out on each other's learnings.

Of course, if there are specific reasons you don't want to do this, you can mix the groups and have remote participants join in via video call. However, you'll want to be sure you have the right equipment—including screens and microphones—so that remote participants can be heard and also properly hear what those in-person are discussing.

**5 tips from leadership coach Kathy Ball-Tonic to build connection in virtual and hybrid environments:**

- Create connection as soon as people "arrive"—send logistics out ahead of time and review them only after they are engaged.

- Have participants "do" something every five or so minutes, even raising their hand signals to the brain to pay attention.

- Take out 25% of your content and replace it with connection.

- Add play—laughter is great!

- Practice your technology, and practice it again, and once more. You want to be able to focus on your gifts as a facilitator and not the platform.

# THE TOOLS AND TECHNOLOGY WE NEED FOR SUCCESSFUL HYBRID WORK

A major change since the pandemic is that technology has gone from a supporting role to a central role. Companies have not only adopted more digital tools to survive the pandemic, but many have realized virtual collaboration can actually be superior to what's possible in-person.

To succeed in the hybrid work model and collaborate effectively remotely, we need a mix of tools for:

- Video conferencing
- Whiteboarding
- Surveys, polls, and data collection
- Note-taking and productivity
- File storage and sharing
- Presentations, videos, and graphics
- Project management
- Online learning
- Scheduling
- Digital facilitation

**The most common tools used for effective remote work, according to our survey results, include:**

Microsoft Teams, Howspace, Zoom, Google Meet, Slack, and email.

Other common tools include Survey Monkey, Miro, SessionLab, Box Collaboration, Flinga, Mentimeter, Gantt, Asana, and other Microsoft and Google suite tools.

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> **Zoom, Google meet, Howspace, google chat, email. Slack for internal conversations and team collaboration, Box for document collaboration, Howspace for facilitation, Teams for client collaboration. Microsoft Teams, Howspace and all other Microsoft tools.**
>
> Summary of "Which tools currently allow you to work effectively remotely? Please share all that come to mind." - discussion

*This is a machine-made summary by Howspace AI.*

On top of digital collaboration tools, it's also important to ensure that employees have all the necessary tools and equipment to get their work done remotely. This may seem obvious, but 42% of employees say they lack essential office supplies at home. And 46% say their employer doesn't help them with remote work expenses, according to a Microsoft study.

It's crucial for employers to identify the requirements needed for long-term well-being at work, and make sure every employee has access to the same resources.

## Have a central hub for all dialogue

While several tools are needed in a hybrid work environment, Howspace is the only tool available that allows you to facilitate a dialogue. It was built specifically for digital facilitation, and you can do almost everything listed above, all on a single platform.

Howspace differs from other online collaboration tools and social networks in a way that facilitators can guide the conversation and empower individuals to use the platform to have meaningful conversations and drive deep change.

**Pro-tips for combining tools:**

- Create a script for yourself which reminds you when to use each tool, and clearly communicate that to all employees.

- Test new tools and tool combinations with a colleague before using them so that you can start a workshop or meeting relaxed and with a plan in mind.

- Remember your choices for digital collaboration are almost endless (in a good way). Answering questions through a virtual poll might be more effective and efficient since it won't take away time from a live meeting. How about whiteboarding on a tool like Miro, and then dropping it into your digital facilitation hub like Howspace?

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## CONCLUSION

When it comes to hybrid work, there is no cookie-cutter solution for all people, roles, or projects. A hybrid work model will look different for each organization, and co-creating that model with everyone in your company is the key to success.

When considering what type of hybrid work model best suits your organization, ask yourself "How can we best encourage collaboration and engagement within teams no matter where individuals are located?" rather than "How many days a week should I ask employees to show up to the office?"

Trust is a crucial component to succeeding with the hybrid work model: Build a work environment based on positive assumptions, trusting that everyone is doing their best and making responsible decisions.

If you want to facilitate meaningful dialogue in the hybrid work environment, why not give Howspace a try? You can get started on designing collaboration right away.

Start your free Howspace trial →

## Howspace

www.howspace.com