

SUPERVISOR'S TOOLKIT



University
of Windsor

Department of
Human Resources

Leading a Hybrid Work Team

As we continue the gradual transition of employees back to campus in accordance with public health measures, you may find yourself managing a hybrid work team. Hybrid work teams may operate on a rotating schedule (where different members of the team work on campus and remotely based on a set schedule) or where some team members continue to work remotely while others transition full-time to work on-campus. This document outlines 5 strategies for leading and managing an inclusive, engaging, and supportive hybrid work team.

1. Ensure clear standards and expectations.

Engage the team in the development of guidelines/practices for the hybrid team such as norms for communicating and collaborating so that both team members working on campus and remotely can work together productively. These are sometimes referred to as “rules of engagement”. Open communication is the key to ensure that everyone knows what is expected of them and for the work to be conducted with greater clarity, understanding and effectiveness. A good practice is to schedule a brief weekly touch-point virtual meeting for the entire team so that everyone, regardless of where they are working, is aware of key priorities for the week, deadlines, share progress of projects, etc.

Transparency about work schedules/location is also important, particularly for teams operating on a rotating schedule. Consider creating a shared calendar where employees can view work schedules.

As you navigate new ways of conducting work and managing the team, look for opportunities to consult your team on new practices and encourage them to share suggestions.

2. Discourage a “them versus us” culture.

When part of the team predominantly works on campus or remotely, it is easy for unhelpful or negative attitudes about the “other” group to emerge which can create divisions within the team. It is important to address these behaviours/attitudes as they arise. Be proactive by implementing the weekly touch-point virtual meeting outlined above and by planning activities to bring the team together either virtually or in person.

Consider pairing individuals working remotely with individuals working on campus to collaborate on projects/tasks to help build team cohesion.

3. Be mindful of modes of communication and ensure everyone feels a sense of belonging.

Be careful not to fall into the trap of “proximity bias”, favoring and spending more time with team members with whom you have more frequent in-person contact. Commit equal time and focus to each member of your team regardless of their work location. Be cognizant of the attention and support that you are providing to individuals working on campus versus to those working remotely:

- Schedule weekly check-ins with individuals working remotely to ensure that you are spending the necessary time guiding, coaching and supporting them. This can help compensate for the casual face-to-face encounters/impromptu

meetings that will likely take place with individuals working on campus. These one-on-one meetings are a great mechanism to keep the communication channels flowing, hear concerns and check-in on their overall wellbeing.

- Hold all your team meetings virtually. This helps to prevent anyone from feeling excluded or that they are missing out on the shared experience. Having meetings where some people join virtually and others from a meeting room on campus can be unfair to those who are not in the physical space as sometimes it is hard to listen, there is also the inevitable side chatter and other noises that may impact the interaction.

4. Provide opportunities to bring your team together and for social connections.

Look for ways to connect as a group to encourage a collegial and harmonious team culture. With the nice weather you may consider holding an outdoor team building event where all members of the team to come together. Make sure that these interactions comply with the health and safety guidelines.

Other opportunities for social connections:

- Include a social/personal element to the virtual team meetings. Adding time at the end of a team meeting for people to have informal conversations, time to catch-up, chat about family, books, movies, etc. and have fun. This can help employees feel valued and it will also be a great opportunity to pick-up on cues of any challenges that employees may be experiencing.
- Schedule regular virtual team activities to help the team stay socially connected and engaged. Ensure that you schedule these at times when everyone can participate.
- Encourage team members to have virtual breaks together. For example, set-up a standing virtual meeting where people can join in to have lunch or coffee together if they want.

These activities can make people feel connected and create a sense of community.

5. Encourage healthy practices.

Do not ignore signs of stress. Be empathetic as people adjust to a new way of working. During one-on-one meetings, do not hesitate to ask employees, ‘How are you coping? Is there anything that I can do to support you during this time?’

Encourage employees to make health and wellness a priority and to build self-care into their routine to help improve resilience and prevent burnout. The following are some work-related examples of self-care practices that you can encourage employees to follow:

- Take breaks from your desk to stand up, stretch or walk around. Taking a short 5-minute break to get a drink of water or stretch your legs is not only good for your physical health but also allows you to reset mentally.
- Do not skip breaks or lunch. Take the time to go outside, take a walk and disengage from work. A short walk can help you flex your joints, boost blood circulation, and at the same time promote mental recharging and reflection.
- Schedule meeting-free times in your calendar. Having focused work time can help reduce the stresses associated with an ever-growing to-do list or the inability to carve time to move important projects forward. This practice can also help combat the mental exhaustion known as Zoom/Microsoft Teams/virtual fatigue.
- Set boundaries. For instance, make a conscious effort to not check e-mails after hours and turn off work e-mail alerts on the weekend and on vacation. When work “bleeds” into other aspects of one’s life, it can be a major source of stress.

Remind employees of the mental health and wellness supports available to employees through the [Employee & Family Assistance Program](#).

Resources Consulted

Harvard Business Review. How to Manage a Hybrid Team (Oct 2020). Retrieved from <https://hbr.org/>

Harvard Business Review. 4 Imperatives for Managing in a Hybrid World. (June 2021). Retrieved from <https://hbr.org/>

HAYS. How to Manage a Hybrid Team Long-term. Retrieved from <https://www.hays.com.au/>

Queen's University. Managing Hybrid Teams. Retrieved from <https://www.queensu.ca/humanresources/>

The McQuaig Institute. The Rise of the Hybrid Team (February 2021) Retrieved from <https://medium.com/@McQuaig>

Trello. How to Successfully Manage a Hybrid Model Team (February 2021). Retrieved from <https://blog.trello.com/>



Putting the COVID-19 Employee Pulse Check Survey into Action

This initiative has been designed to address the areas of focus and key actions emerging from the survey results.