

The evolution of hybrid work

*Putting leaders and managers at the
heart of hybrid success*

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Introduction

The latest stats on hybrid work show that it's in full swing and what employees and employers want. Many UK businesses are utilising a one-to-three day office week whilst job market data shows a 6,000% year-on-year increase in searches for hybrid jobs. On the employer side, CIPD research shows that two-fifths of businesses are planning further investment in hybrid and homeworking over the next 6-12 months.

Although numerous employees enjoy the flexibility and work-life integration that fully virtual work allows, hybrid models can also utilize the organizational benefits that full-time in-office work provided pre-pandemic. These benefits range from better underpinning of strong organizational cultures, which is linked closely to better financial performance, to better work-life segmentation, more consistent provision of workspace and tools, and more seamless relationship-building opportunities.

In fact, with cited hybrid-work benefits also including more wide-ranging inclusivity, the broadening of talent pools, better support of work-life balance and increased employee wellbeing – and with CIPD data finding that over four in 10 employers utilising a mixture of co-located office work and away-from-office work enjoy increased productivity, efficiency, or both – **it means hybrid is the right way forward.**

Hybrid work is **still evolving**

Yet, hybrid, for many employers, is still a work in progress. This will be because hybrid reframes many business agenda points and adds new challenges. It creates unique and novel issues in the areas of inclusion, equity, bias and proximity. In addition, the stewardship of employees' wellbeing, energy, engagement, performance, communication, and the potential for conflict, as well as development, will require new leadership and managerial capabilities to avoid hybrid pitfalls. Not forgetting that managers will need the skills to guide effectively work in a more agile and asynchronous, less hierarchical and less co-located environment. And all of this will need to be wrapped up within new protocols, agreements, and expectations around fair, psychologically safe and productive work.

Although many argue for the benefits of hybrid, rather than full-time virtual, remote, or office work, due to the range of challenges it produces, it's still a trade-off of sorts. Indeed, many employers currently don't experience hybrid work as a fix-all to their business and people management challenges. There has been criticism of hybrid and remote work structures from offices as high as the Prime Minister, whilst CIPD research has found that hybrid working has caused productivity issues for some businesses, with others citing hybrid-caused issues with stress, conflict and intra-team relations.

Essentially, these issues can be attributed to the newness of this way of working's en masse implementation. Couple this novelty – although hybrid work isn't a new concept, the widespread utilisation of it as the go-to working structure is – with leadership and managerial newness to this way of working, and it's quite likely that many feel like they are only just getting to grips with hybrid structures and the best ways to manage individuals and workflows within them. As a result, many are looking for tools, development and frameworks to help them drive the best outcomes.

Development of managers needed **to support optimal hybrid working**

Unsurprisingly, leaders and managers are at the centre of this evolving hybrid work landscape. Not only will they have to deliver and manage the above but they will also have to focus on their own capabilities and wellbeing as new hybrid-underwritten challenges arise. It will force them to reimagine how they manage their own time and energy, how they practice empathy and emotional intelligence, and how they communicate, even during moments of ongoing change. All in support of better collaboration, better guiding of colleague practices, and better working cultures where high-performance occurs, employees feel safe and like they can grow.



Positively, many employers understand that the way toward a high-functioning hybrid model is through managerial development. According to CIPD research, over half are looking to provide development, guidance and support for managers in hybrid structures. This makes sense. Managerial quality and engagement are clearly linked to better employee engagement and retention as well as better financial outcomes.

Furthermore, managers are also critical in setting purpose and direction, process effectiveness, deploying resources, organizing teams and communication, and fostering stability and trust. Elements of work that become even more crucial as hybrid continues to bed in and further evolve. In practice, this means employers must support managers in learning new skills to set themselves, their teams, and the organization up for long-term success.

Development must respond to *managers' multiple hybrid challenges*

The development necessary for hybrid managers and leaders to be successful will need to be crafted with awareness of the multiple challenges they face. Challenges will include learning new hybrid-tailored skills, capabilities and behaviors to manage individuals, teams, workplace interactions, and performance – as well as managing their own performance and wellbeing in this structure.

Of course, the skills managers and leaders need to learn in practice will differ depending on the type of work, the balance of co-located and non-co-located work, the accessibility of tools that they have, and the characteristics and personalities of the individuals and teams they manage. They must also make sense within the context of the culture and the goals of the organization they support. However, some of the structures of those new skills remain largely the same for all organizations, and the concepts of hybrid management will be consistent.

For example: when it comes to hybrid team management, leaders will need guidance on everything from how to create buy-in, set expectations, and cultivate agreement around new operating models. They will have to get to grips with new details, too: from how to create protocols hand-in-hand with their employees, to how (and when) to run hybrid meetings, to why document sharing procedures are increasingly critical, to agreeing on when check-ins take place. Additionally, they will have to become more intentional with their contact and communication, taking into account their team member's different life responsibilities, requirements, strengths and preferred working styles, as well as career goals. They will also need to become ruthless with priority setting.

New managerial awarenesses will also have to be built. Team leaders must understand how remote employees can miss out on opportunities and knowledge-sharing and how to mitigate this. They will also have to understand why note-taking and 'one-screen, one-person' rules are crucial pillars of the new meetings normals under hybrid. They will need to tweak their own managerial behaviors so that connectedness remains front of mind: so no one employee, nor team, becomes a silo. This will require bravery and additional resilience capabilities, to lean into difficult conversations and trial new work structures, approaches, and models of employee agency.

Importantly, leaders will also need the critical tools to be able to re-assess and reformulate their own traits. With stress levels at an all-time high and hybrid structures forcing leaders to grapple with additional dimensions of work, they will need to effectively manage their own time and energy, be able to deal with their own uncertainty, and that of their reports, and know-how to better prioritize (for themselves and their team), and make the right kind of trade-offs.

Ensuring development is *hybrid appropriate*

Already the above is a lot for managers and leaders to have to understand, digest, and then enact upon. It is therefore incumbent on employers, as well as L&D and HR functions, to guide leaders and managers as they navigate the evolving hybrid-management and hybrid-work landscape with the suitable deployment of, and access to, development experiences, tools, assets and programs.

This development will have to be delivered in a way that fits the new structures and platforms of work itself – be it in-office, remote, or digital – and in a way that suits the flexible, but under pressure, lives of managers and leaders. Therefore, a focus on learning-in-flow of work, accessibility, and increased self-service will be crucial. With careful management of connection-making (relationship-building, silo-breaking down, and networking) and creative space curation, there will also be a clear role for programmatic group learning experiences. Not forgetting, the need to share case studies that showcase success under this still-new structure.

If employers can roll out these types of learning successfully, they will be able to better empower managers and leaders to deliver the benefits of hybrid work whilst also being more able to navigate future changes to this working structure. In essence, becoming a learning-enabled organization that is able to problem-solve, experiment, take stock from failure, and share knowledge quickly – with managers at the heart of this model. This is where Hemsley Fraser's learning programs, technology and services can play a key role. Through a mixture of self-service custom content types that be accessed in the flow of work, to coaching, and blended learning approaches, we are helping organizations become hybrid success stories in a way that makes sense for them.

CONTACT US

hemsleyfraser.com

US

+1 888-559-0074

inquiries@hemsleyfraser.com

UK

+44 345 071 2801

enquiries@hemsleyfraser.co.uk

GERMANY

+49 69 9203 75680

info@hemsleyfraser.de

CANADA

+1 250 999 2656

inquiries@hemsleyfraser.ca