

A GUIDE

How to make hybrid WORK


HUMANIFY HR
HUMAN RESOURCES CONSULTING

WELCOME

Hybrid working has become a popular flexible working option for many people and organisations. The popularity of hybrid working rose significantly during the pandemic. This model of flexible working presents an enormous opportunity to restructure traditional models of work that we know are outdated require a more human approach.

However, there are mixed views on hybrid working. It is recognised that this way of working may not be suitable for all organisations and positions. Many leaders still hold concerns about the impacts of hybrid working on productivity, performance and overall engagement of the workforce. Other leaders hold the view that access to hybrid working, and flexible working more broadly should be seen as a fundamental ‘right’ for employees. Put simply, there is no real consensus on hybrid work. The range of and often opposing views on hybrid work, can make it a real challenge to develop a hybrid working solution that meets the needs of your organisation.

The key is understanding that there will be no ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach to hybrid working as every industry, organisation, leader and individual position has different requirements that need to be considered. It is a complex area of work that requires careful planning and consideration. This guide sets out the practical steps you can take to ensure hybrid working WORKS well for both your people and organisation.



WHAT IS HYBRID WORK?

Hybrid work is a way of working ‘that involves sometimes being physically present and sometimes working at a distance using the internet’ (Cambridge Dictionary, 2022). For many, it is seen as a flexible way of working that provides employees with the benefit of balancing work and life commitments. When structured appropriately, employers receive a benefit as they have access to more engaged, healthy and productive workers.

Hybrid work has boomed in popularity since the COVID-19 global pandemic, that required organisations in many cases literally overnight to immediately shift to providing employees access to hybrid and remote ways of working. Employers had to do this to ensure the safety of their workforce and to maintain operational viability of their organisations. The COVID-19 pandemic was a true hybrid work experiment, that has radically reshaped the way we live and work.

BENEFITS OF HYBRID WORK

Since the rise in popularity of hybrid working, there have been many studies conducted to examine the benefits of hybrid working. The benefits reported have been wide ranging from:

- 1. Enhanced engagement and productivity:** employees use the time they would normally spend on travel to the office often work extra hours and are reported to be more energised, engaged, productive and focused at work.
- 2. Improved safety:** employees who are not required to physically attend the office are at less risk of transmitting viruses and other diseases (ie: COVID-19).
- 3. Higher levels of employee wellbeing:** employees are provided with more autonomy that enables them to achieve greater work/life balance – leading to more positive wellbeing outcomes.
- 4. Improved diversity and inclusion outcomes:** employees can more



freely participate in the workplace without barriers that are present when working in physical workplaces, so this provides an enormous benefit to many diversity groups.

5. Reduces operating costs and expenses: for employers they no longer need to incur in some cases expensive overheads that go with physically accommodating employees and employees can reduce daily expenses on fuel, insurance, transportation and other incidental expenses.

WHAT IS THE STATUS OF HYBRID WORK?

The jury is still out on hybrid work. To say there is an overwhelming consensus that supports hybrid work, would simply be a dishonest representation of the current position. Many leaders remain concerned about the impact of hybrid work, specifically what it means for productivity, connection and collaboration. Other leaders have embraced hybrid and flexible working as they see it as a critical way to engage and retain the most talented people and to build more contemporary ways of working.

EVERYONE IS NOT ON THE SAME PAGE WHEN IT COMES TO HYBRID WORK

It can be challenging for leaders, particularly those who have directly experienced for most of their own careers a way of working that requires people to be physically present and located in the same space and time to effectively get things done. The leadership skills and capability required to successfully make the transition to hybrid ways of working have been severely underestimated. There was a leadership capability deficit prior to the pandemic. Unfortunately, for many the shift to hybrid working has magnified the enormity of this leadership deficit that already existed pre-pandemic.

By being honest about the dichotomy of the views that are influencing the debate and formulation of policy settings around the status of hybrid work, we have the



capacity to come together to understand and respect these different views with the aim of creating a brighter future. Together we can reap the benefits of hybrid working, but we first need to understand that not everyone is on the same page.

Everyone has a role to play in making hybrid WORK

It is important to understand what hybrid work really means. The reason for this is that many organisations will advertise externally that they provide access to hybrid working – and the reality of this internally when a new employee arrives is that access to hybrid working is inconsistent and poorly managed. Hybrid working means different things to employees, particularly if they have worked in another organisation that had robust HR policies around hybrid working and did it well – they will naturally join a new organisation with an expectation of how hybrid work should WORK.

Managing expectations around this issue are important, as we know that access to flexible working is now featuring more heavily for some employees when they are making career decisions than money or other benefits. So, hybrid working is something we cannot ignore – and for leaders to do so in the current environment will cost their organisation.

The role of leadership and culture in making hybrid WORK

Telstra adopted a ‘work anywhere’ policy in the early stages of the pandemic and recently published a definition of hybrid work as:

“Working in the office when it suits or at home when it suits. Or wherever you can connect”.

This works for Telstra as a communications company. This would be quite a contemporary and innovative definition of hybrid working, that clearly works for the Telstra business model. However, it is recognised that this definition may not work for all organisations. This is something we need to be OK with



accepting and understanding that no one single model of hybrid work will work for everyone – both organisations and individual people included.

For hybrid work to be a success in any organisation, it needs to be underpinned by a culture and leadership approach that signals to employees in the simplest of terms that:

1. We see and respect you as an adult with a life outside of work;
2. We pay you to do a job here to the best of your ability; and
3. We trust you will do that job well.

This in many cases, is a significant shift to make for employers and leaders, as traditional models of work that defined our history had origins in production and factory work – driven by principles of supervision, command, control and output. We have known well before the pandemic that these traditional models of work were not serving us well, and that a more human solution was needed. Hybrid work provides both employers and employees the opportunity to create a more productive and human-centric model of work.

How to make hybrid **WORK** for everyone

So, how do we make hybrid work for everyone? It is important to make hybrid work for everyone – both employers and employees. If we are not able to achieve this with hybrid work, then we risk regressing back to more traditional models of work that we know did not serve us well. Everyone has a role to play in making hybrid **WORK**.

Despite the complexity of the status that we have now on hybrid work, there is an enormous opportunity for leaders and employees to work together to create a more positive and contemporary model of work through embracing the benefits of hybrid working. This will need to be a collaborative effort that requires positive action on the part of both employers and employees. The status of hybrid work now very much represents a critical point in time, that requires



constructive conversation and consensus building that will ultimately define the future of work. This is an opportunity not to be missed, to work collectively to truly embed new flexible ways of working that will positively shape the way we work for generations to come.

3 key steps for employers and employees on how to make hybrid WORK

For Employers:

1. Don't fight hybrid work and hang onto traditional ways of working - just because this is your personal preference. This approach will see you lose and be unable to retain talented people – being inflexible will cost your organisation.

2. Set clear expectations and policy guidance around hybrid work. How do you want hybrid to WORK in your organisation? You can structure this in the way that best meets the needs of your business. This is about getting on the front-foot and designing a model of hybrid work that reflects your unique requirements.

3. Upskill your management in how to manage a hybrid workplace. The management and leadership skills required to lead hybrid workers is different. It relies heavily on leaders having strong communication, coaching and leadership capability, and an ability to apply this in practice.

For Employees:

1. Communicate with your employer/manager. Be clear about your schedule of work and time you will be available and how you plan to communicate with your manager. If things aren't working well for you – communicate early, openly and clearly about what isn't working and solutions you are prepared to put forward to resolve issues.



2. Focus on your productivity and output. Your employer/manager is putting trust in you to work in a way that is self-managed and gives you the flexibility to deliver your work. Understand this trust can be quickly eroded if you don't keep up your end of the deal.

3. Keep your health and fitness routines. Hybrid work makes it easy, particularly for passionate and dedicated people to overwork. Keep up a routine that enables you to take regular breaks away from your workstation (as you would if you were in the office). It can be easy to overindulge on unhealthy foods and miss your daily fitness commitment. Keeping disciplined in these areas will assist you to maintain productivity that is sustainable in the long-term and avoids burnout, that we know is currently a major risk factor for many people.



So, is it time to make hybrid WORK for your organisation?

ABOUT HUMANIFY HR CONSULTING

Humanify HR Consulting Pty Ltd is a specialist HR consultancy firm that works with the Australian Public Service (APS), private sector and not-for-profit organisations as a leading provider of workplace relations, leadership and culture, targeted workplace training and HR consulting services.

We strive to create workplace cultures that support more productive humans at work, healthier humans in our communities and more successful organisations who are achieving their goals. One of the ways we achieve this is through the delivery of our HR consulting services. We are experienced in the development and implementation of contemporary, fit-for-purpose HR policies and procedures – including on hybrid and flexible working.

ABOUT OUR FOUNDER

Sarah Queenan is the Founder and Managing Director of Humanify HR Consulting and her focus is on providing a high-quality service that aims to put a more ‘human’ approach into the delivery of HR. As a former senior public servant and HR leader operating in the private sector, Sarah has a wealth of experience in developing and guiding both individual and organisational capability. She has a unique understanding of how organisations work, including the cultural, political and regulatory environments the APS operates within. Sarah is a trained lawyer, with qualifications in psychology, coaching and Human Resources. Sarah is an accredited coach in the Human Synergetics Life Styles Inventory (LSI) and Group Styles Inventory (GSI) diagnostic tools, that is regularly used by leaders to help them better understand their leadership strengths and impacts on others.



WORK WITH US

Humanify HR Consulting offers clients the benefit of providing HR consulting services to establish a hybrid working model that WORKS for both your people and organisation to drive productivity and performance.

Are you ready to take the next step towards making hybrid WORK for your organisation?

Get in contact with our team at hello@humanifyhr.com.au to arrange a free consultation to find out more about our HR consulting services and to discuss next steps.

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