



Belonging beyond the office

Toolkit for inclusive hybrid
and remote work



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Belonging beyond the office

Toolkit for inclusive hybrid and remote work

“Remote work is no longer a temporary solution , it’s a lasting shift reshaping how we work, and who gets to belong.



The ReWork Project

The principles of **equality, inclusiveness and fairness** are part of the core values of the European Union, and the new and boundaryless HRW (Hybrid and Remote Work) environment has created increased concerns for a host of challenges, especially around inclusivity and discrimination.

The ReWork Project aims at providing organisations with the support they need to mitigate these challenges coming from HRW and to support them to future-proof their organisations for diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI).

Since HRW is here to stay, it is necessary to develop new training programs and tools for professionals with HR and people management responsibilities in large organisations but also in SMEs (small and medium enterprises) that create awareness around the emergence of biases in HRW and provide them with the appropriate knowledge and tools to make HRW more inclusive, since previous organisational DEI practices might no longer be fit for the new world of work.

The primary target groups for this project include:

- HR practitioners
- D&I leaders
- Middle managers
- SME managers and leaders
- External VET providers (trainers and learning designers and academics)

The partners



IPAG

(Institut de la Préparation à
l'Administration et la
Gestion),
Project coordinator



AFMD

(Association Française des
Managers de la Diversité)



CEFI

(the Center For Inclusion at
work)



GISA

(Getafe Iniciativas S.A.)



ITKAM

(Italienische
Handelskammer für
Deutschland)



UNIR

(Universidad
Internacional de la Rioja)



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Considering diversity and inclusion topics in HRW environments

The Covid-19 crisis exposed the flaws in our work system and led to a dramatic transformation in the way we work. According to a study conducted by McKinsey, the need for change was already being felt, long before the Covid-19 pandemic. Indeed, 'many managers feared, and the pandemic confirmed, that their companies were designed for an outdated model' (McKinsey, 2021), unsuited to the current and future expectations of workers and inappropriate to economic and technological realities. In the wake of this crisis, remote work has become a reality that no organisation can avoid or ignore, as revealed by the 2024 survey by INSEE in partnership with DARES, which indicates that remote work concerns more than one in five private sector employees, whereas in 2019 it was not very widespread in France, where only 4% of employees practised it on a regular basis.

In today's evolving work landscape, remote work has become more than a temporary solution: it is now a lasting shift that is reshaping how companies operate and how employees experience their professional lives. **As organisations adapt to this new shift, it is crucial to recognise the intertwined importance of embracing remote work and actively preventing discrimination.** These issues are not only ethical concerns but also strategic imperatives for building inclusive and resilient workplaces.

Remote work offers flexibility, autonomy, and access to talent regardless of geographic location. However, it can also create new inequalities if not carefully managed. Employees who work remotely may face reduced visibility, fewer opportunities for advancement, or exclusion from key conversations. **These risks can compound existing inequalities, particularly for women, people with disabilities, and members of underrepresented groups. Without proactive policies and inclusive practices, remote work can unintentionally reinforce discrimination rather than dismantle it.**

At the same time, prevention of discrimination, whether related to race, gender, age, disability, or other factors, must remain a top priority in any work environment, remote or in-person. In virtual settings, unconscious bias can manifest in different ways: through unequal access to technology, exclusion from informal networks, or assumptions about productivity based on who is seen online more often. Addressing these issues means developing clear anti-discrimination policies, promoting digital equity, and training leaders to manage inclusively across distance.

Why must HR managers prioritise **discrimination prevention in HRW?**

As remote work becomes a permanent fixture in many organisations, HR professionals must take an active role in shaping how this new way of working evolves. The shift to remote and hybrid models brings both opportunities and challenges, especially when it comes to inclusion and the prevention of workplace discrimination.

For HR managers, this means **rethinking policies, practices, and management approaches**. Ensuring that all employees, regardless of work location, have equal access to opportunities, recognition, and support is critical. This includes revising performance evaluation methods to avoid proximity bias, providing inclusive leadership training, and ensuring access to the right digital tools for collaboration.

By proactively addressing the intersection of remote work and discrimination prevention, HR teams can create a more inclusive and equitable workplace.



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About this toolkit

This innovative toolkit for an inclusive hybrid and remote work stems from the work of the ReWork Project. It is meant for HR practitioners, D&I leaders, middle managers and SME leaders, and its aim is to ensure that HRW does not have a negative effect on historically disadvantaged employees and to develop inclusive HR practices and management skills.

By presenting multiple tools and practices, it offers a comprehensive view of what can be done to achieve a more inclusive workplace, whether remote or in-office.

Objectives

- Mitigating the risk of exclusion of historically disadvantaged groups in HRwork settings
- Equipping managers and HR practitioners with resources and tools to foster inclusive work environments

Content

The toolkit is structured around seven parts:

- 1 Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in Hybrid and Remote Work: fundamental knowledge**
- 2 Preventing discrimination in HRW**
- 3 HR Tools**
- 4 Remote management**
- 5 Implementing a proper digital environment**
- 6 Communication tools**
- 7 Fostering team cohesion**

The toolkit contains **35 fact sheets** that were developed by project partners based on their expertise. They aim to provide readers with actionable information to foster inclusion in HRW.

16 case studies complete this toolkit. They were developed with partners' stakeholder and provide practical examples of inclusive initiatives.

Diversity and inclusion : What are we talking about?

“Managers occupy an important place among the many cogs of inclusion. They are the ones charged to implement the rules coming from above in their teams’ daily activities.



Introduction

For the past twenty to thirty years, in Europe, many employers have been implementing actions to promote a more inclusive and respectful working environment. These organisations – private, public and academic – seek to:

- Avert the risk of discrimination;
- Ensure the health and safety of every team member;
- Attract talent and build loyalty;
- Create the conditions for overall performance.

The plurality of these actions is part of a framework generically called "**diversity and inclusion policies**".

Diversity : what are we talking about?



The term "diversity" originated in the United States and has been widely used since the early 2000s, under the drive of public authorities and companies. Defining its concept, its origins and its links to non-discrimination or social responsibility is not simple. Depending on the meaning it is given, **diversity covers a heterogeneous reality that will vary from one organisation to another**: depending on the target populations (women, people with an immigrant background, young people, seniors, people with disabilities, etc.), objectives (professional equality, equal opportunities, diversity, non-discrimination, etc.) or markers of individual identity such as religious affiliation or sexual orientation.

Diversity: the managers' outlook

According to a study conducted by AFMD and Numeum in 2022

- **74% of managers consider their teams to be "diverse"** even if they do not always agree on what "diversity" is. Most managers refer to "the diversity of profiles and skills", whereas the notion of diversity makes it possible to reason in terms of objectives and the prevention of discrimination.
- **Women are less likely than men to list gender as a component of the diversity** of their team.
- **For more than half (55%), managing a diverse team is not more demanding**; On the other hand, for 18% of them, it calls for adjustment and equity.
- **The differences in perception are greater when comparing generations.**

What is inclusion?



Inclusion is a complex concept made up of five pillars:

- ✓ **Equity**, which generates a strong sense of justice;
- ✓ **The implementation of intersectional actions**, which include all diversities;
- ✓ **A dynamic of integrative cooperation**, going beyond the simple juxtaposition of individuals;
- ✓ **The acknowledgment of all identities**, balancing uniqueness and belonging, and social engagement;
- ✓ **Actions as well as a social climate** that neutralise stereotypes of all kinds.

Inclusion has a direct impact on employees' **sense of belonging**, sense of being heard, and sense of being able to express oneself authentically and safely.

How does this apply to management?

Inclusion is based on respect for the rules of non-discrimination. This means enforcing them, setting an example in all situations and enforcing sanctions when necessary. Otherwise, discrimination will remain the norm and inclusive discourse will have no chance of being listened to.

Managers occupy an important place among the many cogs of inclusion. They are the ones charged to implement the rules coming from above in their teams' daily activities. HR processes set the framework, and managers guarantee its implementation.

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The challenges of hybrid and remote work

“In addition to social and emotional challenges, hybrid work can bring about a range of organisational difficulties, particularly in the areas of communication, coordination, and task management.



Introduction

The ReWork Project aims to enhance employees' efficiency and well-being, in remote work context, particularly among disadvantaged or underrepresented populations. As a first step, the ReWork Project team conducted a survey to collect data across four European countries: France, Greece, Germany, and Spain. This questionnaire was distributed to employees working in various sectors and holding diverse professional profiles.

The objective of this study is to offer a comprehensive overview of **how hybrid work is implemented and experienced across four European countries**, based on over 300 valid responses.

The data reveal that hybrid work is now **a standard mode of work**, with 85.8% of respondents currently working in hybrid arrangements, most often two or three days per week. However, only 65.7% of respondents report that their organisation has a structured policy to support hybrid work, while 17.8% operate under only partially structured frameworks, and 16.5% report no policy at all. This lack of formalisation may lead to **poor communication and inconsistencies in access to resources**.

The survey also reveals **significant gaps in training and upskilling**. Only 19.9% of respondents state that their organisation offers structured training on managing motivation in hybrid environment. A further 21.2% report partial training provision, while the majority (58.9%) report no training at all. This lack of structured training on management motivation may negatively affect long-term performance and employee engagement.

When it comes to perceived challenges, respondents **report strong concerns about social interaction**. The rarefaction of informal relationships and the general deterioration of social dynamics suggest that **hybrid models risk weakening workplace cohesion and collaboration**, especially in terms of informal, and cross-functional communication.

Regarding individual well-being, moderate feelings of isolation and exclusion are reported. Though not predominant, these experiences raise concerns about psychological safety and inclusion.

Organisational challenges focus on the reduction of feedback and discussion opportunities and unclear expectations.

Managerial issues are more visible. Respondents highlight less recognition, fewer development opportunities, and burnout as persistent concerns. The quality of employee–manager relationships is moderately impacted, although work–life balance is largely maintained.

Based on these results, we can say that hybrid work is now an established practice, but its success depends on more than just flexibility. To ensure equity, motivation, and cohesion, organisations must invest in structured policies, formal training on managing remote teams, inclusive leadership, employee recognition, and professional development, all of which are critical to ensure performance and engagement in remote and hybrid work environments.



Challenges of remote work

One of the main challenges of remote and hybrid work is the reduction in social interaction. To better understand this issue in the European context, we begin by examining in detail the perceived deterioration of social relationships in hybrid work environments.



Social interactions and communication

One of the main challenges associated with hybrid work is the deterioration of social interactions and communication dynamics among individuals within companies. The survey shows that many employees perceive a decline in social interaction and communication quality as a significant challenge in hybrid work environments.

The strongest concern emerges around the rarefaction of opportunities to build and maintain personal relationships at work. This reflects a widely shared feeling that hybrid work makes it harder to maintain the informal, everyday interactions that are key to workplace cohesion. Similarly, the overall deterioration of social interactions points to a noticeable decline in social dynamics for many employees.

The degradation of team cooperation and idea exchange and reduced cross-functional communication and collaboration reinforce this trend. Employees appear to experience not only reduced contact, but also a weakening of collaborative energy, particularly across teams and departments.

These results highlight the **social fragmentation in hybrid work context**. While not extreme in every area, the consistently moderate-to-high scores across all indicators suggest that social ties, informal collaboration are under pressure. To maintain a strong organisational culture and team cohesion, companies will need to invest in deliberate efforts to foster connection, especially outside formal meetings, such as during informal events like team-building activities.



Individual feelings

Beyond organisational or relational issues, hybrid work can also affect employees on a more personal level. This category explores how remote or partially remote work may lead to feelings of exclusion, isolation, or vulnerability.

Among the three items, the sense of isolation ranked highest, followed by exclusion and vulnerability. While none of these scores are extremely high, they do indicate that a significant portion of employees experience **some degree of psychological discomfort or disconnection in hybrid environment**.

The relatively lower scores compared to other challenge categories suggest that these issues are less widespread but still meaningful. In particular, feelings of being left out or unsupported may not affect all employees, but for those who do report them, the impact on engagement, motivation, and mental well-being could be significant.



Organisational issues

In addition to social and emotional challenges, hybrid work can bring about a range of organisational difficulties, particularly in the areas of communication, coordination, and task management.

The most prominent issue appears to be the reduction in opportunities for discussion and feedback. This suggests that many employees feel hybrid work limit informal exchanges.

There is also a moderate perception of unclear expectations and priorities, which may arise from inconsistent communication or a lack of structured frameworks in hybrid contexts. This challenge is particularly relevant in companies where hybrid work policies are informal or only partially defined.

Other organisational concerns, such as inefficient use of time, increased conflict at work, decreased productivity, and lesser performance, scored relatively low. This implies that employees do not generally perceive hybrid work as damaging to their output or efficiency, and that the practical functioning of hybrid teams may be more resilient than initially expected.



Managerial issues

Hybrid work also introduces managerial challenges that affect both team dynamics and individual development. The data reveal a set of concerns related to recognition, communication with managers, well-being, and career advancement, these areas are closely tied to the role and presence of leadership.

The most prominent issue in this category appears to be less recognition. This indicates that many employees feel **their contributions are less visible or valued in hybrid work settings**, possibly due to fewer face-to-face interactions or unbalanced visibility across remote and on-site staff. Closely linked to this, the perception of having **fewer development opportunities** and more burnout or fatigue also emerge as key concerns. These results indicate that for a considerable number of employees, hybrid work may limit access to growth pathways and increase mental stress, especially if managerial support is lacking or inconsistent.

Optimising hybrid work : what employees need most

Employees were asked to identify the key organisational practices and cultural elements that would help optimise remote and hybrid work. Their responses provide a clear roadmap for what workers value most in this evolving work model. Across 20+ dimensions, a strong consensus emerged about the following: hybrid work is not just about flexibility in location, it must be grounded in principles of equity, inclusion, communication, trust, and continuous development. To achieve this, employees believe that organisations must move beyond logistical fixes and **actively cultivate a more intentional and inclusive work culture**. This involves formalising hybrid work policies to ensure fairness and clarity in expectations and resource distribution, while actively training managers to lead with empathy, flexibility, and inclusiveness. Employees also call for **more equitable career development pathways through mentoring, feedback, and socialisation opportunities** that are accessible regardless of work location. In addition, companies should reinforce open and respectful communication and maintain safe channels for reporting inappropriate behaviour. Finally, optimising hybrid work also requires recognising employees' diverse backgrounds and personal responsibilities, with targeted efforts to support those who are underrepresented or face structural disadvantages. By responding to these priorities, organisations can transform hybrid work into a model that promotes equity, engagement, motivation, well-being and long-term performance.

Conclusion

This survey was conducted during a period when hybrid work has shifted from an emergency response to a normalised, structured component of work in many organisations across Europe. The data gathered across four countries and diverse sectors reflects a significant evolution in both practices and expectations surrounding remote and hybrid work. Since the disruptions of the Covid-19 pandemic, hybrid work has matured, not only in terms of implementation but also in how employees perceive its potential and limitations.

When asked what would truly optimise hybrid work, employees widely shared a common vision, one that moves beyond flexibility to prioritise fairness, inclusion, trust, and purposeful leadership. The most valued organisational practices include **equal access to information and career development, respectful communication, and targeted support for underrepresented groups**.

In light of these findings, this report does not just document a shift in work modalities, it reveals a broader cultural transformation underway. Hybrid work, as it continues to mature, offers a unique opportunity to rethink how organisations build trust, recognise talent, and support every individual's development, regardless of where they work. The success of this model now relies less on technology or scheduling, and more on companies' ability to foster an effective, collaborative, and formally inclusive remote work culture.

Defining the role of HR leaders and DEI managers in Hybrid & Remote Work

“Preventing discrimination in hybrid settings is not a one-off initiative, it is an ongoing commitment to seeing, hearing, and valuing everyone, everywhere.



Key concepts and definitions

Human Resources Leadership encompasses strategic workforce planning, talent acquisition, employee engagement, compliance, and performance management. HR leaders are responsible for aligning people strategy with business goals and cultivating a productive organisational culture (Ulrich et al., 2012).

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) managers focus specifically on building inclusive workplaces where employees from diverse backgrounds feel valued and respected. Diversity refers to representation across identity categories such as race, gender, age, and ability. Equity involves ensuring fair treatment and opportunities for all, while inclusion speaks to the environment of belonging and engagement (Shore et al., 2011).

While HR traditionally focused on administration, recruitment, and compliance, modern HR leaders are expected to act as strategic partners and change agents (Ulrich et al., 2012). DEI professionals emerged more prominently in the 2010s as organisations recognised that inclusion was not automatically achieved through diversity hiring alone.

Both roles require leadership, systems thinking, and collaboration across departments. Increasingly, HR and DEI professionals work in tandem to design policies, training, and metrics that shape inclusive employee experiences and support organisational growth. HR leaders and DEI managers must co-create inclusive systems that are resilient and responsive.



Responsibilities in shaping inclusive policy and driving change

In an increasingly digital and decentralised workplace, HR professionals and D&I leaders play a crucial role in safeguarding equity and preventing discrimination. Remote and hybrid work structures, while offering flexibility and cost-efficiency, also create new challenges around visibility, fairness, and inclusion.

HR and D&I departments are tasked with designing and enforcing inclusive workplace policies that uphold legal standards (such as the UK Equality Act 2010) while reflecting the cultural values of the organisation. In remote contexts, this includes ensuring equal access to information, advancement, and visibility for all employees—regardless of location, disability, caring responsibilities, or digital literacy.

HR and D&I leaders must also act as agents of change, championing initiatives that move the organisation towards greater inclusion. **In hybrid models, this might mean revisiting performance evaluation criteria, adapting onboarding procedures for remote hires, or providing training for managers to lead diverse, dispersed teams.**

Their role is also strategic: inclusion policies should not remain static but evolve in line with emerging trends in technology and work habits. Remote-first inclusion audits, inclusive digital communication practices, and accessible remote meeting protocols are just a few examples where HR and D&I leaders can set new standards and expectations.

Barriers to implementation and acceptance

Despite the critical importance of inclusive practice in hybrid settings, the implementation of such policies can be met with resistance from employees or managers.

A first challenge is acceptability among staff. Remote workers, particularly in organisations with a history of presenteeism, may feel sceptical about inclusion efforts that seem superficial or disconnected from day-to-day realities.

Additionally, some team members may resist change due to unconscious bias or fear of losing relative privilege (e.g. visibility for office-based staff versus home-based staff). In hybrid teams, employees working remotely are often unintentionally excluded from informal conversations, mentoring opportunities, or visibility during performance reviews.

From a managerial perspective, adapting leadership styles to be inclusive remotely is not intuitive. Many managers lack training in inclusive virtual leadership, and may struggle with issues like equitable task distribution, inclusive feedback, and awareness of cultural or gender-based communication norms in digital spaces.

Conclusion

The hybrid and remote work era has redefined not only where we work but how inclusion is experienced and how discrimination can take root in subtle, untraceable ways. HR and D&I leaders carry the strategic and ethical responsibility of steering organisations towards fairness, but they cannot do it alone.

By equipping managers with inclusive tools, engaging employees as co-creators, and aligning policies with values rather than appearances, organisations can build workplaces where diversity thrives, even across digital divides. **Preventing discrimination in hybrid settings is not a one-off initiative, it is an ongoing commitment to seeing, hearing, and valuing everyone, everywhere.**



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The challenges of hybrid and remote work

Information on the Case Study

Organisation: Inditex

Size: 165,042 employees

Location: La Coruña, Spain

Sector: Textile industry

Operational Context

Inditex (Industria de Diseño Textil), is a multinational textile manufacturing and distribution company. It is one of the largest fashion distribution companies in the world with brands such as Zara, Massimo Dutti and Bershka. It is characterised by its dynamic and constant evolution.

The Problem/Opportunity

Problem:

At the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, the company recorded losses of more than €400 million, so it was necessary to adapt its online sales capacity immediately, and to do so, it had to renew the functions in all its employees' jobs. This situation has allowed the company to detect the main challenges to be overcome to implement the hybrid and remote work (HRW) model.

Opportunity:

Inditex has a complex structure, with different areas ranging from logistics and physical shops to design and marketing teams. The challenge has been to adapt the hybrid model to the different needs of each area. This has been excellently achieved, which would not have been possible without the company's ongoing digitisation strategy and integration of online and offline channels. Containment boosted online demand, with total group sales rising from €20,402 million in 2020 to €27,716 million in 2021, an increase of 36%. Gross margin increased by 39% in 2021 compared to the previous year, reaching 15,814 million euros (Inditex, 2021).

What Was Done

1. **Adaptation of the work culture:** Inditex has been changing its work culture towards a hybrid model in which diverse social groups are included.

Action: Transition to the hybrid model with a change in the mentality of employees and managers accustomed to seeing face-to-face work as the standard for productivity.

Examples: Inditex's Compliance System is committed to good governance and social and environmental sustainability, as well as to transmitting this ethical corporate culture. To this end, it develops an inclusive culture to cater for diversity. It is based on values such as inclusion, equality and respect. Diversity and equality are addressed through four global priorities: gender equality, inclusion of people with disabilities, LGBT+ people, and socio-ethnicity.

2. **Coordination of global teams:** Inditex operates in multiple countries, and maintaining coordination between teams working in a hybrid way and in different time zones has been one of the main challenges.

Action: Ensure that communication is fluid and that projects continue to move forward with geographically dispersed teams. increased investment in technological tools and more flexible management

Examples: IOP (Inditex Open Platform) is the hybrid cloud reproduction of each of the phases of the work model. It is adapted to each department and employees' needs and allows for permanent interaction and adaptation.

3. **Investment in technology and training:** The technological infrastructure for hybrid work was not fully optimised before the pandemic.

Action: Investing in collaborative platforms, improving cybersecurity and training employees in the use of new digital tools to be able to implement the hybrid model efficiently.

Examples: Implementation of a proprietary technological platform, Inditex Open Platform (IOP). The platform integrates the entire life cycle of the product, which allows for permanent interaction and adaptation between all of them.

Outcomes

1. Adapting the working culture:

Outcome: The Inditex Compliance System, as a commitment to good governance and social and environmental sustainability, has been implementing an inclusive culture to attend to diversity.

Evidence: This has been implemented in 100% of the workforce, with women accounting for 75% of the workforce, and 80% of management positions in the company are held by women. Inditex also employs 1 698 people with disabilities.

2. Hybrid work management:

Outcome: Employees have increased their online work functions, mainly in online sales, so that dealing with queries about order status, delivery times or the online operation itself is a very important part of their work.

Evidence: A total of 45 443 721 customer contacts (calls, emails, WhatsApp conversations and messages from social media profiles) were handled in 2023.

3. Investment in technology and training of the IOP (Inditex Open Platform):

Outcome: It has developed the capacity to constantly generate technological solutions, in an agile and versatile way in a digital environment.

Evidence: IOP has been implemented in 5 800 shops of the group's brands. This represents 100% of the company's facilities.

Conclusion

The transition to the hybrid and remote work (HRW) model has been a challenge to change the mindset of employees and managers used to seeing face-to-face work, as the standard for productivity. Ensuring that communication is seamless and that projects continue to move forward with geographically dispersed teams has required greater investment in technology tools and more flexible management. Managing these differences and providing equity between different types of workers has been a challenge. The company has had to invest in collaborative platforms, improve cybersecurity and train employees in the use of new digital tools to implement the hybrid model efficiently.

Bias checking in remote work

“ Unconscious bias can impact career evolution and promotions, potentially leading to unequal opportunities: this is especially true for disadvantaged groups.



Introduction

Remote and hybrid work (HRW) arrangements offer flexibility and opportunities for wider talent pools, but they also risk amplifying existing biases or creating new forms of exclusion.

Because of the unconscious bias we all have, it is possible to discriminate or exclude without even meaning to or realising it. This factsheet provides practical guidance for identifying and preventing bias in HRW settings.

Understanding unconscious bias



Definition

Unconscious bias refers to the automatic, mental shortcuts used to process information and make decisions quickly. These biases are shaped by personal experiences, societal stereotypes, and cultural norms and operate below the level of conscious awareness. They appear in all areas of life, from interpersonal relationships to legal decisions or in the medical and health sector. Hence, it is not surprising that they should also appear in work environments, whether on-site or remote.

Types of unconscious bias

According to Savard et al. (2022), unconscious bias operates at different levels:

- **On an individual level**, stemming from one's beliefs system, stereotypes, blind spots...
- **On a social level**, based on the sense of belonging to a specific group (pertaining to gender, race, political beliefs, sports interests...).
- **On a systemic level**, rooted in oppressions and privileges dynamics. Sexist, racist, heteronormative, ableist bias operate on this level.

There is a multitude of unconscious biases, and it is not possible to list them all. Some, however, are easier to pick up on and to mitigate.

- 1 The affinity bias leads us to prefer those who are similar to ourselves in terms of interests, backgrounds, or experiences.
- 2 The confirmation bias means focusing on information that confirms existing beliefs and ignoring contradictory evidence.
- 3 The proximity bias can be prevalent in HRW, when employees who work more often on-site are often perceived as more committed or productive, even when performance metrics suggest otherwise.

Impact of unconscious bias

Unconscious bias plays a role in decision-making, from **the recruitment process**, where the affinity bias may come into play and affect hiring decisions, to **performance evaluations**, where the confirmation bias may lead a manager to overlook an employee's achievement because they are seen as not reliable, etc... Hence, **unconscious bias can impact career evolution and promotions, potentially leading to unequal opportunities: this is especially true for disadvantaged groups.**

As they are strongly linked to oppression and privilege dynamics in the workplace, bias can result in the marginalisation of certain team members, reducing their chances to contribute fully, hence negatively impacting team dynamics. For examples, if an employee has an accent because their work language is not their mother tongue, **their input may be undervalued or seen as less relevant.**

Bias-checking practices for managers and HR

- ☒ **Audit your decisions**
Periodically review decisions related to hiring, feedback, promotions, and project assignments. Ask: are remote and hybrid employees represented fairly? do evaluation criteria disproportionately benefit those who are more visible or vocal?
- ☒ **Standardise performance metrics**
Use clear, role-based, and outcome-driven criteria that apply regardless of where someone works. Focus on deliverables, not hours online or perceived enthusiasm in meetings.
- ☒ **Diversify feedback channels**
Gather performance input from multiple sources (peers, clients, team members) to minimise individual bias
- ☒ **Bias awareness training**
Provide regular, role-specific training for managers on how bias manifests in hybrid environments and how to counteract it during recruitment, evaluations, and everyday interactions.

Conclusion

Addressing and fostering awareness of employees' unconscious bias is not an easy task. Admitting we are biased is often difficult and uncomfortable, and feelings of guilt and shame are common. To mitigate these feelings, it is paramount to have structured and pedagogical training tools. The goal is not to antagonise or blame anyone, but to help them understand how these biases impact communication and relationships. This is a necessary step to then build on strategies to mitigate the negative impact of unconscious bias.



References

- Savard, Benoit, Brière, Sophie, Pulido, Bibiana, Keyser-Verreault, Amélie, Auclair, Isabelle, Laplanche, Laurie, St-Georges, Jade and Stockless, Alain. Biais inconscients et comportements inclusifs dans les organisations, Presses de l'Université Laval, 2022. <https://www.pulaval.com/livres/biais-inconscients-et-comportements-inclusifs-dans-les-organisations>

Further reading

- The Harvard Implicit Association Test
<https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html>

Inclusion of people with neurodiversity in Hybrid & Remote Work

“In remote work settings, challenges like communication barriers, sensory sensitivities, and differing work styles can make it harder for employees with neurodiversity to feel included or thrive.



Introduction

Neurodiversity refers to the natural variation in the human brain and mind, including conditions such as autism, ADHD, dyslexia, and other cognitive differences. As remote work continues to grow, it is essential to create environments that are inclusive of people with neurodiversity. People with neurodiversity (sometimes referred to as neurodivergent or neuroatypical) bring unique perspectives and problem-solving skills to the table, just like any other individual, but they may face additional challenges in virtual work settings. This guide provides strategies for fostering inclusion and ensuring that neurodivergent employees thrive in remote work environments.

Understanding the issue

When people with neurodiversity are excluded from the workplace, the organisation cannot use their unique characteristics, points of view, and experiences that might lead to better decision making, both strategic and operational, and add immense value to the team. However, in remote work settings, challenges like communication barriers, sensory sensitivities, and differing work styles can make it harder for employees with neurodiversity to feel included or thrive.

What can be done to ensure the inclusion of neurodivergent employees in remote and hybrid work?



Provide Clear and Structured Communication

Neurodivergent employees, particularly those with ADHD or autism, may struggle with vague or ambiguous communication. Managers should ensure that expectations, instructions, and feedback are clear and structured. They can use written communication as much as possible, with bullet points or step-by-step instructions, to support clarity and reduce misunderstandings.



Offer Flexible Work Arrangements

Allow employees to design their workday around their peak productivity times can enhance their performance.



Foster a Supportive Work Environment

Encourage managers to engage in open, empathetic conversations with employees with neurodiversity about their specific needs and preferences. This includes understanding sensory sensitivities, preferred communication styles, and specific challenges. Managers can create a culture of support by regularly checking in with employees, offering assistance when needed, and providing feedback that is constructive and specific.



Leverage Technology for Accessibility

Ensure that remote tools and platforms are accessible for employees with neurodiversity. This may include tools with speech-to-text functionality, task management apps, and noise-cancelling technology.



Encourage Regular Breaks and Mental Health Support

Remote work can be draining for neurodivergent employees, especially those with conditions like ADHD or anxiety. Encourage regular breaks to help employees manage their focus and energy levels. Offer resources for mental health support or access to counselling services, to help employees cope with stress, anxiety, or other mental health challenges.



Promote Equal Opportunities for Career Advancement

Ensure that employees with neurodiversity have access to the same career development opportunities as their neurotypical peers. This includes clear pathways for promotion, mentoring, and skill-building. Provide accommodations in performance reviews and goal-setting to ensure that employees with neurodiversity are evaluated fairly based on their unique strengths.

In addition to these strategies, make sure to ask employees about what they might need to work efficiently: they know best what works for them and what does not! It can be as simple as asking, "How can we make you more comfortable?"

What is the role of Human Resources ?

- HR should provide training for all employees and managers on neurodiversity to promote understanding, empathy, and awareness of the unique needs of individuals with neurodiversity in remote work setting.
- HR should work with managers to ensure that employees with neurodiversity have equal access to career growth opportunities, including mentorship programs, promotions, and skill-building workshops.
- HR should facilitate the provision of accommodations, such as flexible working hours, specialised tools, or sensory-friendly workspaces, and ensure that employees with neurodiversity have access to appropriate mental health support and resources.
- HR should regularly assess the effectiveness of inclusion initiatives, gather feedback from neurodivergent employees, and adjust policies as needed to ensure that all employees feel supported and included.

Conclusion

The inclusion of neurodivergent employees in remote work environments is vital for creating inclusive, innovative, and high-performing teams. By providing clear communication, flexible work arrangements, and the right resources, organisations can foster an inclusive environment where employees with neurodiversity can succeed and contribute their unique talents. Inclusion requires ongoing effort from both management and HR to ensure that neurodivergent employees feel supported, valued, and able to thrive.



Further reading

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- Houghton, S., & Anderson, R. (2019). Inclusion of Neurodiverse Employees in the Workplace: Strategies and Benefits. Journal of Occupational Psychology, 24(3), 221-232.
- Robertson, J., & Ne'eman, A. (2020). Neurodiversity in the workplace: A guide for HR and managers. The Neurodiversity Employment Network.

Preventing ageism

“The rise of HRW is tightly linked to the use of digital technologies. Unfortunately, significant stereotypes relate to age and the use of these technologies. If these stereotypes are not considered and mitigated, in addition to essentialising employees, they might divide the work teams and create inequalities.



What is ageism?

“Old people can’t use a computer.”, “Ask the trainee to create the PowerPoint, young people know how it works!” Who has never heard this type of phrase at work?

According to the World Health Organization “**Ageism refers to the stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination towards others or oneself based on age.**” It is generally understood as the experience of old people (or people perceived as old), but it also pertains to young people.

There are a lot of stereotypes about age and work: young people would be less skilled and lazy when older employees would be strict and unable to adapt to new forms of work...

We also tend to categorise generations (millennials, boomers, gen Z...) by assign them specific traits, interests, and skills, hence contributing to **essentialising them and reducing them to stereotyped representations.**

Ageism in remote and hybrid work (HRW)



The rise of HRW is tightly linked to the use of digital technologies. Unfortunately, **significant stereotypes relate to age and the use of these technologies:**

- We tend to assume that young people are comfortable with technology, computers, and software used for work
- On the contrary, we expect older employees to encounter difficulties and to be less skilled when it comes to these issues

If these stereotypes are not considered and mitigated, in addition to essentialising employees, they might divide the work teams and create inequalities.

For example:

- Young employees **will not be trained** to use digital work tools during their onboarding as they are assumed to already have mastered them
- They will be **given specific tasks** without any certainty that they have the proper skills to complete them: create a PowerPoint presentation, revise and edit a document, update the website...
- Conversely, older employees will be assumed not to be skilled in the use of the same tools, which may lead to **tasks or projects not being assigned to them**, or **bypassing their application** for a fully remote position
- They may be perceived as **out of touch with their time** without this being justified or true, and be excluded from the work collective
- Regardless of their age, employees who struggle with new technology **may not feel comfortable sharing their difficulties** and try to overcompensate, leading to stress and fatigue

Preventing ageism in HRW

- ✓ When recruiting, avoid biased phrasing such as “We are looking for a dynamic person, comfortable with new technology.”
- ✓ Set a **shared foundation** regarding the digital tools every employee should master
- ✓ Regularly assess employees’ mastery of digital tools **and offer training session to bring them up to standard regardless of age**
- ✓ **Include familiarising oneself with digital tools in the new employees’ onboarding programme**
- ✓ **Encourage sharing knowledge and skills** with mentoring and reverse mentoring programmes
- ✓ **Normalise asking for help**
- ✓ **Provide tutorials on how to use digital working tools.** For example, how to edit a text in Word, how to create a PowerPoint presentation, how to use Teams or Slack features effectively...
- ✓ **Mitigate stereotypes linked to age and generations**, especially for managers and recruiting teams
- ✓ **Analyse HR data** to detect inequalities related to age in recruitment, career development and training plans
- ✓ **Involve employees of all ages** when elaborating working methods and choosing working tools



References

- World Health Organization, Ageing: ageism - <https://www.who.int/news-room/questions-and-answers/item/ageing-ageism>

Addressing Gender Equality Issues in Hybrid and Remote Work (HRW)

“It is important that managers understand how remote, and hybrid work can reinforce gender inequalities and take steps to mitigate these risks.



Introduction

Hybrid and remote work have often been celebrated as methods of reducing gender inequality in the workplace by providing women, who commonly bear a disproportionate share of household and caregiving duties, greater opportunities to work full-time. However, HRW can also blur work-life boundaries, with women more likely than their male counterparts to take on household tasks during work hours, potentially reinforcing gender inequalities.

This guide serves to provide strategies to mitigate these discrimination risks in HRW.

Understanding the issue

What are the risks to gender equality that arise from hybrid and remote work ?

Decreased work-life balance

Recent research on the gender dimensions of hybrid and remote work reveals that women who work from home are more likely than men to take on household and caregiving demands during work hours.¹ For instance, a study conducted by The Ohio State University² shows that in a two-income household, men who work from home while their female partner works at the office are much less likely to take on shared household responsibilities during work hours. Women are also more likely to feel guilty about neglecting household or caregiving duties when working from the office.

This dual burden of domestic and work-related tasks can lead to a blurring of the lines between professional and personal life as well as insufficient work breaks, often fostering unhealthy habits, such as feeling the need to be constantly available. Furthermore, this increase in non-work interruptions can leave women with a persistent sense of needing to catch-up, creating a cycle of overworking and leading to increased stress, and risk of burnout.

Stigmatisation of HRW

In some companies, women who opt to work from home or in a hybrid format may experience stigmatisation, as they are perceived to be prioritising their family over work. This stigmatisation working in tandem with the corporate culture of “presenteeism” has been known to result in decreased pay and promotion opportunities for women in comparison to male counterparts, who spend most of their time at the office. This has also been referred to as the “fatherhood premium” and the “motherhood penalty”.

Isolation

A decreased presence in the office can also increase feelings of isolation. While isolation is a risk for all remote workers, women are disproportionately affected due to their higher rates of working from home. This heightened isolation can contribute to a decline in mental health and overall well-being among female employees.

How can we mitigate these risks ?



Inclusive policies and fair performance evaluations

Employers must establish policies that support work-life balance and foster a culture where remote work is not penalised. Employees should be evaluated based on performance outcomes, rather than physical presence in the office.

To prevent remote work being perceived as a policy primarily for women, employers should actively encourage male employees to take advantage of remote work opportunities.

Employers should implement and communicate realistic deadlines and provide workloads that fit into workhours, regardless of work location.

Foster team dynamics and employee well-being

To mitigate risks of isolation, employers should offer opportunities for in-person interaction and networking. These could be done in the way of team building activities, coworking spaces, or non-work-related social events.

Employees should be given access to mental-health and well-being services.

What is the role of Managers and Human Ressources ?

Managers



- Facilitate a work culture that supports both men and women in choosing remote work if desired and emphasises employee well-being.
- Ensure performance evaluations are fair and consistent, regardless of whether employees work remotely or in the office.

Human ressources



- Provide support and trainings to managers on the opportunities and risks to gender equality that arise from remote and hybrid work.
- Use employee feedback mechanisms to monitor progress and identify areas for improvement.

Conclusion

Ultimately, women's access to remote work does not change the division of labour in many households. For this reason, it is important that managers understand how remote, and hybrid work can reinforce gender inequalities and take steps to mitigate these risks.



Further reading

- Double challenges: How working from home affects dual-earner couples' work-family experiences: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/peps.12559>
- Gender, Parenting, And the Rise Of Remote Work During The Pandemic: <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC9122150/>

Supporting Domestic Violence Survivors in Hybrid and Remote Work (HRW)

“For many who experience domestic abuse at home, the office is a safe space, providing security and connection. However, as the implementation of hybrid and remote policies increases, employees experiencing domestic abuse are losing this safe space.



Introduction

The rise of hybrid and remote work (HRW) policies within organisations has come with increased risks for individuals experiencing domestic abuse. Consequently, it is important for companies to provide accessible resources for anyone who may be affected and to be well-informed on how to offer these resources effectively. It is also essential that these support mechanisms are integrated into broader wellbeing, safety, and inclusion strategies.

Domestic violence: scope and definition

Domestic violence, also called “domestic abuse or “intimate partner violence”, can be defined as “a pattern of behaviour in any relationship that is used to gain or maintain power and control over an intimate partner”. Domestic violence can be physical, sexual, emotional, economic, or psychological actions or threats of actions.

What are the risks ?

- **Lack of a safe space**

For many who experience domestic abuse at home, the office is a safe space, providing security and connection. However, as the implementation of hybrid and remote policies increases, employees experiencing domestic abuse are losing this safe space. Furthermore, this increased time at home leaves survivors even more vulnerable, with a study conducted during the Covid-19 pandemic revealing that working from home may increase the frequency of the abuse faced by domestic violence victims.

- **Increased isolation**

Hybrid and remote work can cut employees facing domestic abuse off from friends, colleagues, and support networks.

- **Impacted work performance and career progression**

A 2021 survey of nearly 5,000 workers across nine countries reveals that 94% of workers who have experienced domestic abuse said it impacted their work performance.³ Moreover, one-third (32%) stated the abuse had a significant impact on their career progression.

- **Restricted Access to Help**

Only 16% of workers surveyed said their workplace had a dedicated policy to help survivors of domestic abuse. Furthermore, increased HRW further reduces this access to help, as it can be more difficult to reach survivors in a remote format.

Barriers to disclosure

- Fear of job loss or disbelief as well as shame may prevent employees from disclosing domestic abuse
- Survivors may be unsure of what constitutes domestic abuse, especially in cases of economic or emotional abuse
- HRW settings reduce opportunities for informal disclosure, such as chats with colleagues

How can we mitigate the risks ?

- **Avoid generalisations**

Research indicates that women are more likely than men to suffer from ongoing assaults and more serious injury. However, it is important to not fall victim to generalisations and acknowledge that men can experience domestic abuse from their female partner and that domestic abuse can also occur in same-sex relationships. Domestic abuse can happen to anyone of any age, sexual orientation, or gender.

Establish a clear policy for assisting survivors of domestic abuse

- In a HRW setting, domestic violence should become part of the workplace's overall safety and violence prevention program.⁴
- Implement a confidential method for employees to disclose concerns or abuse. This could be a code word, a secure online form, or in the form of regular employee wellbeing checks.
- Communicate regularly the domestic abuse policies and resources in place and make them accessible online.
- Identify mental confidential helplines and health professionals specialised in assisting survivors to refer employees to if need be.
- Implement a non-retaliation policy protecting employees who disclose domestic abuse to their employer from adverse action such as termination, demotion, harassment or any other form of penalty for coming forward.

Train managers and staff

- Train both managers and staff on the definition of domestic violence and the various forms it can take
- Train managers on trauma-informed responses to take if an employee discloses abuse and confidentiality.
- Offer bystander intervention training so colleagues know how to recognise signs of domestic abuse and respond safely.

Offer flexible work options

- Allow employees to work at the office if working at home is unsafe
- Provide access to coworking spaces, if need be
- Offer paid leave or adjusted work hours for employees to recover, relocate, attend legal meetings, etc

What are the roles of Managers and Human Resources?

Managers



- Awareness and vigilance
- Regular check-ins and confidential disclosure methods
- Workplace flexibility and adaptability
- Referring employees to professionals when needed
- Trust-building amongst employees

Human resources



- Clear survivor-centred domestic violence policies and resources
- Trainings and awareness for managers and staff
- Confidential support systems
- Monitor and evaluate: regularly assess the effectiveness of policies through anonymous surveys and adjust accordingly.



Further Reading

- <https://www.vodafone.co.uk/newscentre/press-release/employer-support-for-domestic-violence-and-abuse-survivors-must-adapt-to-reflect-changing-hybrid-working-patterns/%C2%A0%C2%A0%C2%A0%C2%A0>
- <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/domesticabuseguide.pdf%C2%A0%C2%A0%C2%A0>
- <https://www.shrm.org/topics-tools/news/employee-relations/domestic-abuse-reports-fueled-remote-workers>

Preventing online Sexism

“ Many gender biases and stereotypes continue to be perpetuated in hybrid and remote work environments. Because these incidents happen online, they are particularly difficult to detect, report, and address.



Online sexism: what are we talking about?

Sexism is an attitude or action that humiliates, excludes or stigmatises individuals based on their gender. It can take many forms. Sometimes disguised as humour, expressed in a seemingly well-meaning way, or used to justify violent acts.

We refer to sexist cyberviolence when such behaviour occurs in digital spaces: online harassment (repeated text messages, calls, etc.), spreading rumours, and much more. The risks are not excluded in contexts of remote and hybrid work (HRW)

Understanding the issue



What are the risks of sexism linked to HRW?

The persistent impact of sexism in hybrid and remote work

The shift to new ways of organising and communicating through remote work has seen an increase in sexist behaviour (e.g., comments about appearance on Zoom, deliberate exclusion from email threads or meeting invites). Such behaviours heighten psychosocial risks for women. Women are disproportionately affected by “Zoom fatigue” due to the pressures felt around physical appearance. One in seven women report feeling “very” or even “extremely” fatigued after a video call, compared to one in twenty men¹. A DARES study² revealed that women are more likely to be criticised by those around them for perceived unavailability (27% of women working remotely versus 20% of men).

More violent abuse online

The "cockpit effect" refers to the loss of empathy in online interactions, where individuals feel dehumanised when communicating via electronic channels (intranet, emails, etc.). This often leads to aggressive behaviour, with the lack of face-to-face interaction normalising or even encouraging the violence of such attacks. The cockpit effect illustrates the emotional detachment of the perpetrator, who is no longer aware of the victim's emotional response.

Preventing and mitigating sexism in HRW

How can we reduce the risks of discrimination and sexist behaviour in hybrid and remote work?

- **Raising awareness**

Risk assessment is the first step in addressing the factors behind sexist cyberviolence. Organisations can appoint an independent body to evaluate risks and conduct internal investigations. Mandatory training for all those in positions of authority and responsibility is also a crucial tool in raising awareness and proactively tackling these harmful, often hard-to-detect behaviours.

- **Reporting**

Online sexism often takes place out of sight, which is part of what makes it so insidious. That's why, wherever possible, it is vital to implement listening and reporting mechanisms, enabling potential victims to come forward while reducing the isolation that this experience can bring. Employers must ensure that these systems are both independent and competent and clearly outline the internal procedures to be followed once an alert has been raised.

- **Sanctioning**

When cases of online sexism are reported within an organisation, it is essential to carry out thorough internal investigations to determine appropriate sanctions. These may range from a formal warning to a reprimand or even dismissal and must be applied swiftly and fairly.

- **Providing support**

Once an appropriate sanction has been issued, there may be cases where both the victim and the perpetrator remain colleagues. In such situations, both parties require support: the victim, to avoid feeling stigmatised; and the perpetrator, not to be excluded from the workplace community but to be realigned with the organisation's values of equality.

What are the roles of Managers and Human Resources?

Managers



- Identify signs of sexist cyberviolence and raise team awareness about gender stereotypes in the context of HRW
- Support victims and perpetrators in the process of repair and reconciliation

Human resources



- Offer support and training to managers to help them recognise and manage the risks and signs of sexist cyberviolence
- Incorporate hybrid and remote working conditions into company policies for addressing and preventing sexism

Conclusion

Many gender biases and stereotypes continue to be perpetuated in hybrid and remote work environments. Because these incidents happen online, they are particularly difficult to detect, report, and address. However, there are numerous actions that organisations can take in terms of assessing, reporting, sanctioning, and supporting victims to help reduce and actively combat online sexism.



Further Reading

- AFMD, 2023 #StOpE Barometer: Everyday Sexism in the Workplace Remains a Reality for 8 out of 10 Women, <https://www.afmd.fr/en/stope-barometer-2023>

Accounting for caregiving employees

“Caregivers are more likely to face workplace discrimination, such as loss of responsibilities, denial of promotions or pay rises. A gendered perspective is also necessary to understand the challenges of inclusion: more than half of caregivers are women, rising to 60% in cases of intensive dependency.”

Introduction

In 2021, France had more than 9 million people providing care to a loved one experiencing a loss of autonomy. Given the ageing population, an increasingly large share of the public is affected by this status.

While the widespread adoption of hybrid and remote working (HRW) is often seen as an opportunity by employees to better balance work and personal life, the experience of working caregivers deserves closer attention.

The key issues of caregiving and HRW

Among the millions of informal caregivers, 61% are in employment. On average, working caregivers are 42.2 years old and spend 9.8 hours per week caring for their relative(s). Caregivers represent a growing segment of the workforce: by 2030, one in four employees will be a caregiver. Caring for one's relatives is no longer just a private matter but a real issue for employers.

What are the challenges of supporting caregivers HRW?

Impact on caregivers

Whether they work mostly on-site or remotely, caregiving employees have to juggle personal and professional obligations within the same day, or even the same hour. Remote working is sometimes viewed as a way to better manage these demands and create a healthier work-life balance: by working from home, caregivers may be able to take breaks to care for their loved ones, accompany them to medical appointments, and so on.

However, it is important to note that remote working, if not properly managed and supported, may fail to deliver the expected benefits for employees: there is a risk of physical and mental exhaustion, especially if no breaks are taken throughout the day. Similarly, working caregivers may become isolated from the team because they are less physically present and may be perceived as less available.

Employers must therefore support these employees, taking into account **health considerations, quality of working life, and the dynamics of team management in an HRW environment.**

Impact on the team

Maintaining team cohesion in hybrid and remote settings is a major challenge of this new way of working. This is especially true when addressing the needs of caregiving employees, who may be working remotely more often and may feel disconnected from the rest of the team.

Employers need to be transparent about remote working arrangements and any additional days that may be granted to support caregivers. If caregivers are allowed more remote working days than their colleagues, clear communication and transparency are essential to avoid feelings of unfairness. **This open approach also helps to highlight employees' needs and encourages mutual support and empathy within teams.**

Ideally, a balance should be struck between the flexibility required by working caregivers and organisational needs (e.g. in-person meetings, project tracking, etc.).

Impact on working conditions and career development

Caregivers are more likely to face workplace discrimination, such as loss of responsibilities, denial of promotions or pay rises. **More than 15% of caregivers fear their career development will be hindered, and 13% have already experienced some form of stigmatisation.** A gendered perspective is also necessary to understand the challenges of inclusion: more than half of caregivers are women, rising to 60% in cases of intensive dependency.

Recognising the role of caregivers

Fostering a culture of compassion

The first step in offering support is to create a climate of trust and to encourage open dialogue. Caregivers are sometimes subject to negative or stereotypical perceptions from colleagues. A sense of trust is essential, so caregivers feel comfortable discussing their role and needs — if they wish to do so. Creating a compassionate culture can also involve designating "caregivers point of contact": employees who serve as key points of contact for information and referrals to appropriate support mechanisms.

Developing an HRW policy tailored to caregivers

As a matter of fact, caregiving responsibilities are as diverse as caregivers themselves. The goal is to help these employees manage both their work and personal lives, and to prevent burnout and depression. A tailored policy could include collective agreements establishing caregivers' leave, psychological support, or partnerships with specialist organisations, particularly for legal or administrative help.

The role of HR and management

Managers



- Monitor signs of fatigue or burnout among working caregivers
- Contribute to a supportive atmosphere and communicate sensitively with the team

Human resources



- Provide support and training to managers on recognising and managing the risks faced by working caregivers
- Integrate the specific needs of caregivers into corporate HRW policies
- Ensure equal opportunities in career development



Further Reading

- [California Employers Association, “The Remote Work and Caregiving Dilemma”](#)
- <https://www.employers.org/blog/2023/10/26/default/the-remote-work-caregiving-dilemma/>
- [Forbes, “New Research Shows Remote Work Essential For Caregivers”](#)
- <https://www.forbes.com/sites/glebtsipursky/2023/01/27/new-research-shows-remote-work-essential-for-caregivers/>

Including LGBTQ+ employees in hybrid and remote work

“ While physical distance can remove some of the daily barriers faced in office environments, it can also obscure visibility, limit social connection, and reduce opportunities for expression and support.



Introduction

Hybrid and remote work (HRW) have transformed the way organisations operate, offering increased flexibility and access to new ways of working. However, this shift has also brought new challenges in ensuring inclusive and equitable workplaces, particularly for lesbian, gay, bi, trans or queer (LGBTQ+) employees. While physical distance can remove some of the daily barriers faced in office environments, it can also obscure visibility, limit social connection, and reduce opportunities for expression and support.

Hence, it is important to ensure LGBTQ+ inclusion remains a priority in hybrid and remote settings.

What are the challenges of LGBTQ+ inclusion in HRW?

Hybrid and remote work can unintentionally exacerbate existing inequalities and introduce new barriers for LGBTQ+ employees. Key challenges include:

Fewer opportunities to come out

In remote settings, casual conversations and social cues that help build trust and identity are reduced. Employees who may have chosen to be out in a physical workplace might not feel the same level of comfort or safety online, leading to a sense of invisibility.

Video calls and privacy concerns

For LGBTQ+ employees who are not out at work, participating in video meetings can feel intrusive or risky. For example, they may be anxious about colleagues seeing their same-sex partner in the background or other family interactions.

Risk of isolation and unsafe environments

Remote work can increase social isolation for LGBTQ+ employees, particularly if they lack a supportive network outside of work. For some, home may not be a safe space to express their identity, leading to heightened stress and a reduced sense of belonging.

Reduced visibility of allies and role models

Without shared physical spaces, the informal presence of allies and visible role models becomes less tangible. This can weaken the sense of solidarity and support that LGBTQ+ employees may have previously relied on in the workplace.

Best practices

Internal communication

One of the key issues of LGBTQ+ inclusion in HRW is the decreased visibility of LGBTQ+ employees and allies. By regularly communicating on LGBTQ+ topics, initiatives or news, employers can facilitate discussions among employees and mitigate this visibility loss.

Pronouns sharing

Encouraging employees to include their pronouns in email signatures, user profiles, and when introducing themselves during meetings promotes an inclusive culture. This simple act normalises gender diversity and creates a safer environment for trans, non-binary and gender-diverse employees. Managers and senior leaders should lead by example to embed this practice across teams.

Using virtual background

Virtual backgrounds can protect employees' private life by preventing colleagues to see into their home during virtual meetings. They can also convey supportive messages, remind of the company's inclusion policy and help celebrate pride events.

The roles of HR and managers

Managers



- Lead by example and promote inclusive policies by making sure your team is aware of them and attend related events
- Support employees' initiatives (communication, creation of an ERG...) by allocating time and resources when possible
- Promote role models and allyship to ensure the topic of inclusion is everybody's responsibility

Human resources



- Conduct a situational analysis: analyse complaints on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity, use anonymous surveys or create focus groups to gather information on LGBT+ employee's experiences at work
- Formalise the company's commitment to LGBT+ inclusion and appoint executive sponsors to carry it out
- Ensure that company processes are inclusive of LGBT+ employees, whether it be recruitment, career management or mobility



Further Reading

- Santos, Ronnie de Souza, et al. Benefits and Limitations of Remote Work to LGBTQIA+ Software Professionals. 2023, <https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.2301.05379>
- Out Now, LGBT+ WFH: Effective inclusion strategies for remote working, 2021 <https://www.outnowconsulting.com/media/56542/lgbtwfh-report-final.pdf>
- AFMD, LGBT+ inclusion in the workplace: A matter of equality, a matter of opportunity, 2022 <https://www.afmd.fr/kit-dinclusion-lgbt-au-travail-version-anglaise>

Promoting inclusion in hybrid and remote work

Information on the Case Study

Organisation: Telefónica

Size: +103,000 employees

Location: Madrid, Spain

Sector: Telecommunications

Operational Context

Telefónica is a Spanish multinational telecommunications company with state participation. It is the fourth largest telecommunications company in Europe and the fifteenth largest worldwide. It is present in more than twenty countries in Europe and America and generates 1.2 million jobs. Its corporate principles include training, guidance and responsible advice on digital skills so that everyone can face the present and future challenges.

The Problem/Opportunity

Problem: The labour integration of disabled people, LGBTQ+ people and other groups at risk of exclusion in the workplace is necessary to build a truly inclusive work environment

Opportunity: Integration not only represents an act of social justice, but also benefits society by fostering diversity and harnessing the potential and capacity of each individual. To this end, the hybrid and remote working (HRW) model seems to be a fundamental and powerful tool, because it allows for the elimination of physical barriers, flexible working hours, reduces prejudice in the work environment, generates a personalised environment, and opens up geographical opportunities.

What Was Done

1. Diversity and Inclusion Policy:

Action: Development of a specific internal policy and tools.

Examples: Telefónica developed and implemented a Diversity and Inclusion Policy, establishing its commitment to comply with the laws applicable in the countries in which the company operates, as well as with the international Human Rights. This seeks to ensure management free of prejudices associated to differences. In this light, complaints and Inquiries Channel were also implemented allowing people to report anonymously or personally any case of harassment or discrimination.

Action: Promoting an inclusive culture, where employees contribute their views freely.

Examples: creation of a Global Diversity Council. This is a committee to implement globally all initiatives to promote diversity. One example is the 'Talentia' programme, developed by Telefónica Spain. This project works on female talent at levels prior to management so that when there are opportunities for promotion, women are prepared to take up their new position.

2. Carrying out a study on the LGBTQ+ reality among employees:

Action: Telefónica carries out an annual diagnosis of the reality among LGBTQ+ employees.

Examples: Global Diversity Council promotes an inclusive culture, in which employees contribute their opinions freely. It is aimed at emotional-sexual and gender diversity and promotes the visibility of the group and family diversity in their advertising campaigns. It also facilitates access to employment for disadvantaged sectors of the population.

3. Awareness campaigns:

Action: Organisation and/or participation in events.

Examples: Affinity groups are present in different countries and areas, such as Spain, Brazil, the United Kingdom or Latin America, which allow actions to be aligned with the interests and concerns of the LGBTQ+ community. Participation in external events and, particularly, in the main pride marches in cities (e.g., Madrid, London or São Paulo) also helps build environments where Telefónica's employees feel valued and included.

4. Training and information:

Action: Organisation of courses, workshops and events, and preparation of corporate videos.

Examples: participation in the YesWeTrans project of FELGTBI+. Courses: The role of non-LGBTQ+ allies in achieving equality, lesbian visibility, bullying and harassment on social media, the reality of intersex people, the health and emotional well-being of LGBTQ+ employees and gender transition at work.

5. Inclusive, non-sexist or discriminatory language and communication

Action: Use of an inclusive language, free of discriminatory references.

Examples: In communication channels, images, documents, advertising and commercial materials (*i.e.*, both internal and external), Telefónica avoids the use of sexist references, and prejudiced or discriminatory messages.

6. Removing barriers

Action: Introducing technical aids and support to reduce and eliminate barriers to digital accessibility, connectivity, network performance, security, privacy, communication, and collaboration., ensuring equal work environments.

Examples: Telefónica adapts and customises workspaces (*i.e.*, assuming all the involved costs without government aids) for the well-being of employees with recognised disabilities, enhancing their working performances.

Outcomes

1. Visibility of the LGBTQ+ community:

Outcome: Increased number of LGBTQ+ employees.

Evidence: Employment contracts for 50 transgender employees

2. Labour integration of disabled people:

Outcome: Empower people with disabilities to humanise technology and break down barriers with digitalisation.

Evidence: In September 2023, the company had a total of 2 069 employees with disabilities, 39.6% more than in 2022.

3. Incorporation of the Hybrid Remote Work (HRW) model:

Outcome: Workplace accessibility and tools for remote work (key components for workplace integration) improved.

Evidence: 95% of the workforce works remotely and at the same time connectivity has been guaranteed. This evidence is related to the actions described above.

Conclusion

Labour integration for people at risk of social exclusion is not only a moral imperative, but also an intelligent strategy to build stronger and more resilient societies and companies. By breaking down barriers, using technology, among other tools, we not only build a more inclusive future, but also take advantage of the talent and diversity that will enrich communities and workplaces.

Meeting the needs of caregiving employees

Information on the case study:

Organisation: Banque Populaire Val-de-Marne

Size: 2000

Location: France

Sector: Banking and Finance

Operational context

In France, between 15% and 20% of employees look after a seriously ill or disabled relative on a daily basis. A third of caregivers are forced to resign in order to care for a frail relative. This figure could rise to 25% (one in four employees) by 2030, according to AGIRC-ARRCO. 8.3 million: the number of people over the age of 16 who regularly help someone close to them for reasons of health, loss of independence or disability (DREES). Of these, 4.3 million are helping someone aged over 60. Companies need to take action to recognise their role.

How do we define a caregiving employee? According to the Confederation of Family Organisations in the European Union, a carer is defined as "any non-professional person who provides assistance, on a principal basis, in part or in full, to a person who is dependent on them for the activities of daily life, because of their state of health, a disability or their age. This may involve help with everyday activities, material or financial support, or moral support. This help is provided at least once a week and represents at least three hours a week."

In France, this status is governed by the law "adapting society to ageing", which has been enforced since 2016. Family caregivers have a legal status in their own right. Under the French Social Action and Family Code, family caregivers include spouses, cohabitees, persons with whom the beneficiary has entered into a civil solidarity pact, ascendants, descendants or collateral relatives.

For example, according to a BVA study with April Foundation (2022)¹, on average, an employee carer takes 16 days off work a year to look after family in need. What's more, this situation has a major impact on their career, with 43% believing that their development has been held back because of their status. The "Aider & Travailler 2023" barometer, published in September 2023 by Interfacia², identifies the impact of being a care-giver on work: 34% of caregivers have left their job because of their role, 48% cannot find a new job because of their status, 68% of caregivers say that their situation has a negative impact on their work, 41% say that it has a negative impact on their spouse's professional life, 79% of caregivers' colleagues and managers see the organisation of team work impacted.

¹ <https://www.bva-x-sight.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Barometre-des-aidants-Fondation-April-BVA-2022-vDEF.pdf>

² <https://interfacia.fr/>: a solution for companies and their employees who provide care. Improving the social climate & productivity

It is an issue that companies need to address. All the more so as the foreseeable fall in the standard of living of retired people, of 15 to 20% between now and 2050, could be passed on in part to caregivers and increase the scale of transfers, raising the crucial question of how to share the burden between people losing their independence, their caregivers and collective solidarity.

It was in 2018, while working with the Cancer@Work association that Banque Populaire, according to Philippe Triboulet, Director of Diversity and HR Support for the business lines, became aware of the need to look after its employees in need and discovered a hitherto little-identified population, that of employee caregivers.

The problem/opportunity

In 2019 Formell consultancy organised webinars on the subject for all BP Val de Marne employees and offered support to employee caregivers. The company has carried out a survey. Of its 2 000 employees, around 20% are directly affected by this issue. Since 2019, the cooperative bank has been increasing the number of support schemes to make the day-to-day working lives of its 400 employees who are caregivers easier.

What was done

1. A structured approach has been put in place:

- A scheme to grant 4 extra days' leave a year to all caregivers who have to accompany a member of their family for medical treatment or to deal with administrative formalities.
- Several teleworking days adapted to their personal situation as caregivers.
- A solidarity fund made up of days of RTT³ and paid leave donated by colleagues and intended for caregivers wishing to support a person at the end of life or in the terminal phase of an illness.
- A "Caregivers Coffee" in partnership with the "Association Française des aidants" (the French Caregivers Association). This is a 1-hour discussion forum for 7 to 8 caregivers who want to meet, talk and give each other mutual support.

The initiatives also include training for key players, such as managers, particularly regarding flexible working hours and teleworking arrangements. Another issue that managers have been made aware of is the isolation felt by employees who provide care. Hence the training given to managers on managing remote teams and maintaining links between face-to-face and remote employees to avoid tension. The work objectives have remained the same. HR managers and social partners are also trained.

2. A "labelled" approach based on two labels: Cap Handéo and the Diversity label

BPCA Val de Marne has been awarded the "Cap'Handeo, Entreprise engagée auprès de ses salariés aidants" (Cap'Handeo, a company committed to its caregiver employees) label in 2019, to help companies define actions to support their caring employees. This label enables

³ Days of Working Time Reduction

the company to benefit from additional support for its actions in favour of employees who are caregivers.

These actions have also enabled Banque Populaire Val de France to obtain the AFNOR Diversity label.

Outcomes

To date, BP Val de Marne has provided support to almost 100 employees, including 70 in their capacity as caregivers and 30 managers or key contacts within the bank (HR managers, social partners, etc.). In 2022, the solidarity fund enabled a total of 58 days to be redistributed.

1. A stronger employer brand

This strong social issue has won the support of all employees internally, including the social partners. For the company, it represents a challenge in terms of both internal and external communication on diversity and has become one of the major pillars of the Banque Populaire employer brand. Benevolence is one of the company's core values, which creates strong recognition among employees and increases their commitment to the employer.

2. Employees who are developing their skills

According to the 2023 Interfacia barometer⁴, 69% of caregivers say they have acquired new skills as a result of their role, particularly in terms of managing priorities, organising their time and being more efficient. This is a view shared by colleagues and managers of caregivers at BPCA. The latter also note a positive impact on team cohesion and on their own work organisation.

3. A subject that will become increasingly important over the next few years

As the population ages, the proportion of employees providing care will increase dramatically. Another sobering fact is that the predicted 15-20% fall in the standard of living of retired people between now and 2050 could be passed on in part to caregivers and increase the scale of transfers, raising the crucial question of how the burden should be shared between people losing their independence, their caregivers and collective solidarity.

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⁴ Help & Work 2023

<https://www.bva-xsight.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Barometre-des-aidants-Fondation-April-BVA-2022-vDEF.pdf>



Creating digital safe spaces for LGBTQ+ employees

Information on the case study:

Organisation: PageGroup

Size: 1000

Location: France

Sector: Recruitment

Operational context

With the rise of remote and hybrid work models, digital communication platforms have become central to workplace interactions.

One of the challenges we are facing is ensuring these platforms are safe, inclusive, and supportive for LGBTQ+ employees. This is crucial in the absence of physical office spaces where inclusivity efforts are more visible and direct.

The problem/opportunity

Problem:

Some employees or even leadership may resist the idea of creating digital safe spaces, viewing them as unnecessary or as a form of favouritism. This resistance can stem from a lack of understanding of LGBTQ+ issues or from a broader resistance to DE&I initiatives.

Low participation can limit the effectiveness of these spaces, making it difficult to build a supportive community or to address issues faced by LGBTQ+ employees.

While anonymity can protect employees from discrimination, it can also hinder the development of a close-knit, supportive community. Striking the right balance between anonymity and visibility is difficult.

Measuring the impact of digital safe spaces can be difficult. Metrics such as participation rates, user satisfaction, and impact on employee well-being are not always easy to quantify or track. Without clear success metrics, it can be challenging to demonstrate the value of these spaces to the organisation, potentially jeopardising their future.

Opportunity:

A company's reputation is closely tied to its commitment to diversity and inclusion.

Organisations that create and promote digital safe spaces for LGBTQ+ employees are seen as leaders in DE&I. This positive reputation can enhance customer loyalty, attract investors, and build stronger relationships with stakeholders.

Providing digital safe spaces can also help avoid potential legal issues related to discrimination and harassment. It demonstrates a proactive approach to creating an inclusive environment, aligning with both legal requirements and ethical standards. This contributes to a more equitable workplace.

Digital safe spaces allow LGBTQ+ employees to share experiences, seek support, and connect with others in similar situations, which can significantly reduce stress and anxiety. Healthier employees are more productive, have lower absenteeism rates, and are less likely to experience burnout.

What was done

We started with a pilot program to test the effectiveness of digital safe spaces, gather feedback, and make necessary adjustments before a full-scale rollout.

The key concepts covered was allyship strategies which are broken down into:

- Facilitate inclusive meetings
- Fair hiring / promotions
- Promote inclusive culture

Then, we discussed individual responsibility through individual and interpersonal allyship experiences. The pilot gathered about 100 attendees.

Outcomes

The existence of digital safe spaces signals to all employees that the organisation values diversity and inclusion, fostering a more inclusive culture.

These spaces allow LGBTQ+ employees to voice their concerns, share their experiences, and contribute to organisational discussions about diversity and inclusion.

Our LGBTQ+ employees have asked us to take more significant action on transidentity; that request came first in all geographical areas.

Digital safe spaces provide a platform for LGBTQ+ employees to connect with others at an international level who share similar experiences, fostering a sense of community and belonging through our 34 international locations.

Managing unconscious bias and microaggression in hybrid and remote work

Information on the case study

Organisation: Hellenic EcoFashion Ltd.

Size: 250 employees

Location: Greece

Sector: Sustainable Fashion

Operational context

Hellenic EcoFashion Ltd. is a leading company in Greece's sustainable fashion industry. The company produces eco-friendly clothing and accessories, emphasising ethical sourcing and sustainable practices. The workforce comprises designers, marketers, administrative staff, and factory workers. The recent shift to a hybrid work model, prompted by the COVID-19 pandemic, combined remote work for corporate staff with on-site work for factory employees.

The Problem/opportunity

Problem: The transition to a hybrid work model revealed underlying issues of unconscious bias and microaggressions within the organisation. Remote employees, especially those from minority backgrounds, reported feeling marginalised during virtual meetings and excluded from critical decision-making processes. Microaggressions in virtual communication, such as dismissive comments and inappropriate jokes, also became more apparent.

Opportunity: This situation presented an opportunity for Hellenic EcoFashion Ltd. to address these issues proactively, promoting a more inclusive and respectful work environment. The company's leadership recognised that effectively managing unconscious bias and microaggression could enhance employee engagement, foster innovation, and improve overall productivity.

What was done

1. Conducting a thorough assessment:

- **Action:** Partnered with external consultants specialising in diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) to comprehensively assess the company's current practices.
- **Example:** Surveys, focus groups, and one-on-one interviews were conducted with employees to identify unconscious bias and microaggressions.

2. Implementing training programs:

- **Action:** Rolled out mandatory training programs to recognise and address unconscious bias and microaggressions.
- **Example:** Interactive workshops and e-learning modules were developed to educate employees about the impact of their behaviour and how to foster an inclusive environment.

3. Establishing clear policies and reporting mechanisms:

- **Action:** Updated the company's code of conduct to include specific guidelines on preventing and addressing microaggressions and unconscious bias.
- **Example:** Implemented anonymous reporting tools and established a DEI committee to handle complaints and ensure accountability.

4. Promoting inclusive communication:

- **Action:** Developed guidelines for inclusive communication in virtual settings, emphasising active listening, equitable participation, and respectful language.
- **Example:** Encouraged the use of inclusive language in emails and virtual meetings and provided training on how to facilitate inclusive discussions.

5. Enhancing leadership accountability:

- **Action:** Incorporated DEI objectives into performance evaluations for managers and leaders.
- **Example:** Leaders were trained to recognise their biases and were held accountable for fostering inclusive team environments.

6. Creating support networks:

- **Action:** Established Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) to support and advocate for underrepresented employees.
- **Example:** Launched ERGs for women, LGBTQ+ employees, and ethnic minorities, facilitating regular meetings and providing a platform for shared experiences.

Outcomes

1. Increased awareness and understanding:

- **Outcome:** Employees became more aware of their biases and the impact of their actions on others. Training programs led to a greater understanding of recognising and mitigating unconscious bias and microaggressions.
 - **Evidence:** Post-training surveys indicated a 75% increase in employee awareness and understanding of DEI issues.
2. **Improved reporting and accountability:**
- **Outcome:** Establishing clear policies and reporting mechanisms resulted in more employees feeling safe reporting instances of bias and microaggression.
 - **Evidence:** The number of reported incidents increased initially, indicating greater trust in the reporting process, followed by a decrease as the culture improved.
3. **Enhanced employee engagement and inclusion:**
- **Outcome:** Promoting inclusive communication and establishing ERGs helped create a more engaged and inclusive work environment.
 - **Evidence:** Employee engagement scores in annual surveys improved by 20%, with specific gains in the feeling of inclusion and belonging.
4. **Stronger leadership commitment:**
- **Outcome:** Leaders became more committed to DEI objectives, resulting in more inclusive team management and decision-making processes.
 - **Evidence:** Performance reviews significantly improved leaders' DEI competencies, and employee feedback highlighted more inclusive leadership practices.
5. **Positive impact on company culture:**
- **Outcome:** The comprehensive approach to managing unconscious bias and microaggressions fostered a more respectful and supportive company culture.
 - **Evidence:** Employee retention rates improved by 15%, and there was a noticeable increase in the diversity of new hires, reflecting a more inclusive recruiting process.

Conclusion

By taking targeted actions to address unconscious bias and microaggressions, Hellenic EcoFashion Ltd. not only improved its workplace culture but also set a standard for inclusivity in the sustainable fashion industry. The initiatives ensured that all employees, regardless of their work location or background, felt valued and respected, leading to a more cohesive and productive workforce.

Remote working for people with disabilities: Simplifying inclusion through digitalisation?

Information on the case study:

Organisation: IW

Size: circa 4,83 million employees

Location: Köln, Germany

Sector: Private economic research institute

Operational context

The Institut der deutschen Wirtschaft (IW) is a private institute for economic research which focuses on economic, social, and educational policies, as well as the labour market. In 2023 the IW conducted a study concerning remote work and how it affected people with disabilities.¹ The overall result that emerges from their research is that the rising of digitalisation opened up many new involvement opportunities for employees, making it easier for people with disabilities to become or remain employed. By companies offering hybrid working arrangements and further developing assistive technologies, people with impairments have been able to improve their professional lives as well as their possibilities to independently integrate into society. To support this theory, the IW study took into account several worldwide research surveys that are elaborated throughout this case study.

The problem/opportunity

Since the changes brought about by the coronavirus pandemic will have a lasting impact on the professional reintegration of people with disabilities, IW deems it essential to increase their digital skills and self-management. Emerging cross-border communication technologies provide individuals with disabilities with more autonomy and flexibility, allowing them to manage medical treatment or rehabilitation exercises while working.² However, a complete shift to remote working could jeopardise social integration within teams as well as the feeling of connection to the company.

¹ C. FLÜTER-HOFFMAN, P. TRAUB, [Menschen mit Behinderungen im Homeoffice – Erleichterung für die Inklusion?](#), 2023.

² J. YORK, J. JOCHMARING, [Dilemmata einer inklusiven Arbeitswelt. Menschen mit Behinderung zwischen Sondersystemen und Gestaltungschancen einer Arbeitswelt 4.0](#), 2022, p.88.

What was done

The IW study takes into account the results from a study by Algoma University in Ontario³, which examined how employees with disabilities can be supported while working from home. This study suggests that all types of data should be processed electronically, and computers should be equipped with appropriate aids (e.g. Braille display, alternative texts, voice recognition program) when needed. During video conferences, sign language interpreters and live subtitling can be useful for many employees. While the Covid19-pandemic accelerated the promotion and investment in digital aids, research on their application for employees with disabilities remains limited. This digital gap is also cemented by the fact that households of people with disabilities generally have fewer access to hardware, software and internet connections.⁴

While reduced commuting can benefit many people with impairments, the IW study finds, new assistive digital aids should not create new barriers but rather facilitate greater participation in the workforce. Empirically proven success factors for a successful home office are above all: information flow, management quality, technical equipment, ergonomics and the quality of the room environment.⁵

A further study taken into account by IW was the one carried out by the German Association for Rehabilitation (Deutsche Vereinigung für Rehabilitation – DVfR)⁶. It defined the optimal frame conditions to promote remote working and inclusion:

- Establishing voluntariness and depict remote working as a choice, not a duty;
- Equipping the workplace to be disability-friendly and barrier-free;
- Investing in training courses to improve the use of digital tools;
- Strengthening the internal communication: keep in touch, offer support, ask for feedback;
- Accommodating the needs of people with visual and hearing impairments and develop tailored home office solutions together with the employees.

These requirements emerged from a follow-up analysis conducted after the pandemic, which the IW team viewed as an opportunity for companies to revolutionise their organisations. Inevitably, during the first lockdown in 2020, many employees had to face challenges like insufficient technical equipment, poorly designed home office ergonomics and an increase in cybercrimes due to inadequate virus software. As a result, both managers and employees were compelled to quickly familiarise themselves with new communication technologies, as well as learn new leadership and cooperation practices.

The final report that this case study will incorporate from the IW paper is the so called AKTIF project (Akademiker_innen mit Behinderung in die Teilhabe- und Inklusionsforschung)⁷. This

³ N. SHAW, S. BOUDREAU, M. ISSAOUI, [Digital Assistive Technologies to support remote working by people with disabilities: A scoping Review](#), Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario, 2022.

⁴ S. JOHANSSON ET.AL., [Disability digital divide: the use of the internet, smartphones, computers and tablets among people with disabilities in Sweden](#), 2021, p. 105–120.

⁵ C. FLÜTER-HOFFMAN, P. TRAUB, [Menschen mit Behinderungen im Homeoffice – Erleichterung für die Inklusion?](#), 2023, p. 57.

⁶ M. BOEHLE, [Corona-Konsultationsprozess der Deutschen Vereinigung für Rehabilitation, Ergebnisse Themenfeld 2: Arbeitsleben](#), Heidelberg, 2021.

initiative also concluded that it is essential to ensure team integration when establishing home office workplaces. The AKTIF findings highlighted the significance of flexible working time models and home office solutions. At the same time, it emphasised the need to adapt and create flexibility in the work environment based on individual requirements, allowing personalised working rhythms while maintaining team cohesion.⁸

Outcomes

The IW study drew the conclusion that an inclusive corporate culture, as described by the Optimal Distinctiveness Theory (ODT)⁹, strikes a balance between the desire for group belonging and the need for individual distinction.¹⁰ Such a culture fosters a strong sense of belonging and collaboration within the company, department, or team, while also providing space for individuals to showcase their unique strengths and personalities, thereby contributing to overall team success.

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⁷ Editor's note: Academics with disabilities involved in inclusion research.

⁸ M. SCHRÖTTLE, S. ZAPFEL, [*Akademiker innen mit Behinderung in die Teilhabe- und Inklusionsforschung \(AKTIF\) – Abschlussbericht*](#), Dortmund/Nürnberg, 2019, p. 40.

⁹ Proposed by Marilynn Brewer in 1991, the theory aimed to explain the psychological motivations driving people to identify with groups. After researching social identity theories, social dilemmas and evolutionary biology, Brewer stated that humans have two competing motivations: a need to belong and a need to feel unique or distinct. These two needs work in opposition and can be activated or deactivated depending on the context. From A. MA and D. RAST, [*Optimal Distinctiveness Theory*](#). Encyclopedia of Personality and Individual Differences, 2017, pp.1–8.

¹⁰ C. FLÜTER-HOFFMANN, A. HAMMERMAN, R MONSEF, [*Betriebliche Einflussfaktoren auf die Inklusion von Menschen mit Behinderungen, Eine empirische Analyse auf Basis der BIBB/BAuA-Erwerbstätigenbefragung 2018*](#), IW-Trends, 2021, Nr. 4, p. 6.

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Inclusive hiring and decision-making processes, women empowerment and diverse team-spirit.

Information on the case study:

Organisation: SAP SE

Size: 105.000. + employees

Location: Walldorf, Germany

Sector: Software development

Operational context

SAP, one of Germany's largest tech companies, has a highly diverse workforce spread globally, with employees from more than 157 nationalities. With the shift towards remote work, the company noticed potential barriers to reporting discrimination in an increasingly virtual environment. Therefore, SAP has been implementing its D&I strategies to foster a global workplace culture. The initiatives that promote diversity and inclusion are illustrated annually in the "Integrated Report"¹ with detailed data on the most impactful projects and the achieved goals. This case study will in particular take into account the Report from 2023 and showcase the most inspiring ideas to enhance inclusivity and diversity in the workplace.

The problem/opportunity

According to SAP, the organisation believes that a work culture where employees feel empowered to be their authentic selves can largely impact both business and society. In the context of the ReWork project, this aspect becomes even more relevant when we consider the rising influence of artificial intelligence in the workplace. While it is currently under debate if AI can reduce the risk of bias in hiring processes when designed as an ethical and fair tool,² it also increases demand for a sense of belonging in a rapidly changing work environment. With this background in mind, SAP established the so-called Employee Network Groups (ENGs)³ several years ago: voluntary and employee-led groups which have created a common digital space where everyone can share their unique perspectives. SAP currently counts on 13 different global ENGs whose addressed topics vary from autism inclusion to accessible workplaces in case of disabilities, flexible schedules for working parents and representation of different cultures overall (e.g. Latinos, Indigenous, Pan-Asians and Black employees). Through

¹ [Moving Towards Greater Impact, SAP 2023 Diversity & Inclusion \(D&I\) Report](#)

² The Future of Life Institute is designing a top-of-funnel process to eliminate the pre-hire bias due to the limited capacity of the manual recruiter. Many companies admitted how only a small portion of the millions of applicants are ever reviewed. Technologists and lawmakers should therefore work together to create tools and policies that make it both possible and mandatory for the entire pipeline to be reviewed. From F. POLLI, [Using AI to Eliminate Bias from Hiring](#), Harvard Business Review, 2019.

³ Currently representing more than 50 countries with 800 leads across the globe. From SAP CAREERS, [Employee Network Groups](#), 2022.

mentorship, formative learning, community engagement, events for cultural celebration and outreach, SAP's ENGs represent a way to let employees celebrate their own identities while also enabling them to develop networking opportunities despite working remotely or in different parts of the world.

What was done

In order to continue to broaden the diversity of its workforce, SAP reports to have reached a number of goals in 2023, including the engagement of more than 14,000 employees in the Inclusive Mindset Challenge (IMC) and the participation of over 1,000 managers in the Intentional Inclusion Workshop.⁴ According to SAP, the purpose of such initiatives is to stimulate the desire to learn and self-develop. The IMC, for example, is a learning platform which "challenges" the thinking of employees. This happens via quick exercises concerning mental health, LGBTQIA+ issues, bias and other unconscious behaviours that need to be addressed in order to raise awareness on D&I. For example, one challenge called "Deaf and Thriving"⁵ shared techniques that could come of help towards colleagues who have hearing impairment and may be at a disadvantage in situations like a meeting room with poor audio quality or understanding different accents on the phone. Small adjustments like directly facing co-workers when speaking or provide room near the screens during meetings to allow the reading of live captions can make a great difference. This challenge was also an important occasion for deaf and hard-of-hearing colleagues to share their experience and to minimise the stigma attached to deafness.

As far as women empowerment and gender parity are concerned, SAP set the goal to fill 25 % of executive roles by women by 2027. Hiring policies reflect this trend: 41,6 % of the SAP workforce were women, included tech roles.

In this regard, another important project was the SWICS Programme, initiated in 2021, in order to improve cybersecurity training and thereby raise the employability of women.⁶

Finally, as far as inclusive hiring is concerned, SAP emphasised diversity by using tailored strategies to ensure representation at every step of the recruitment process. Key aspects in this regard are:

- Strengthening relationships with initiatives like *Returnship programs*⁷ in North America, which aims to support mid-career professionals with 5 or more years of work experience who have taken a career break for caregiving, immigration or military service by offering remote and hybrid positions, varying from sales to marketing or other corporate functions.⁸

⁴ Launched in 2023, the Intentional Inclusion Workshops consist in interactive sessions which provide practical guidance on unconscious biases and ways to foster respect, inclusion, and psychological safety. [Moving Towards Greater Impact, SAP 2023 Diversity & Inclusion \(D&I\) Report](#), page 5.

⁵ Life at SAP, [Inclusive Mindset Challenge: Deaf and Thriving](#). YouTube, 2023.

⁶ S. PRAKAASH, [Empowering Women in Cybersecurity: My Swics journey](#), SAP Community Blog, 2023.

⁷ A 20-week paid project which includes workshops, coaching and a dedicated mentors to ease the transition back to the workforce. [Moving Towards Greater Impact, SAP 2023 Diversity & Inclusion \(D&I\) Report](#), page 13.

⁸ SAP Careers, [SAP Returnship Program](#), 2018.

- Collaborating with the ENGs to let all employees connect with SAP team members who share similar backgrounds.
- Training hiring managers to prioritise cultural contribution and be mindful of biases with initiatives like the Intentional Inclusion Workshop.

This inclusive framework has helped SAP increase the hiring of women, early-career talent, and underrepresented ethnic groups in 2023, particularly in the U.S., where the hiring of Asian, Black, and multiracial candidates exceeded workforce representation.

Outcomes

In 2023 SAP achieved many important recognitions for its D&I strategies. For example, the company's Autism at Work program⁹ was recognised as a Lighthouse Program by the World Economic Forum and received the Corporate Compassion Award from the HollyRod Foundation.

This inspired SAP to further broaden their D&I strategies, and as a result they launched their *Global Anonymous Self-Identification Diversity Survey*,¹⁰ which enabled the company to gain better insights into its workforce diversity.

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¹⁰ The survey invited employees to voluntarily share personal characteristics, such as their ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability status, nationality, military/veteran and caregiver status, among others. In its first year, the self-ID survey achieved a significant 12% response rate from employees and management. [Moving Towards Greater Impact, SAP 2023 Diversity & Inclusion \(D&I\) Report](#), page 9.

Education and integration by and for people at risk of social exclusion in the online university environment

Information on the case study:

Organisation: Universidad Internacional de La Rioja (UNIR)

Size: 3 700 employees

Location: Logroño, Spain

Sector: Education

Operational context

UNIR is an online university based in Logroño (Spain) that offers awards bachelor's and master's degrees. The student body is made up of people from more than 25 countries, with different cultures and socio-economic backgrounds.

The problem/opportunity

Problem: Some students present personal and social situations regarding social exclusion risks. The university's priority objective is to achieve the full integration of all students into university life, seeking the necessary means and resources to make UNIR a university for all. The inclusion of different learner profiles, with different needs and diversity (functional diversity, cultural diversity, gender, ...), implies the implementation of strategies, measures, and actions focused on adapting the context and environment to individuals. Challenges include a lack of training and information to respond to the needs of students with disabilities. In addition, difficulties in communicating with other university staff are one of the main challenges to inclusion.

Classroom diversity is beneficial for the students, both for its energising effect and for the transmission of values it embodies. It is precisely the lack of reference points that can give rise to difficulties in dealing with peers, insofar as ignorance can lead to rejection or, on the contrary, paternalistic behaviour. It is therefore important to improve and perfect knowledge and strategies to offer quality teaching to all students.

Opportunity: UNIR investigates the benefits and challenges posed by the inclusion of students with disabilities in universities. Their inclusion in the university classroom benefits them and teachers, according to a study carried out by UNIR's researchers and the University of Seville. This study compiles the experience of 119 teachers from 10 Spanish universities (Carballo, Molina, Cortes Vega, & Cabeza Ruiz, 2022). The professors agreed that the presence of students with disabilities in the classroom favours the development of values and skills, such as empathy and understanding of diversity in general (particularly disability). The development of these is the responsibility of professionals trained in the field of social sciences and specialised with postgraduate degrees.

What was done

1. Implementing specialised diversity Masters:

Action: Carrying out postgraduate courses specialising in intervention with groups of people at risk of social exclusion.

Examples:

- Master's degree in social Intervention, which provides the specific knowledge to effectively manage, design and evaluate social intervention programmes.
- Master's degree in special education, supported by ICT and neuropsychology, adopting a multidisciplinary approach that explores various disabilities, providing practical and theoretical tools directly applicable in educational settings.

2. Implementing specialised diversity courses:

Action: Implementation of specialised courses on functional diversity.

Examples:

- Course in Intellectual Disability in Children and Motor Development new psychomotor activities: oriented to use sport as a therapeutic tool, teaching the most innovative trends in the field of sport and health. It offers access to different resources and activities that can later be put into practice with children and allows them to acquire the necessary competences to foster the development of socio-emotional skills such as self-esteem, communication and assertiveness.
- Therapeutic Football Course: Together with the Atlético de Madrid Foundation and the Querer Foundation, this course is aimed at professionals who work with children with Intellectual Disability and difficulties in their Motor Development. With the participation of internationally renowned and active professionals, this course uses sport as a therapeutic tool, giving the opportunity to learn the most innovative trends in the field of sport and health.
- Course in Neuroeducation: practice with children possessing intellectual disabilities. An interdisciplinary methodology is applied, allowing children to acquire the necessary skills to promote the development of socio-emotional skills, such as self-esteem, communication and assertiveness. This course is provided by the Querer Foundation and the Atlético de Madrid Foundation, with the collaboration of the Community of Madrid.

3. Implementing special support services:

Action: Special Needs Attention Service (SANNEE) provides support to students with temporary or permanent functional educational needs, providing the most appropriate solutions for each case.

Examples:

- Access to Virtual Campus resources: materials are adapted according to the needs of the student.
- Curricular adaptations: the Academic Coordination Departments are informed on the special educational needs of students, so that the appropriate modifications can be made.
- Adaptations in exams: the necessary actions are taken in exams to guarantee equal opportunities for all UNIR students.
- Pedagogical advice: cases that require it are referred to the Academic Guidance Service to provide students with the most appropriate personalised attention.
- Other actions: considering different case and situations, specific departments provide appropriate responses to the requests of UNIR students with functional limitations.

Outcomes

1. Students are specialised in diversity topics and their professional applications

Outcome: Professional profiles for intervention with groups at risk of social exclusion in:

- Public administration, as a civil servant specialised in social policies and intervention programmes.
- Social services, as a manager and director of companies in charge of planning and supervision or responsible for specific care centres for various population groups.
- Third sector, as a director in organisations to plan and evaluate social projects.
- Research, as a technician in public and private organisations.
- Head of social projects in public and private organisations, responsible for the design and management of intervention projects.
- Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) area, in organisations, defining fields of interest and designing action plans.
- Consultancy in social welfare and social policies, diagnosing needs and supporting the implementation of social intervention programmes.

Evidence: The number of degree graduates is over 10 000.

2. Special needs students:

Outcome: Students attended in Special Needs Attention Service (SANNEE)

- **Evidence:** 4% of the total number of students at the university have stated that they have some kind of functional diversity and have been supported.

Conclusion

Higher education in the field of intervention with people at risk of social exclusion, as well as support people with functional diversity, made UNIR overcome the challenge of creating specialised professional profiles and integrating students. The university demonstrated its commitment to diversity and the satisfaction of students and teachers. These efforts created a good study and work environment, contributing to successful results of employment opportunities for students in general, as well as equality in access to education without any

discrimination. This demonstrates the importance of continuing to raise awareness and create an inclusive environment in the university environment.

Inclusive **HR practices**

“It is not a matter of complicating daily activities, but, on the contrary, of allowing the organisation to function optimally.



Introduction

HR professionals have the responsibility to ensure D&I policies are deployed throughout the organisation and known and understood by all. This is especially important in the context of hybrid and remote work (HRW), as remote employees may feel or be excluded from the community due to them not being present and seen around the office.

The following checklist aims at making sure HR professionals have taken the necessary steps to promote the D&I policy and initiatives and mitigate the risk of exclusion or discrimination in HRW.

Defining the organisation's position

Define a clear rule that is...

- ☒ **Compliant with the law**
- ☒ **From an equity perspective**
- ☒ **Applicable to everyone without distinction** (both in-office and remote workers)
- ☒ **Representing the interests of all people** involved in the organisation
- ☒ **Consistent** with all pre-existing processes and systems
- ☒ **Based on organisational imperatives**
- ☒ **That can be mobilised in complete impartiality**
- ☒ **Stable over time**

Establishing a transparent working environment

Integrate the legal framework into internal regulations

Make this regulation a resource and not a constraint

Rely on the idea that it is not a matter of complicating daily activities, but, on the contrary, of allowing the organisation to function optimally

Understand and consider the specificities of your work environment to build your action plan:

Teams, positions, working hours, tasks, the singularities of each person, teleworking conditions, etc...

Formalise the expectations of the diversity policy regarding the skills of managers

It is important to define the managerial skills relevant to your context, formalise them and ensure that they can be assessed. For example, the question "Is your manager inclusive of remote workers?" is too broad; "how does it include remote workers?" is a formulation that calls for more detail.

Assess the impact of training in terms of expected and developed skills

This can involve reviewing the training in the following months to assess how it has been integrated by managers into their daily work and whether they think they have access to relevant tools.

Capitalise on one-on-one interviews

Improve the experience of individual meetings by ensuring that managers' annual interviews include a "managerial skills assessment" section and that the interview is part of a series of regular meetings during which managerial skills and managerial issues are discussed.

Foster a safe work climate

This helps to avoid self-censorship behaviour or fears of reprisals, which can lead to sensitive topics being taboo.

Propose a framework promoting exchanges between peers

Based on feedback and reflection, they make it possible to solve individual management and/or team management problems. This is especially useful in HRW.

Provide information on the people and/or services to be contacted in the event of uncertainty or problematic situations (diversity, HR or legal departments)

Establish a committee to assess the most problematic situations to answer questions from those concerned

Involving key stakeholders

Confront points of view

Include as many stakeholders as possible whose input can be important on key D&I topics in brainstorming meetings: managers at different levels, as well as employees from different departments, and in-office and remote workers

Establish bottom-up processes

Thematic seminars, hackathons, managerial focus groups, individual and group interviews or ERGs (employee resource groups): they have the advantage of taking into consideration the needs and expectations of managers and empowering them as "key players" of the solution.

Define, assess and work around managerial skills

It is a matter of starting from the daily life of managers to co-construct with them the best way to integrate D&I issues into their management. This can be done, for example, by setting up an individual or collective target-based bonus dedicated to managers' commitment to include remote workers.

Ensuring the same level of information to all managers

Formalise the employer's position and translate it into operational tools

Create internal guides, charters, etc..., illustrated by concrete examples of practices, by involving staff representatives and trade unions and people from all levels of the company (from top management to operations); be able to inform candidates and employees about their means of recourse in conjunction with institutional actors; ensure that these resources are known to each manager, and that they cover the needs of hybrid and remote teams

Communicate internally, to managers and employees, to make the organisation's position on D&I topics known

Meet the remote teams and increase the spaces for meetings and exchanges

Increase communication formats and channels without increasing messages

Managers all get information in different ways. To ensure that your messages reach them, consider using all formats (face-to-face training, conferences, publications, intranet, videos, podcasts, internal newsletters, posters, etc...).

Do not assume that because "processes exist"

(charters, training, resource guides, etc...), they are known, understood and used by everyone. Do not hesitate to renew messages several times and assess processes' impact

Identify who can be your policy representatives among the managers the ambassadors. By supporting them and providing them with specific resources, they will become real spokespersons on whom to rely.

Ensure that there are no information gaps between recently promoted managers and managers with more seniority, as well as between in-office and remote managers. D&I issues are often integrated into the training of new managers; However, as these subjects evolve rapidly, it is necessary to establish mandatory reminders, at least every five years.



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This checklist was adapted from the 2023 AFMD and Numeum's toolkit on Integrating diversity and inclusion into management practices, available in French: <https://www.afmd.fr/mode-demploi-integrer-la-diversite-et-linclusion-dans-le-management>

Fact sheet

Protecting employee's private life

“Working from home or shared spaces presents unique challenges for employee privacy. Unlike controlled office environments, home offices vary dramatically in terms of infrastructure, physical security, and network reliability.



Employees' private life encompasses their personal activities, relationships, and communications conducted outside the workplace (Ranc, 2020). This concept is protected under various legal frameworks, notably Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights, which guarantees the right to respect for private and family life. In the workplace, this right extends to personal communications and activities, even during working hours, provided they do not interfere with professional duties (Markham, 2024). The French legal system, for instance, recognises this distinction, allowing employers to access professional files but not personal ones without consent or specific legal grounds.

It seems very important to safeguard employees' personal data and privacy, whether they are working on-site or remotely. However, it appears that data protection becomes more complex in remote working environments, as organisations may lack comprehensive information or access regarding the methods employees use to connect remotely.

In that context, a study by IBM Security (2022) highlighted that 83% of organisations experienced more than one data breach, with remote work contributing to higher breach costs. These risks stem from vulnerabilities in home networks, unencrypted communications, and the growing use of personal devices (BYOD – Bring Your Own Device), often outside the control of IT departments. In such decentralised environments, protecting employee privacy becomes both a technical and ethical imperative.

Challenges of protecting employees **private life in HRW**

Working from home or shared spaces presents unique challenges for employee privacy. Unlike controlled office environments, home offices vary dramatically in terms of infrastructure, physical security, and network reliability. Employees may use insecure Wi-Fi connections, fail to install regular software updates, or even share their workspace with others, increasing the risk of accidental data leaks.

The increasing use of monitoring and productivity tracking tools, such as keystroke loggers, webcam surveillance, or application usage trackers, has sparked significant debates. While such tools may serve managerial purposes, they often infringe on personal privacy boundaries, especially when employees work from spaces where personal and professional lives overlap.

As illustrated in the figure below, remote work environments often include multiple devices, cloud-based applications, and connections to unsecured networks, each presenting potential vectors for privacy violations.



Academic literature has thoroughly examined the implications of remote work on employee privacy.

A significant concern is the blurring of personal and professional spheres, which undermines the right to a private life as protected by Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights.

According to Ajunwa et al. (2017), employee monitoring in the digital

age raises critical concerns about autonomy and dignity, particularly when surveillance continues outside of regular office hours. Similarly, Nissenbaum's (2004) theory of contextual integrity posits that privacy violations occur when data flows deviate from their expected context, which is a frequent occurrence in remote work scenarios.

Solutions and recommendations for HR and managers

Addressing employee privacy in remote and hybrid contexts requires a strategic approach that balances operational control with respect for individual rights. Below are some key recommendations for HR professionals and managers:

1

Develop clear and transparent policies

Ensure that any data collection or monitoring is explicitly documented, justified, and communicated. Employees should be informed of what data is collected, how it is stored, who accesses it, and for what purpose.

2

Apply the principle of data minimisation

Collect only the data necessary to achieve clearly defined objectives. Avoid intrusive practices such as webcam activation or GPS tracking unless absolutely required and consented to.

3

Strengthen IT and security infrastructure

Invest in secure VPNs, endpoint security, multi-factor authentication, and encrypted communications. Encourage regular updates and offer support for home office configurations.

4

Respect boundaries and work-life balance

Avoid surveillance outside of agreed working hours. Allow flexibility and focus on outcomes rather than constant visibility. Implement a "right to disconnect" policy to preserve employee wellbeing.

5

Train managers in privacy-aware leadership

Equip team leaders with the knowledge and tools to foster trust-based cultures rather than control-based approaches. According to CIPD (2022), leadership style greatly influences how privacy measures are perceived and respected.

6

Conduct regular privacy impact assessments (PIA)

Evaluate the impact of new technologies or processes on employee privacy before deployment. Include employees in the consultation process to ensure transparency and co-ownership.



Recommended Resources

Video

- "The Right to Disconnect from work" – A comprehensive overview of the legal and ethical considerations surrounding employees' right to disconnect and protect their private lives. https://multimedia.europarl.europa.eu/en/video/the-right-to-disconnect-from-work_N01-AFPS-210119-RTDI

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Fact sheet

Guaranteeing Equity in Career Opportunities in Hybrid & Remote Work

“The key to preventing discrimination in career opportunities is to design hybrid work environments that promote equal access to leadership, training, and career development.



Introduction

As hybrid and remote work models become the norm, ensuring **equity in career opportunities** is more important than ever. While these flexible arrangements offer many benefits (such as better work-life balance and broader talent inclusion) they can also create **new barriers to career progression**. Employees who work remotely risk being overlooked for promotions, missing out on mentorship, and struggling to stay visible in leadership discussions.

By **rethinking performance evaluations, leadership structures, and access to development opportunities**, businesses can build a fair and inclusive workplace where all employees—regardless of location—have an equal chance to grow.

Understanding the **issue**

Remote and hybrid work environments have changed the way employees interact with colleagues, managers, and corporate culture. Ensuring **equity in career opportunities** is essential not only for **fairness and inclusion** but also for **business success**. When employees feel they have an equal chance to advance, they are more engaged, productive, and committed to their organisations. Companies that actively promote career equity **retain top talent, foster innovation, and build stronger, more diverse leadership teams**. On the other hand, failing to address these challenges can lead to **demotivation, higher turnover**, and missed opportunities for both individuals and businesses.

Some of the most common challenges include:

Unfair Performance Evaluation:

Employees who are physically present in the office often receive more recognition, promotions, and career development opportunities simply because they are more visible to managers. This can put remote workers (especially those from underrepresented backgrounds) at a disadvantage. Compounding this issue is the way in which performance is often assessed. In many organisations, evaluations are still based on visibility and time spent working, rather than actual results and impact. Remote employees may be overlooked for high-profile projects or leadership roles, not because they are less productive, but simply because they are less visible. This limits the career growth of remote workers, making it harder for them to advance at the same pace as their in-office counterparts.

Unequal Access to Career Development and Mentorship:

Networking and mentorship are crucial for career growth, yet remote workers often miss out on informal learning moments, leadership exposure, and training sessions that take place in the office. Without structured mentorship programmes, their opportunities for career development may be limited.

Without proactive policies, these challenges can create a workplace, where remote employees have fewer opportunities to grow. The key to preventing discrimination in career opportunities is to design hybrid work environments that promote equal access to leadership, training, and career development.

How can we mitigate these risks ?

Workplace equity is about “**levelling the playing field**”, and by making career equity a priority, organisations can retain diverse talent, drive innovation, and create a fairer, more engaged workforce. Here a few ways companies can ensure remote employees have the same opportunities as their in-office colleagues.

- ✓ Establish **clear, objective performance metrics** that focus on results rather than physical presence.
- ✓ Standardise **promotion criteria** to ensure that all employees, regardless of location, are valued fairly.
- ✓ Regularly **highlight remote workers' achievements** in company-wide communications to ensure their contributions are recognised.
- ✓ Ensure that remote workers are included in company culture initiatives, from **virtual team-building activities to regular check-ins with managers**.¹
- ✓ Create **virtual mentoring and sponsorship programmes** so that remote employees have the same networking opportunities as in-office staff.
- ✓ Ensure that **training and executive programs** are fully accessible online.
- ✓ Develop **career roadmaps** with transparent promotion pathways to ensure that remote workers are equally considered for leadership positions.²
- ✓ Conduct **DEI training** for managers to help them create an inclusive culture that supports both in-office and remote workers.

Conclusion

Without **deliberate efforts to remove barriers**, hybrid and remote work can reinforce **existing inequalities** and limit career opportunities for remote worker. Organisations should take proactive steps to ensure that career advancement is based on **merit, performance, and equal access to opportunities**, rather than physical presence.

By eliminating barriers related to visibility, access to leadership, mentorship, training, and fair compensation and implementing structured policies that **prioritise performance over physical presence**, companies can create **an inclusive work environment where every employee has the opportunity to grow and succeed**.



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Implementation of hybrid and remote work guidelines

Information on the Case Study

Organisation: Repsol

Size: 24 099 employees

Location: Madrid, Spain

Sector: Energy

Operational Context

Repsol is a global and integrated energy company, based on innovation, efficiency and respect, creating value for the progress of society in a sustainable way. Digitalisation and technology play a fundamental role in meeting Repsol's goal of zero net emissions by 2050. In addition, the company uses digital technologies such as artificial intelligence, robotic process automation (RPA), cloud solutions and advanced data analytics.

The Problem/Opportunity

Problem: Repsol is a very diverse global company, with people in different countries and core business activities based on industrial operations. The biggest challenge was to implement coherent hybrid and remote work guidelines taking into account employees whose work must be face-to-face and those who are constantly moving and travelling. Another challenge was cybersecurity awareness for all employees, suppliers and third parties, mainly during the pandemic. Repsol had the means to manage these risks that existed previously, but it was necessary to reinforce security measures.

Opportunity: Since 2008, Repsol's employees, whose functions allowed it, have been able to telework. In 2019, they started with a first piece of the Repsol Work Model. In 2020, with the pandemic, their hybrid work model was ready to be implemented without disruption.

What Was Done

1. Digital Workplace deployment:

Action: The Digital Workplace is a joint effort between the General Directorate of Organisational People and the Directorate of Information Technologies and Digitalisation, as well as Asset Management.

Examples: Flexible teleworking maximises technology adoption and reached close to 100%. Next, they focused on working on the employee experience around teamwork, mobility, efficient collaboration and meetings, among others. To this end, a change management network was developed, in addition to the automation of processes by employees and the creation of almost 500 apps generated. With the Repsol Work Model, it has been possible to reduce the time spent in meetings and increase the one-to-one time of each employee with

their manager, in order to be more efficient daily and reduce the generalised situation of excessive unproductive meetings.

2. Strengths in cybersecurity and the cloud

Action: Communication focused on making employees aware of the increase in cybersecurity threats.

Examples: The company reinforced both technical and safe behaviour training, although they had already been tested for 15 years. The prior adaptation of its cybersecurity systems and the movement of services and computing to the “cloud”, in which Repsol was advanced, were bases of strength to face remote work on a massive scale. Since 2017, strategies were already being proposed that prioritised security schemes around identity, the access device and the data, regardless of where they resided and where they were accessed from. Protocols for detecting and monitoring potential incidents, digital surveillance services were reinforced, and some services and infrastructure were resized and adapted to accommodate the change in scale.

3. Foster diversity

Plan: Inclusion of different social groups

Examples: Since 2020, Repsol has a group of volunteers working for LGBTQ+ equality in the workplace, creating a safe space that contributes to attracting and retaining talent, guaranteeing the well-being of people in the company and equal opportunities regardless of their sex, gender, orientation or sexual identity, in any area and location of the company.

Outcomes

1. Flexible teleworking modality:

Outcome: Repsol have had a change management network of more than 300 people in all countries and regions and in terms of automation, and it have more than 2 000 makers, almost 20 000 processes automated by employees and nearly 500 apps generated.

Evidence: more than 6 000 people who enjoy flexibility after a cultural change, constant awareness and measures focused on cybersecurity and the use of the cloud that make it possible with notable success.

2. Maximises technology adoption:

Outcome: The model that combines face-to-face and remote working responds very well to the needs of individual workers, teams, and the organisation. This always depends on factors such as the level of maturity of a team, the moment in the life cycle of a project or product, its type of work and the task to be undertaken.

Evidence: almost 100% of its workers have adopted technology tools.

3. Wellbeing that attracts talent:

Outcome: Repsol people recognise the value of this way of working, which is a key element in attracting the best talent, because work-life balance, flexibility and well-being are actively prioritised. The company listens, adapts and anticipates social and work realities.

Evidence: The most positive thing about the experience is the assessment that employees make of the work model. Satisfaction levels of almost 90% were reached. The support of the unions has also been obtained.

NewNormal policy: enhancing productivity while remote working

Information on the case study:

Organisation: Siemens

Size: 320 000 employees

Location: München, Germany

Sector: Digitalisation for industry and infrastructures

Operational context

The coronavirus pandemic was a great challenge for many enterprises who had to switch to a digital working environment. Siemens was no exception and developed its new policy “New Normal” in order to survive and adapt to the rapidly changing reality in the professional world.

The problem/opportunity

During the most critical phases of the pandemic, Siemens developed a variety of flexible solutions to ensure the safety of employees and the maintenance of all the company's services. Siemens opted for a remote working model in the long term, where people can work remotely 2-3 days a week if their work amount allows it. Global surveys of Siemens employees had confirmed the desire for more flexibility and individual solutions in terms of work location.

What was done

Mobile working not only refers to home office, but rather to the fact that employees may choose, through consultation with their manager, the workplace where they feel most productive. The hybrid working model therefore includes working environments such as co-working offices.

According to Roland Busch, Deputy CEO and Labor Director of Siemens AG, this shift also involves a different management style that is geared towards results, not showing up in the office: “We trust our employees and empower them to shape their own work in order to achieve the best possible results.”¹ To this end, a central IT platform provided employees with all relevant information as well as specific training for managers. Growth mindset and empowerment - i.e. encouraging lifelong learning and empowering employees - are the two central cornerstones on which the new management style is based. According to Siemens, the company believes that only those who are open to change and new ways of working will remain relevant for the job market in the future.

The team responsible for the “New Normal” working model gathered the input from employees from many different sectors: Strategy, Human Resources, IT and business representatives to address as many needs as possible.

¹ K.SOMBORN, [Siemens etabliert mobiles Arbeiten als Kernelement der „neuen Normalität“](https://press.siemens.com), press.siemens.com, München, 2020.

Ever since the pandemic, Siemens has taken many measures to keep on promoting empathy, communication and teamwork even while remote working. For instance, Sonja Hoppe (Head of Business Excellence at Siemens IT Applications Platforms & Digital Solutions) explains:

We soon started to enter into more intensive personal exchanges, carried out more virtual interactions, and again stand-ups, frequent virtual team and ad-hoc bilateral coffees to check how colleagues are and to exchange experiences. We also had a virtual offsite with joint learning and fun elements organised by highly creative team members. The preparation for our virtual Christmas cooking has just started with a call for favourite recipes from the various countries of the team members.²

Another important Siemens initiative in the areas of inclusivity, empathy and mental health was the integration of the GROW2GLOW³ coaching movement, which explores personal or professional challenges. This company-wide network, initially focused on coaching women, gave employees of all genders the possibility to receive three hours of free coaching as social distancing and remote working began.

When after the end of the pandemic concerns about the new hybrid work possibilities started to rise, such as possible limited social interactions or collaboration opportunities, Siemens introduced the app “Comfy Flexible Spaces”⁴ in June 2022. The app is supposed to support employees while implementing the NewNormal policy. Key features included:

1. In-Office preferences: Employees could indicate their preferred workspaces or in-office days and at the same time see the ones selected by their colleagues. As a result, connections within the company improved.
2. Coworker Future Filter: Employees could check when relevant coworkers would be in the office, helping them plan their schedules and easing onboarding for new hires by enabling connections across teams.
3. Coworker Delegate Booking: This feature simplified meeting organisation and space reservations by allowing employees to book spaces for teammates.

² G. ADENAU, [Siemens IT teams and the ‘new normal’ culture: staying connected for mental health and employee wellbeing](#), LinkedIn.com, 2020.

³ An initiative born from a broad-based group of women who met in München and discussed the squandered potential of the company. Many certified coaches were missing a target to spread their knowledge to and many women in the company struggled to climb the corporate ladder. The participation is voluntary and follows the “pull principle”: whoever finds the time can contribute and you can leave without pressure. From I. HOFMANN, [‘We just started’ – The beginning of a grassroots movement](#), blog.siemens.com, 2022.

⁴ M. PALMER, [Siemens adds hybrid work collaboration tools to its workplace technology solution: Comfy](#), press.siemens.com, 2022.

Tools like this app are helpful to minimise the 'empty office syndrome'⁵ and foster a sense of community between colleagues.

Outcomes

For Siemens, the shift to the NewNormal has generated several benefits: The possibility of switching between in-person and remote work has turned the office into a place where people meet and interact, instead of just working from 9 to 5. At the same time, the company reports that the NewNormal policy has improved self-determination, resilience and general performance of employees. Letting them work independently and responsibly is strengthening the company's allure, thus increasing the diversity of its teams. This working concept now affects employees in 43 countries, and it always takes into account the local legal requirements, such as the rights of employee representatives, specific requirements of different job profiles and individual preferences. It is essentially based on a mutual agreement between employees and managers.

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⁵ A phenomenon that arises when employees return to the office only to discover a nearly empty workspace. The feeling of regret is inevitable after such contexts of isolation, which cause employees to be even less inclined to return.

From S. COLLIS, [*How to Prevent Your Office from Becoming a Ghost Town*](#), Amicus.com.au, 2024.

Effective remote work plan

Information on the case study:

Organisation: Xataka, part of Webedia Spain

Size: SME with around 200-500 employees

Location: Headquarters in Madrid, Spain

Sector: Digital media and technology

Xataka is a prominent Spanish-language tech news platform, a subsidiary of Webedia Spain. The company focuses on technology journalism, producing articles, reviews, and analysis. It has a significant online presence and adapts to the fast-changing tech landscape. Xataka operates within the dynamic media sector where the need for continuous content generation and flexible work structures is crucial. Remote work became increasingly relevant, particularly during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, pushing the organisation to reassess its work arrangements.

Operational context

The COVID-19 pandemic radically changed the way businesses operated globally, and Xataka was no exception. Before the pandemic, the company had a mixed approach to work, primarily centered around office work in Madrid. However, the need to maintain content production and stay competitive in the digital media market prompted the company to explore remote work as a viable alternative. The flexibility provided by remote work enabled Xataka to ensure the continuity of its operations during lockdowns and social distancing measures, while allowing employees to maintain productivity from home. This sudden shift also highlighted the importance of structured remote work policies to maintain consistency and employee satisfaction.

The problem/opportunity

The abrupt transition to remote work due to the pandemic exposed Xataka's lack of a formalised, structured remote work policy. While some employees had informal flexibility to work from home occasionally, there was no official strategy in place for long-term remote work. This posed several challenges: ensuring productivity, collaboration, and communication across teams, while also maintaining employee engagement and addressing concerns about work-life balance. Xataka identified this as an opportunity to develop a structured remote work plan that would allow flexibility, while also preserving the strong sense of teamwork and collaboration within the company's culture.

What was done

In response to these challenges, Xataka's leadership initiated the development of a formal remote work plan. The company conducted internal surveys to assess employee needs and preferences for remote work. Based on the feedback, Xataka established a hybrid work model

that allows employees to work remotely for part of the week, while maintaining some in-office days for collaborative tasks. Additionally, Xataka invested in digital collaboration tools such as Slack, Zoom, and project management platforms to facilitate communication. Regular check-ins with managers were introduced to ensure teams remained aligned and productive, and virtual team-building activities were incorporated to maintain company culture.

Outcomes

The implementation of a structured remote work plan resulted in several positive outcomes for Xataka. Employee satisfaction increased, as many appreciated the flexibility to balance personal and professional responsibilities. Productivity levels remained high, thanks to the use of digital tools and clearer expectations regarding remote work. The hybrid model also allowed the company to maintain a sense of team cohesion, as periodic in-person meetings fostered collaboration. Additionally, Xataka reported lower absenteeism rates and a slight decrease in operational costs, as the company was able to downsize some of its office space. Overall, the plan helped the company continue its operations effectively without significant disruptions.

Conclusion

Xataka's structured remote work plan proved to be a valuable asset, both during the pandemic and beyond. By listening to employee preferences and strategically implementing tools and processes, the company was able to create a flexible, hybrid work environment that enhanced both productivity and employee well-being. The key lesson learned from Xataka's experience is that remote work plans need to be well thought out and supported by the right technological infrastructure and managerial strategies. For other SMEs in the digital media sector, Xataka's approach highlights the importance of adaptability and clear communication in maintaining operations during challenging times.

Adapting recruitment and retention strategies in light of the shifting work landscape

Information on the case study:

Organisation: Telefónica

Size: Approximately 120 000 employees

Location: Madrid, Spain

Sector: Telecommunications

Operational context

Telefónica, a global telecommunications giant headquartered in Madrid, Spain, has a significant presence in over 14 countries. Founded in 1924, the company has evolved into a leader in providing innovative telecommunications services, including mobile, broadband, and digital solutions. With around 120 000 employees, Telefónica operates in a dynamic industry that is constantly evolving due to technological advancements and changing consumer behaviours. The sector faces increasing competition and a growing demand for flexible service offerings. In response to these market challenges, Telefónica has recognised the necessity of adapting its operational practices, particularly regarding employee work models. As the pandemic accelerated the shift toward remote work, Telefónica strategically embraced hybrid working arrangements to meet the needs of its workforce and align with global trends, ultimately aiming to enhance employee satisfaction and attract talent.

The operational context for Telefónica has undergone a significant transformation, especially following the COVID-19 pandemic. Traditionally, the company relied on in-office work to facilitate collaboration and communication among its teams. However, the onset of the pandemic forced Telefónica to pivot rapidly, implementing remote work policies to ensure business continuity while prioritising employee safety. This shift was not merely a response to an immediate crisis; it highlighted the potential benefits of flexible work arrangements. As employees expressed a preference for hybrid work options, Telefónica recognised the importance of fostering a culture that supports both remote and in-office collaboration. To address these evolving demands, the company invested in digital tools and platforms to enhance connectivity and productivity. Additionally, the need for a cohesive team dynamic in a hybrid setting became evident, prompting Telefónica to focus on maintaining engagement and collaboration among employees, regardless of their work locations.

The problem/opportunity

Telefónica faced the challenge of adapting its recruitment and retention strategies in light of the shifting work landscape. Pre-pandemic, the company's hiring processes heavily relied on in-person interactions, which created barriers for potential candidates outside the immediate geographical area. The new hybrid work model presented an opportunity to broaden the talent

pool, enabling Telefónica to attract diverse candidates from various regions. However, the organisation also grappled with potential risks associated with remote onboarding and integration, as new hires might struggle to connect with the company culture without in-person interactions. To leverage the opportunity presented by hybrid work, Telefónica needed to rethink its recruitment strategies, ensuring that they aligned with the expectations of modern job seekers who prioritise flexibility and work-life balance. Additionally, enhancing employee engagement and retention in a hybrid model became critical to maintaining productivity and morale within the workforce.

What was done

In response to the identified challenges and opportunities, Telefónica implemented several strategic initiatives to enhance its recruitment and talent retention processes. The company launched a hybrid working model, allowing employees to choose between remote and in-office work, depending on their roles and personal preferences. To streamline recruitment, Telefónica adopted digital hiring platforms, enabling virtual interviews and assessments that catered to a broader geographic audience. Additionally, the company revamped its onboarding process, creating engaging virtual experiences that introduced new hires to the company culture and values. This included interactive online sessions, mentorship programs, and regular check-ins with Human Resources (HR) and team leaders. Telefónica also focused on promoting its employer brand by highlighting its commitment to flexibility, diversity, and employee well-being through targeted recruitment campaigns. Moreover, the company invested in training programs for managers to ensure effective leadership of hybrid teams, fostering a culture of inclusivity and collaboration across different work environments.

Outcomes

The strategic initiatives implemented by Telefónica yielded notable positive outcomes in both recruitment and talent retention. The hybrid work model significantly broadened the company's talent pool, resulting in more job applications from diverse candidates across various regions. Post-implementation surveys indicated a rise in employee satisfaction, reflecting the value placed on flexibility and work-life balance. Recruitment metrics showed a reduction in time-to-hire, attributed to the efficiency of virtual hiring processes. The enhanced onboarding experience contributed to a smoother integration for new employees, with feedback indicating higher engagement levels during the initial months. Additionally, Telefónica experienced an improvement in retention rates, that was linked to increased employee morale and a stronger sense of belonging, demonstrating the effectiveness of the initiatives in fostering a positive workplace culture. Overall, Telefónica's commitment to hybrid work positioned the company as an attractive employer in a competitive market.

Conclusion

The case of Telefónica illustrates the profound impact of remote and hybrid work on recruitment and talent retention in the modern workplace. By proactively embracing hybrid work arrangements, the company effectively addressed the challenges posed by the pandemic while capitalising on opportunities to attract diverse talent. The successful implementation of

digital recruitment processes and revamped onboarding experiences showcased Telefónica's adaptability and commitment to employee satisfaction. As organisations continue to navigate the evolving landscape of work, Telefónica serves as a valuable example of how fostering flexibility and inclusivity can lead to enhanced employee engagement and organisational resilience. The lessons learned from this case study highlight the importance of aligning recruitment and retention strategies with contemporary workforce expectations, positioning companies for long-term success in a competitive environment.

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Monitoring working hours of remote employees

Information on the case study:

Organisation: CITI BANK

Size: 12 500

Location: UK

Sector: Bank

Operational context

In 2023, Citi Bank introduced a system in the UK to monitor office attendance as part of its hybrid work policy. Employees in London, Edinburgh, and Belfast are required to work at least three days in the office.

The problem/opportunity

Citi is considered as a flexible employer, and the introduction of this monitoring system could present a tension between providing freedom to work remotely and enforcing physical office attendance. This might undermine the hybrid work model balance as well as Citi's Employer Brand and employee retention efforts.

More issues are at stake such as trust in the workplace vs accountability. The system allows exception (e.g. sick leaves, business travels, the limited capacity of the venue, holidays or medical appointments). But this monitoring is likely to reduce employee's autonomy and control on their work organisation to revert to a rigid organisation of work-life balance. Such an evolution could lead to increase micromanagement.

This controlled work environment might impact employee morale and engagement, reducing motivation.

Another point to be considered is the legal consideration on data privacy as the collected data must be in compliance with GDPR and the other laws regarding data protection in the UK.

Another sensitive issue is the guarantee to avoid misuse of the collected data.

What was done

The monitoring, which is already in place in the United States, came after a month-long consultation with UK employees. The firm wanted to avoid direct confrontation with the employees as the issue is sensitive in the UK: in 2020, Barclays Bank used a tracking system called Sapience. Barclays' initial aim was to improve productivity and identify bottlenecks in internal processes. However, this was perceived by many employees as an invasion of their privacy, creating a climate of mistrust within the company. After public and media protests, Barclays was forced to withdraw these surveillance tools, recognising that their use was inappropriate without better communication with employees.

Citigroup recently announced that it will start holding employees “accountable” for compliance with its hybrid work model rules. The bank said in its statement that they are committed to a hybrid work model, and that they have firm expectations that its employees will work at least three days a week in the office and up to two days remotely.

Staff in the UK were informed they face disciplinary action, such as bonus adjustments and termination, for failing to make their way into the office. Office attendance ratio will be considered when rating employees’ performance and reviewing pay.

The bank tracks attendance data on a bi-weekly and monthly basis. Citigroup is to collect aggregated office data every two weeks for the firm’s offices in London, Edinburgh and Belfast. “One swipe per person, per day, per location will be captured,” the memo said. “The focus of the reports will be employees with consistent office absences.” The number of hours spent in the office will not be captured in these reports. The focus of the reporting will be on employees with consistent office absence. Reports may then be shared with managers as appropriate to prompt further discussion.”

Outcomes

This experiment emphasises an important issue regarding control as the best way to increase productivity. It could be argued that motivation or the introduction of new collaboration tools, might be more effective. It raises as well ethical concerns about autonomy, privacy, and the potential erosion of trust between the bank and its employees. The effectiveness of this monitoring will depend on how transparently Citi handles the data and addresses employee concerns.

In addition, this case illustrates the increased reliance on data in HR management and the expected massive use of people analytics to improve employees’ competencies and productivity. An interview of CITI CEO Jane Fraser in January 2023 is quite enlightening : “You can see how productive someone is or isn’t, and if they’re not being productive, we bring them back to the office, or back to the site, and we give them the coaching they need until they bring the productivity back up again,” Fraser told in a November 2023 [interview with Fortune](#) magazine. For Fraser, “Office days help with collaboration and apprenticeship” The remote flexibility, Fraser said, helps make Citi an “employer of choice.” However, she added: “We’re not seeing people coming back who had left the workforce in anything like the numbers we expected.” “We’re going to have keep listening to our people and getting that balance right,” Fraser added. “But if you don’t listen to them, you’re in danger of having some problems.”

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Inclusive **management skills**

“To talk about diversity management or inclusive management is above all to talk about management. These skills are meant to be applied anytime and in all work settings, whether it be with on-site teams or ones working remotely



Embodying and passing on the organisation's values in hybrid and remote work (HRW)

The role of managers is essential: through their words and actions, they represent the organisation, embody its values and adopt an exemplary position. They are the operational relay best fit to make a fair and equitable decision as they know the organisation, the work environment, the different roles, the teams and the individuals.

The **objectives** of management in HRW

- 1 Recruiting without discrimination
- 2 Ensuring an inclusive social climate within one's team, on-site and remotely
- 3 Calling upon objective criteria in all decision-making
- 4 Ensuring a proper division of work and cooperation within the team

Managing on a **day-to-day basis**

To talk about diversity management or inclusive management is above all to talk about management. Listed here are the skills defined by managers as being necessary for their missions. We associated them with practices for preventing discrimination and taking diversity into account. These skills are meant to be applied anytime and in all work settings, whether it be with on-site teams or ones working remotely.

Listening

- ✓ **Build conditions that favour listening** based on benevolent dialogue and empathy
- ✓ **Make sure that everyone can express themselves during meetings**
especially people who work remotely
- ✓ **When needed, make it possible for employees to express their feelings about a decision**, a tough or equivocal situation, or a relationship issue. Rely on internal rules to explain the decision and how it fits into the professional framework
- ✓ **Use pre-set meeting times to take stock of a potential interpersonal conflict or a situation of potential discrimination or harassment**: annual interviews, team meetings or individual assessments allow you to hear and support all the parties concerned
- ✓ **Pay attention to «tell-tale signs»**, for example during informal moments, which can indicate future problems for employees (e.g. greater stress or fatigue than usual, discomfort during breaks or meals, etc.)

Supporting

- ✓ **Ensure recognition of all parties, and guaranty equity**
- ✓ **When making decisions, rely on factual information as much as possible**
Make sure you have heard all stakeholders and try to be mindful of your own cognitive biases
- ✓ **Seek a conciliatory solution with the help of team members** in case of a misunderstanding or conflict
- ✓ **Ensure a work environment that respects the team's pluralism** by promoting the deconstruction of stereotypes and preconceived ideas. Do not hesitate to explain how this is useful for the proper functioning of the organisation

Explaining

- ✓ **Learn about the organisational rules and the legal framework pertaining to D&I** (internal regulations, agreements, guides, charters, etc.) from HR or diversity departments
- ✓ **Be able to explain the purpose of each decision:** clarify the thought process or logic behind choices to allow for better
- ✓ **Provide a firm response to repeated transgressive behaviour**, and be able to scale the response, from warning to sanction
- ✓ **Systematically prohibit stigmatising and/or hurtful «humour»**
Intervene when you are told of inappropriate remarks or unequal treatment, particularly in relation to the gender, age, origin, sexual orientation, belonging or non-belonging to a specific religion, etc. of an employee

Elevating

- ✓ **Implement good practices to promote the career of each person in one's team**, and consider the situation of employees working remotely
- ✓ **Ensure the dignified treatment of individuals**, by taking an interest in their personal situation, their trajectory, their aspirations and the origin of such-and-such behaviours
- ✓ **Identify best practices and share them with your team:** diversified sourcing, inclusive purchasing, gender-neutral writing, non-discriminatory recruitment practices
- ✓ **Listen to employees' professional requests and expectations**
- ✓ **Promote the achievement of each team member's individual goals**

Encouraging

- ✓ **Open spaces for dialogue between colleagues on D&I topics:** how far can we go in considering singularities? What is professional or private?
- ✓ **Display available resources on D&I,** and relay awareness-raising tools and events
- ✓ **Encourage employees to get involved in internal networks** and to co-implement D&I related projects

Assisting

- ✓ **Refer to the tools provided by senior management** to explain the organisation's positioning. Identify the contact of a resource person in the event of a problematic situation
- ✓ **Foster an inclusive culture**
Enable everyone to weigh in on decision making, to participate in activities and to access information and resources
- ✓ **Faced with complex individual situations, find out about the legal framework and the organisational rules as well as the impact on the rest of the collective to make a decision**
Heed the interests of everybody involved in the situation



References

This checklist was adapted from the 2023 AFMD and Numeum's toolkit on Integrating diversity and inclusion into management practices, available in French:

<https://www.afmd.fr/mode-demploi-integrer-la-diversite-et-linclusion-dans-le-management>

Organising an inclusive onboarding in Hybrid and Remote Work (HRW)

“Successful onboarding means creating opportunities for all team members to meet, encouraging both formal and informal interactions, and supporting the adoption of digital tools.



The first step after recruitment

The aim of designing an onboarding journey is to help new hires discover and familiarise themselves with the key elements of the organisation and its activities, the work tools and how to use them, the team's structure and operations, as well as the specific tasks assigned to them.

The onboarding journey sets the tone for the experience new employees will have within the organisation and helps integrate them into the work collective. Its importance and usefulness should not be overlooked.

The importance of **inclusive onboarding** in HRW

Employees working remotely are particularly likely to feel isolated from the rest of the team. For new hires, it can be more difficult to get to know colleagues, understand the team dynamics, familiarise themselves with the work tools, or ask for help: it's easy to feel lost! Successful onboarding means creating opportunities for **all team members to meet, encouraging both formal and informal interactions, and supporting the adoption of digital tools.**

The **first day**

If possible, aim to welcome the new employee on site for their first day. This will allow you to provide them with their work tools (laptop, phone), show them around the premises, and introduce them to the people who are present.

The model below is designed for **the first three months of onboarding**, but the whole process can take six months to a year before the employee fully takes ownership of their tasks and becomes autonomous.

Best practices for **inclusive onboarding** in HRW

Objective 1: Understanding the organisation



Manager's role

- Take the time to introduce the team members
- Allocate time for debriefing and questions about topics covered in the onboarding process
- Explain the remote work policy and relevant internal practices



New hire's role

- Read up on the organisation: introductory documents, communication materials, etc.
- Explore the website and intranet
- Join in on already scheduled activities



Team members' role

- Present the upcoming calendar and task distribution

Objective 2: Getting to grips with work tools



Manager's role

- Schedule 30-minute check-ins during weeks 2 and 3 to answer any questions about the tools
- Organise a training session on basic digital skills to facilitate remote work and online collaboration



Role of other departments

- Present communication tools (corporate identity and style guide, email signatures, etc.)
- Present work tools: Microsoft Office, Gmail, Slack, CRM tools if applicable



New hire's role

- Test the various tools
- Ask questions about how to use them
- Ensure they have mastered the digital tools

Objective 3: Understanding how the team works



Manager's role

- Share the team structure and each person's responsibilities
- Explain the organisation, frequency, and content of team meetings
- Present validation stages and decision-making processes in collaborative projects, aligned with HRW practices
- Share key team rituals and highlights
- Organise a team-building event within the first month



New hire's role

- Ask questions
- Take notes



Team members' role

- Share their calendars (via Outlook, Gmail, etc.)
- Schedule a 30-minute meeting to introduce themselves and present the current projects they are working on
- Share their preferences for collaboration, particularly when working remotely: email or phone contact, remote work frequency, etc.

Objective 4: Taking ownership of the role and getting involved in tasks



Manager's role

- List short- and medium-term tasks and objectives
- Provide an overview of ongoing projects
- Arrange initial meetings with stakeholders (service providers, partners, etc.)



New hire's role

- Start carrying out tasks in a hands-on manner (implementation and follow-up of actions)
- Organise their files and schedule
- Embrace the HRW set-up

Objective 5: Identifying skills to be developed



Manager's role

- List short- and medium-term tasks and objectives
- Provide an overview of ongoing projects
- Arrange initial meetings with stakeholders (service providers, partners, etc.)



New hire's role

- Start carrying out tasks in a hands-on manner (implementation and follow-up of actions)
- Organise their files and schedule
- Embrace the HRW set-up

Wrapping up the onboarding process

The manager should schedule a 30-minute meeting before the end of the probation period to review the employee's understanding of the role and tasks, any challenges faced, and their achievements. This meeting is also a time to revisit the objectives set at the beginning of the role.

Within 90 days of being hired at the latest, new employees should write a feedback report (rapport d'étonnement). This allows them to share their impressions of the recruitment and onboarding process, their tasks and objectives, how the team operates, interactions with stakeholders and governance, working conditions, communication, learning experiences, the practice of hybrid and remote work.



Further reading

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Tracking progress without micromanaging - in Hybrid & Remote Work

“Tracking progress without micromanaging is an art that requires clear communication, effective technology use, and a culture of trust. Organisations can foster a more engaged and productive workforce by focusing on outcomes rather than rigid processes.



Introduction

Hybrid and remote work arrangements have reshaped the modern workplace, offering flexibility and efficiency. However, they also present unique challenges when it comes to tracking progress. Constant check-ins may overwhelm employees, while managers might struggle to balance ensuring productivity and fostering trust. This guide explores tracking progress effectively without micromanaging in hybrid and remote work environments.

Understanding the issue

Micromanagement in hybrid and remote work can erode trust, reduce morale, and stifle creativity. When managers insist on excessive updates or frequent performance checks, employees often feel scrutinised. This can lead to disengagement and burnout. On the other hand, insufficient tracking may result in missed deadlines, misaligned goals, or communication breakdowns. The challenge lies in striking a balance: providing employees autonomy and support while maintaining oversight to meet goals.

How can we mitigate these risks ?



Set Clear Expectations

Clearly defining roles, responsibilities, and measurable outcomes at the beginning of a project or task is essential for ensuring alignment and productivity. Employees should clearly understand what is expected of them, the goals they need to achieve, and the criteria by which success will be measured. Collaborative tools like project management software (e.g., Asana, Trello, or Monday.com) can outline tasks, assign responsibilities, and set deadlines transparently. This approach keeps employees on track and provides a shared reference point for the team to ensure accountability and clarity.



Leverage Technology

Technology plays a crucial role in tracking progress without micromanaging. Platforms such as Slack, Microsoft Teams, and Trello allow for seamless communication and task management, while tools like Asana and Jira provide real-time updates on project progress. Automated dashboards and analytics can offer managers an overview of task completion rates, deadlines, and team performance, eliminating the need for constant employee updates. By integrating these tools effectively, managers can monitor progress non-intrusively, enabling employees to focus on their work without feeling overly supervised.



Focus on Results, Not Processes

In hybrid and remote work environments, it is essential to shift the emphasis from how tasks are being completed to whether the objectives are being achieved. Employees should be encouraged to work in ways that suit their styles and rhythms as long as they deliver high-quality results on time. This results-oriented approach promotes creativity, efficiency, and ownership while reducing unnecessary oversight. It also allows employees to feel trusted and valued for their contributions rather than being micromanaged based on how they approach their work.



Encourage Regular, Scheduled Check-Ins

Frequent ad hoc meetings can interrupt workflows and create stress for employees. Instead, managers should implement structured weekly or biweekly check-ins to discuss progress, address challenges, and identify solutions. These scheduled meetings allow open and constructive dialogue without disrupting employees' focus during work hours. They also allow managers to stay informed about progress while empowering employees to raise concerns or roadblocks in a supportive and proactive setting.



Build Trust Through Autonomy

Trust is the foundation of effective team management, especially in hybrid and remote work environments. Empowering employees to make decisions and take ownership of their tasks fosters a sense of responsibility and accountability. When employees feel trusted to manage their work independently, they are more likely to stay engaged, motivated, and productive. Managers can build trust by setting clear goals, providing the necessary resources, and refraining from excessive oversight, which can undermine employee confidence and morale.



Provide Continuous Feedback

Constructive and timely feedback is key to keeping employees engaged and aligned with organisational goals. Rather than waiting for annual performance reviews, managers should establish a culture of ongoing feedback. This includes recognising achievements promptly, addressing areas for improvement constructively, and creating opportunities for employees to share their own feedback about work processes. Continuous feedback not only helps employees improve and grow but also strengthens the relationship between managers and their teams by fostering open communication and mutual respect.

What is the role of Managers and Human Resources ?

Managers



- Adopt a coaching mindset rather than a directive one.
- Act as enablers, removing obstacles and providing resources to help teams succeed.
- Use empathy and active listening to understand individual challenges in hybrid or remote setups.

Human resources



- Create and communicate policies that encourage accountability without micromanagement.
- Provide training for managers on remote team management and fostering trust.
- Implement tools and resources for seamless collaboration and tracking without intruding on employee privacy.

HR also plays a pivotal role in nurturing a culture of transparency and trust, ensuring alignment between organisational goals and employee well-being.

Conclusion

Tracking progress without micromanaging is an art that requires clear communication, effective technology use, and a culture of trust. Organisations can foster a more engaged and productive workforce by focusing on outcomes rather than rigid processes. Managers and HR must work together to create an environment where employees feel empowered and supported, regardless of their physical location.



Further Reading

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Providing Feedback to Remote Employees

“While hybrid and remote work environments present several challenges, adopting best practices such as structured feedback models, cultural sensitivity, and two-way communication can enhance the effectiveness of feedback.



Introduction

In the context of hybrid and remote work, providing effective feedback is crucial for maintaining employee engagement, productivity, and overall well-being.

Constructive feedback fosters professional growth, strengthens relationships, and ensures alignment with organisational goals. However, remote settings present challenges such as miscommunication, lack of immediate feedback, and cultural differences. Without face-to-face cues, employees may misinterpret feedback, leading to misunderstandings or disengagement.

This guide provides actionable strategies for improving the effectiveness of feedback, ensuring that employees feel valued and supported in their professional development.

Understanding the issue

Feedback is a fundamental aspect of employee professional development and workplace communication. In traditional office settings, feedback is often given informally through spontaneous conversations and body language cues. In contrast, remote work environments lack these natural interactions, making it more difficult to provide timely and effective feedback. There are several challenges in providing feedback in remote work settings:


- **Lack of non-verbal cues** : Remote communication relies primarily on digital tools, such as video calls and emails, which limits the ability to effectively convey tone, intent, and emotions¹. As a result, employees may misinterpret feedback, leading to misunderstandings or disengagement.
- **Perceived isolation** : Remote employees may feel disconnected from leadership and colleagues, making feedback more impactful on their sense of belonging and professional development.

To address these issues, organisations should adopt structured feedback approaches that emphasise clarity, empathy, and inclusivity. Creating a psychologically safe environment where employees feel comfortable receiving and providing feedback is essential. Regular feedback loops, personalised communication strategies, and cultural awareness training can help mitigate the risks associated with remote feedback. Managers play a crucial role in mitigating these issues **by setting clear expectations, fostering open communication, adapting feedback styles to individual team members, and ensuring that feedback is specific and actionable**. They should prioritise scheduled feedback sessions, encourage self-reflection, and offer constructive insights that enable employees to grow in their roles.

How can we mitigate these risks ?



Not providing feedback for remote employees can lead to lower job satisfaction, disengagement, and higher turnover rates. To foster inclusivity in remote feedback, organisations should implement the following best practices:

-  **Standardised Feedback Frameworks:** Using structured feedback models, such as the SBI (Situation-Behaviour-Impact) or the COIN (Context-Observation-Impact-Next Steps) framework, ensures consistency and minimises bias.
-  **Cultural Sensitivity and Awareness:** Leaders should be trained to recognise and respect different cultural communication styles, ensuring that feedback is delivered in an appropriate and respectful manner.
-  **Balanced and Specific Feedback:** Effective feedback highlights both strengths and areas for improvement. Avoid vague or overly critical statements by providing concrete examples and actionable suggestions.
-  **Encouraging Two-Way Communication:** Feedback should be a dialogue rather than a one-sided assessment. Creating opportunities for employees to share their perspectives fosters transparency and trust.
-  **Use of Multiple Feedback Channels:** Combining asynchronous (written reports, emails) and synchronous (video calls, virtual check-ins) feedback methods allows for clarity and follow-up discussions, reducing misunderstandings.
-  **Avoiding Unconscious Biases:** Managers should be aware of potential biases, such as gender, race, or regional stereotypes, and focus on performance-based assessments rather than personal characteristics.
-  **Psychological Safety and Inclusion:** Encouraging a workplace culture where employees feel safe to ask for clarification, express concerns, and seek support enhances the effectiveness of feedback.

By implementing these strategies, organisations can create a more equitable feedback culture that supports professional growth and workplace inclusion.

Conclusion

Providing feedback to remote employees requires intention, structure, and cultural awareness. While hybrid and remote work environments present several challenges, adopting best practices such as structured feedback models, cultural sensitivity, and two-way communication can enhance the effectiveness of feedback. Organisations that prioritise fair and inclusive feedback processes will foster employee engagement, productivity, and long-term success in an increasingly digital workplace.



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- Edmondson, A. C., Williams, J. C., Frisch, B., Davey, L., (2022), Hybrid Workplace: The Insights You Need from Harvard Business Review, Harvard Business Review.

Creating a **one-on-one** remote meetings template

“ Without in-person interactions, employees and managers must rely on virtual check-ins to align goals, address challenges, and build trust. Poorly structured meetings can lead to misunderstandings, disengagement, and wasted time.



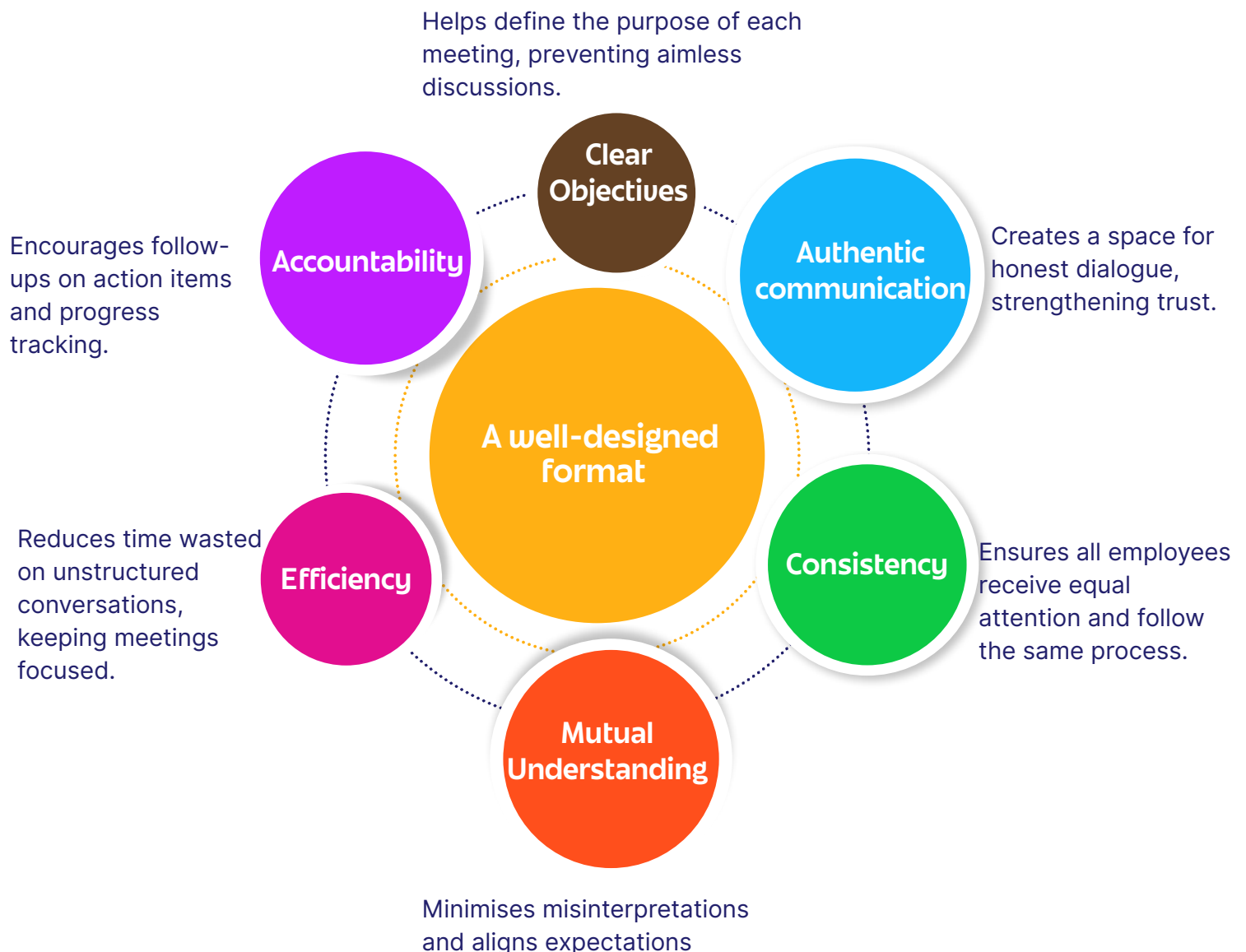
Introduction

Having regular and effective one-on-one meetings is key to ensure authentic communication in hybrid and remote teams. This fact sheet introduces a structured template to facilitate productivity, engagement, and clarity in virtual check-ins. Designed for managers and employees, it ensures alignment, accountability, and meaningful discussions. By implementing a standardised approach, organisations can foster stronger relationships, improve performance, and ensure meaningful interactions, regardless of location.

The importance of effective remote meetings

In hybrid and remote work, structured and effective one-on-one meetings are essential for maintaining engagement and collaboration. Without in-person interactions, employees and managers must rely on virtual check-ins to align goals, address challenges, and build trust. Poorly structured meetings can lead to misunderstandings, disengagement, and wasted time.

Using a structured template for remote one-on-ones ensures consistency, efficiency, and clarity. **A well-designed format provides:**



What can be done to limit the risk of discriminations ?

To ensure fairness and inclusivity in hybrid and remote work settings, organisations must design one-on-one meetings with equity in mind. Structured procedures help prevent unconscious bias, ensure equal opportunities, and create a more inclusive work environment.

Key Strategies to Reduce Discrimination

- ☒ **Consistent scheduling**
Set regular one-on-one meetings for all employees, ensuring equal access to time and attention, regardless of location or role.
- ☒ **Structured agendas**
Use a standardised template to ensure all employees discuss similar topics, preventing favouritism or unconscious bias in discussions. Clearly outline goals and discussion topics in advance.
- ☒ **Objective performance tracking**
Focus on measurable outcomes rather than subjective impressions to ensure fair evaluation across all employees. Review progress and check in on previous action items and achievements.
- ☒ **Inclusive communication practices**
Be mindful of different communication styles and cultural backgrounds. Encourage open dialogue while ensuring all voices are heard.
Challenges & support – Address roadblocks and offer solutions.
Feedback exchange – Encourage two-way feedback for continuous improvement.
- ☒ **Transparent documentation**
Keep records of key discussion points and follow-ups to ensure consistency and accountability in decision-making.
- ☒ **Flexible meeting Format**
Consider different time zones and personal circumstances to ensure fair participation for all employees.
- ☒ **Next steps**
Define clear action items and responsibilities.

Follow-up fairness

- ✓ Ensure follow-ups are action-oriented and apply equally to all employees.
- ✓ Regularly review meeting outcomes to identify and correct potential disparities.

By implementing these practices, organisations can foster fairness, trust, and engagement, ensuring that all employees—remote or in-office—are treated equitably.

Conclusion

Standardised procedures and templates for remote meetings enhance productivity, communication, and fairness in hybrid and remote work. However, each organisation should adapt the template to its unique needs and goals. To support this process, the references included below provide some examples and further reading to serve as inspiration.



References

- Miro – One-on-one Meeting Template: <https://miro.com/templates/one-on-one-meeting/>
- Leapsome - Free 1:1 (one-on-one) meeting template for productive managers & top tips for effective meetings: <https://www.leapsome.com/blog/one-on-one-meeting-template>
- SpinachAI – 33 One-on-one Meeting Templates: <https://www.spinach.ai/agenda-templates?type=one-on-one>

Recognition ideas for remote employees

“Remote employee recognition is a powerful tool for fostering a positive and productive work environment. Employees need to know that their work is valued.



Introduction

Highly engaged and motivated teams make employees happier and more productive. However, in teams where employees work remotely, maintaining engagement can be more difficult. Therefore, it is necessary to make them feeling valued and recognised in their job positions. Recognition is an essential component of the companies' culture, ensuring a positive working environment, as well as good performance of employees working remotely.

This guide provides strategies to help improving recognition among employees working in remote mode.

Understanding the issue



What are the risks of lack of recognition in remote work?

Unclear expectations

When employees are not involved in the definition of the company's objectives and road map, they may not be aware of them and not share managers' expectations. This lack of communication and clear guidelines leads to misunderstandings and frustration, affecting employees' motivation, enthusiasm and performance to carry out their activities.

Disengagement

Lack of face-to-face interaction can make employees feel disconnected from the company's culture and values, which can affect their engagement and motivation.

Stress and anxiety at work

Working remotely can lead to unrealistic deadlines and high workloads, with the possibility of triggering stress and anxiety in workers. When an employee doesn't receive positive feedback or recognition, they may begin to doubt their competence, which increases anticipatory anxiety about tasks or evaluations. This has a direct impact on their mental health and personal lives.

Professional stagnation

Professional development and growth are important factors in employee motivation. Without an opportunity for development, employees have no new expectations in their work and no reason to feel motivated.

How can we mitigate these risks for remote employees?



Public recognition

This is one of the most effective ways, recognising workers in team meetings, internal newsletters, or through a group email. This type of job recognition not only highlights individual achievements but also inspires other team members.

Awards and distinctions

Establishing an award system within the company, e.g. 'Employee of the Month' or a special mention for a well-done project, can motivate other workers reaching the same level of excellence.

Professional development opportunities

Through investment in training for the professional growth of employees. In addition to freeing up working hours to attend courses, workshops, or conferences to improve their skills, it also shows them that their development within the company is valued and recognised.

What is the role of Managers and Human Resources?

Managers



- Facilitate a work culture that reflects the company's recognition mechanisms for remote employees.
- Ensure the well-being of remote employees through motivation

Human resources



- Letting employees know that their work is valued
- Develop a leadership style based on trust, recognition, and transparency.

Conclusion

Remote employee recognition is a powerful tool for fostering a positive and productive work environment. Employees need to know that their work is valued. Implementing forms of recognition will improve the work environment and reinforce engagement, helping to retain top talent in the company.



Further reading

- Rusin, Natalia, and Tomasz Szandała. "The Power of Peer Recognition Points: Does It Really Boost Employee Engagement?" *Strategic HR Review*, vol. 24, no. 1, July 2024, pp. 2–10, <https://doi.org/10.1108/SHR-06-2024-0040>. world.
- Ahmad, Naveed Rafaqat. "Exploring the relationship between leadership styles and employee motivation in remote work environments." *Al-Aasar*, vol. 2, no. 1, Feb. 2025, pp. 21–32, <https://al-aasar.com/index.php/Journal/article/view/34>.

Understanding and preventing digital illiteracy

“If not properly addressed, digital illiteracy among employees can lead to reduced efficiency and communication breakdowns and isolation, not to mention unequal access to growth opportunities.



Introduction

In a hybrid or remote work (HRW) setting, digital tools have replaced many traditional forms of communication and collaboration. However, not all employees possess the skills needed to navigate this digital landscape confidently. **Digital illiteracy is the difficulty or the inability to effectively, safely and confidently use technology and digital tools and access the internet.**

According to recent European data, more than 90% of jobs in Europe require basic digital knowledge, while **32% of Europeans lack basic digital skills**. Gender, education and place of residence play a role in digital (il)literacy.

Adressing digital illiteracy in HRW

In remote settings, technology is everywhere in the workplace. Employees who lack digital skills may struggle to communicate effectively in virtual meetings or chat platforms, collaborate on shared documents or projects or adapt to new tools and systems. There is also a risk in terms of cybersecurity and protecting sensitive data.

If not properly addressed, digital illiteracy among employees can lead to reduced efficiency and communication breakdowns and isolation, not to mention unequal access to growth opportunities.

Hence, building digital literacy is essential for promoting equity and engagement in a digitally driven workforce.

What digital illiteracy looks like

Ever felt annoyed by your colleague who writes in all-caps or the one that “replies all” to an e-mail when it is not necessary? Do you, yourself, use “password” as your password?

If so, **you may have encountered various forms of digital illiteracy.**

It can consist of:

- Difficulty using emails, video calls, or shared drives
- Hesitation or silence in virtual meetings
- Using weak passwords, falling for phishing scams
- Slow adaptation to new tools and platforms
- Inability to create or edit a document

Team efficiency in HRW relies on the digital literacy of team members. If digital literacy levels are too different among a team, it may be harder to work together and it can lead to some employees feeling isolated.

Considering that digital illiteracy is more prevalent among women, people with less diploma or people living in rural area, the discriminatory risk is all the more important and requires employers' attention.

Digital literacy checklist for hybrid team

To assess employees' digital literacy and target areas for improvement, you can rely on the following checklist:

Can employees...



Basic digital skills

- Use email confidently
- Manage cloud storage effectively
- Edit and create basic documents
- Install and update software independently



Communication and collaboration

- Navigate video conferencing tools easily
- Write and engage in chat platforms
- Manage calendars and virtual meeting invites
- Co-edit shared documents



Remote work etiquette

- Follow virtual meeting norms (mute, video, chat)
- Communicate clearly in writing
- Set and respect digital boundaries
- Submit remote work updates properly



Cybersecurity awareness

- Use strong, secure passwords
- Identify phishing attempts
- Follow data privacy practices



Self-sufficiency and learning

- Troubleshoot minor tech issues
- Seek out help or documentation when needed
- Give and receive feedback on tech use



Further reading

- **Digital literacy in the EU: An overview**
<https://data.europa.eu/en/publications/datastories/digital-literacy-eu-overview>
- **What is digital literacy? Definition, skills and importance**
<https://potomac.edu/what-is-digital-literacy/>

Digital accessibility

“Digital accessibility means that people with a disability can use digital tools. More precisely, they can perceive, understand, browse and interact with these tools, and they can contribute to creating content.



Introduction

The rules of accessibility extend beyond recognised disability situations and enhance comfort for everyone. People working in a noisy environment will appreciate having subtitles on videos, while those with a temporary disability (such as a broken arm) will benefit from being able to navigate a document with ease, etc.

To summarise, digital accessibility issues concern anyone who uses digital tools!

Accessible Office Documents

A document is considered accessible if it can be consulted by any user, regardless of the digital tool they are using.

Best practices

We have compiled recommendations from various tools and guidelines available online to present those that seemed the most straightforward to incorporate into your work habits.

For more detailed explanations and a more comprehensive list of best practices, please refer to the resources listed at the end of this document!

Editing Documents



Structure the document

Use the heading and subheading styles available in editing software such as Word and PowerPoint. This helps with navigation and orientation within the document.



Improve the layout

Avoid justifying text, as it creates uneven spaces between words and makes reading more difficult. Instead, opt for left-aligned text. Remember to insert page or slide numbers and indicate the total number of pages or slides.



Clarify hyperlinks

Hyperlinks should be explicit and clearly indicate their destination. Instead of saying “to read the article [click here]”, prefer “[the article on digital accessibility is available online]”



Clarify abbreviations

The interpretation of abbreviations can be inconsistent: the first time you use one, make sure to write out its full meaning. You can also include a glossary at the end of your document!



Add accents to capital letters

Screen readers recognise accents (or their absence) on capital letters. To avoid misunderstandings, it is best to include them if your language requires them! You can do this by inserting a symbol or configuring your software to add them automatically (in Word, go to Options > "Proofing" tab and check the box "Accented uppercase letters in [insert language here]").



Provide alternative texts for images

If you use images or graphics to convey information, adding alternative text ensures that this information remains accessible. This is useful not only for screen readers but also in cases of slow internet connections where images take time to load!

Making an oral presentation



Distribute the material before the meeting

This allows participants to print an enlarged version or access the information on their computers.



Work on your oral expression

Speak clearly and ensure that your speech is not too fast. Don't hesitate to take short pauses to aid comprehension and give your audience the opportunity to ask for clarifications.



Don't rely solely on colour to convey your message

People with colour blindness may struggle to distinguish certain colours, such as green and red. Consider adding alternative ways to present information, such as icons or numbered lists.



Introduce yourself and provide information about the meeting

It is always helpful to remind participants of the meeting format, duration, and agenda. Also, specify whether a Q&A session is planned and when it will take place. You can mention if a summary will be provided and whether supporting materials will be shared afterward.



Repeat the question before answering

This ensures that the audience fully understands the question and shows that you are actively listening. At the beginning of the meeting, you can clarify that you will be repeating questions for the sake of comprehension, not because you doubt their relevance!

How to take action

Talk about the subject around you

As you can see, adopting good habits quickly can make a real difference and improve access to digital documents and meetings. Lead by example and encourage your colleagues to get involved!

Create basic documents to summarise best practices internally

You can draft, either with your team or on a broader level, a best practices charter or concise documents illustrating key habits to adopt. This ensures that everyone has the same level of knowledge and helps spread good practices.

Embed accessibility across teams and challenge all departments

Digital accessibility concerns everyone and goes far beyond workplace disability issues! By encouraging all teams to actively engage with the topic, you integrate inclusion into the organisation's culture.



Further Reading

Guidelines

- [Orange's Guidelines](#)
- [Make your Word document accessible to people with disabilities – Microsoft](#)
- [Make your PowerPoint presentations accessible to people with disabilities – Microsoft](#)
- [The complete checklist to PDF accessibility – Adobe](#)

Training

- [Digital Accessibility Training](#)

Video

- [Tips for accessible virtual meetings](#)

Conducting an inclusive **hybrid meeting**

“Hybrid meetings must ensure all participants have equal access, visibility, and voice, regardless of location.”



Introduction

Hybrid meetings include both on-site and remote participants. To be effective, they require adapted technology such as a wide-angle camera, a powerful microphone and speakers. They also need to be inclusive and ensure all participants have **equal access, visibility and voice, regardless of location.**

This factsheet presents some practices to foster inclusion in hybrid meetings.

Inclusive meeting planning

Before the meeting

Make sure to choose meeting times that **accommodate diverse working hours and send the agenda and relevant documents in advance** so that everyone can prepare. There are different useful roles to distribute in each meeting: **a timekeeper**, who will ensure that the meeting stays on time, **a note-taker** to report on important decisions and **a facilitator** to make sure everyone participates equally. Rotate the roles for each meeting!

During the meeting

Do you know about “**remote-first**” practices? As stated in the name, they focus on remote participants first to ensure that the meeting is not dominated (even unconsciously) by in-room participants. This includes **letting remote attendees speak first** in discussion and using digital tools such as digital whiteboards, so everyone participates equally. **Pay attention to the chat** to avoid missing out on written contributions and **enable live captioning** so that participants who may need it can benefit.

After the meeting

Thanks to the note-taker, **minutes should be readily available** and everyone should **know what they have to do** before the next meeting. The biggest risk of exclusion of remote employees is probably the “hallway decisions”: these decisions are taken informally after the meeting, while walking out of the meeting room for example. They may feel more organic but exclude remote workers as a result, so teams should try and avoid them.

Inclusive hybrid meeting planning

Use this template as a checklist to organise inclusive hybrid meetings and foster a sense of belonging for all employees, whether participants remotely or in-person. You can report the following information in an Excel spreadsheet.



Meeting details

- Meeting title
- Date and time
- Facilitator/Note-Taker/Timekeeper



Welcome and check-In

- Acknowledge all attendees (remote and in-person)
- Quick round of introductions or check-in question
- Review agenda and roles



Main agenda items

- The agenda should always be agreed upon and sent in advance. It should outline topics and speakers and can also be used to write down the minutes during the meeting.

Here is an example:

Team meeting			
Topic	Who	Duration	Information/Comments/ Minutes
		00:10:00	
		00:05:00	
		00:10:00	
		00:10:00	
		00:05:00	

**For each topic**

- Invite input from all, especially quieter voices
- Encourage use of chat or reactions
- Summarise assigned tasks
- Make sure to stay on time

**Feedback and wrap-up**

- Use this time (2 minutes) to ask a check-out question ("What insight do you leave with", "What are you doing next?" ...) or ask for feedback on the meeting or one of the topics

**Accessibility & inclusion checklist**

- Agenda is shared in advance
- Remote participants have equal access to materials
- Captions are enabled
- Rotation of roles
- Time zones are considered
- Camera-optional environment is respected
- Everyone contributes equally and all voices are heard

Digital collaboration tools recommendations

“The benefits of a flexible workforce can be compromised when remote team members feel isolated or need more information about the company's objectives in the absence of a fluid exchange of information.



Introduction

Workplace technologies are essential to enable employees to interact and work together regardless of their location, from tracking project progress to real-time interactions and digital brainstorming solutions. It is important to know the basic set of tools that every hybrid team should have, as well as which ones are specific for collaboration and how to choose the right ones for each hybrid team.

This guide is for virtual collaboration and provides essential resources for managing a workforce in a hybrid working mode.

Understanding the issue

- 1** What are the risks of a lack of virtual collaboration in a hybrid work team?
- 2** How can we mitigate these risks?
- 3** What is the role of Managers and Human Resources?

What are the risks of a lack of virtual collaboration in a hybrid work team?



Difficult communication

In the hybrid working model, communication is a fundamental pillar for any successful business. However, different geographic locations and flexible working hours can lead to conflicts and weaken collaboration if not managed with the right tools.

Online scheduling

Before planning any virtual meetings or starting work on a project, employees need to know who is working where. However, it is sometimes difficult to plan and coordinate their work, leading to problems such as delays and uncoordinated time to log on at times that suit everyone involved. To solve this, full visibility of when and where employees are available, remotely or at the office, is essential for scheduling meetings, assigning tasks, and managing project deadlines.

Isolation and ineffectiveness of work teams

The benefits of a flexible workforce can be compromised when remote team members feel isolated or need more information about the company's objectives in the absence of a fluid exchange of information.

How can we mitigate these risks ?

Establish communication channels adapted to the needs of each work team



Appropriate channels or tools, such as platforms, allow for a smooth exchange of information, ensure that all employees are informed, and promote a sense of inclusion for everyone in the work team. One useful tool is, as for instance, Desk Bird (<https://www.deskbird.com>)

Centralise tasks, documents, and any resources relevant to a project



Streamlining workflows, facilitating the tracking of deadlines, and enabling the efficient allocation of resources are some of the main needs. Using a project management tool helps to mitigate the risk of information silos, and ensures that all team members, regardless of location, have real-time access to project updates, deadlines, and resources. Some tools include Google docs, LucidChart, WebWhiteboard or Figma.

Encourage real-time collaboration



Through a cloud-based document-sharing platform, which provides a centralised repository of files, and allows team members to access, edit, and manage documents, updates are instantly visible to everyone, eliminating time and geographic barriers. By streamlining communication and ensuring version control, the platform mitigates the risks of information silos and data discrepancies. Tools such as HubSpot, Click up, and Monday is very useful.

What is the role of Managers and Human Ressources

Managers



- Build a digital work environment aligned to the needs of hybrid teams
- Create bespoke hybrid working policies and guidelines

Human ressources



- Regularly train team members to use the various collaborative tools
- Include a presentation of the different tools in the onboarding process so that every new employee is aware of how they work and their appropriate use

Conclusion

Digital collaborative tools have transformed the way people work in hybrid work teams, facilitating accessibility, teamwork, and real-time work, as well as communication, project management, and content creation in an efficient, and organised way to improve productivity. However, it is important to train every employee about their use and functionality to ensure they are used appropriately and effectively.



Further Reading

- [Remote vs. Office Teams: Top 7 Tools for Seamless Collaboration:](https://www.workstatus.io/blog/workforce-management/remote-vs-office-teams/)
- [Hybrid Team Collaboration: Challenges, Strategies, and Tools:](https://www.yarooms.com/blog/hybrid-team-collaboration)

Developing accessible technology and adapted digital tools for disabled employees

Information on the case study:

Organisation: MICROSOFT FRANCE

Size: 1500

Location: France

Sector: Information Technology

Operational context

Most companies' online services and digital tools are not designed to be easily usable by disabled employees. Yet in France, a number of legal obligations require both private and public companies to ensure that all employees and users can benefit from the advantages of the digital revolution. Companies are beginning to acknowledge the importance of taking care of their digital accessibility and are keen to adapt their working tools to the needs of all their employees. Microsoft is announcing a 5-year plan to improve digital accessibility and enable better integration of people with disabilities into the world of work.

The problem

Many companies point to the cost of compliance. If we consider the scarcity of controls and penalties despite a legal framework in France that has been strengthened since 2005 (legal obligations since 2005), we understand that these factors do not encourage companies to adapt their workstations to take account of disability.

Opportunities

As Microsoft is an American company, awareness of the problem of adapting the organisation to people with disabilities is greater than in Europe or France. Microsoft demonstrates the importance of these concerns in terms of diversity and inclusion. CEO Satya Nadella himself being the father of a child with a disability has strengthened the company's focus on digital accessibility.

More generally, companies are becoming aware that being digitally accessible is good for their image and makes it easier to attract young talents.

Taking disability into account is proving to be a source of innovation, enabling the development of inclusive solutions that ultimately benefit everyone. What's more, this is a major market that companies can no longer ignore. Indeed, 6.8 million people over the age of 15 living at home report a severe limitation and 3.4 million people say they are severely restricted in their usual activities due to a health condition (Source: DREES, 2023). In 2023, 3.1 million people had administrative recognition of disability, representing 7.5% of the total population aged 15-64 (Source: INSEE, Employment Survey).

On a global level, this represents more than one billion people, or 15 to 16% of the world's population according to 2023 data from the World Bank.

What was done

1. In April 2021, Microsoft announced a 5-year plan with three priorities:

- Stimulate the development of more accessible technologies
- Making the labour market more inclusive
- Improving inclusion in the workplace

2. Developing more accessible technologies

- The [Microsoft Inclusive Tech Lab](#), where people with disabilities work with the company to develop technology and gather feedback on the already available tools.
- A variety of new “accessible by design” features and advances in Microsoft 365, enabling more than 200 million people to build, edit and share documents. A new background accessibility checker will provide a prompt to fix accessibility issues in content across the core Office apps. Outlook will nudge users to correct accessibility issues.
- GitHub, Microsoft software collaboration platform is introducing new themes designed to make its features more accessible to people with visual impairments.
- Microsoft also empowers software developers by embedding accessibility tools, prompts and AI-driven automation so that accessibility is included at the start of the development cycle.
- Microsoft is creating a new Low-Cost Assistive Technology Fund, as part of the AI for Accessibility program, to spark innovation aimed at driving down the cost of assistive digital technology and increasing access to it.

3. Making the labour market more inclusive

The development of accessible technology requires more talented individuals with disabilities. Therefore, Microsoft intensifies its focus on building a workforce that better represents people with disabilities:

- By training more people about accessibility needs and accessible design and working with [Teach Access](#). This collaboration addresses the critical need to enhance students’ understanding of digital accessibility, to support a cultural shift across the tech sector that will help create new technologies with the needs of people with disabilities in mind.
- By improving the accessibility of classrooms through a new Accessibility University Initiative to increase graduation rates of students with disabilities in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) education
- By connecting skilled workers with jobs. For higher-education students, Microsoft and LinkedIn launched the [Career Coach](#) app in Microsoft Teams, powered by LinkedIn and aiming at helping increased accessibility skills. In addition, LinkedIn Coaches events

are geared toward job seekers with disabilities to help identify new employment opportunities.

4. Improving inclusion at work

The aim is to foster a welcoming and inclusive culture for people with disabilities and to attract employees with disabilities, through accessible digital and physical work environments.

- Building a sustainable culture of accessibility. In 2020, Microsoft published a [Disability Representation](#) report, disclosing that 6.1% of U.S. employees have self-identified as having a disability. They expanded the [survey](#) from the US to 45 additional countries, reaching 90% of their employees.
- Increasing the scope of inclusive hiring programmes developing an [Autism Hiring program](#) to include neurodiversity, such as ADD/ADHD, dyslexia and dyspraxia, as well as learning disabilities
- Creating the Microsoft's Disability Employee Resource Group which now includes more than 22 disability communities, with regional and divisional chapters associated with a new Employee Experience Accessibility team that focuses on improving accessibility of Microsoft internal tools, training and content, physical environment and partnerships with their suppliers.
- Microsoft is also proactive in Empowering customers and partners on their accessibility process by developing Microsoft [Accessibility Evolution Model](#), an operational "how to" to help customers and suppliers develop their own accessibility road maps and business plans.

Outcomes

The aim is to improve digital accessibility and enable better integration of people with disabilities into the workplace. According to Agefiph¹, the employment rate for disabled people in France is estimated at 3.5% in the private sector and 5.66% in the public sector.

Technologies such as artificial intelligence, cloud services, and newer generation mobile data networks such as 5G enable further opportunities for development and deployment of accessibility solutions.

Developing the business case

In 2018, Accenture conducted [a study in collaboration with US organisations for people with disabilities](#), which found that 45 companies known for excellence in their fields are also leaders in terms of employment and inclusion of disadvantaged people. These companies had 20% higher revenue on average and 30% higher profit margins than their competitors. But accessibility is as well a responsibility of a company to the society, and the inclusion of workers with disabilities have to be considered as well through the prism of ethical issues.

¹ Agefiph, or Association de Gestion du Fonds pour l'Insertion Professionnelle des Personnes Handicapées, is a French association that provides aid and support for the integration of people with disabilities in the workplace

References

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<https://blogs.microsoft.com/blog/2021/04/28/doubling-down-on-accessibility-microsofts-next-steps-to-expand-accessibility-in-technology-the-workforce-and-workplace/>

Fostering psychological safety in Hybrid & Remote Work

“Psychological safety is not a one-time achievement but an ongoing commitment to ensuring that team members feel heard, respected, and supported, no matter where they work.



Introduction

Remote and hybrid workplaces offer unparalleled flexibility, but they also present unique challenges, especially when it comes to fostering psychological safety. Psychological safety is the foundation upon which trust, collaboration, and inclusion are built. In a virtual setting, the absence of face-to-face interactions can exacerbate feelings of isolation, hinder communication, and prevent team members from fully engaging in discussions. This guide provides practical strategies to mitigate these risks, ensuring that employees feel heard, valued, and included, regardless of their location.

Understanding the issue

As organisations increasingly adopt hybrid and remote work models, understanding and addressing psychological safety becomes more critical. In traditional office environments, psychological safety develops naturally over time, with spontaneous conversations, informal interactions, and shared physical spaces contributing to stronger interpersonal bonds. However, in remote work settings, these organic interactions are minimised, and teams often struggle with creating an environment where employees feel comfortable taking interpersonal risks (such as speaking up, sharing ideas, or admitting mistakes) without fear of judgment.

The shift to remote work has highlighted how essential psychological safety is to maintaining high-performing teams. Research by Lechner and Tobias (2021) highlights that remote teams face specific challenges that impact their psychological safety. For example, virtual team members often feel isolated, disconnected, and excluded from informal communication networks (such as hallway conversations), which can lead to a decline in trust and collaboration. Furthermore, psychological safety is linked to better team performance, increased innovation, and lower employee turnover. Without psychological safety, team members may withhold valuable insights, avoid providing feedback, or disengage from collaboration efforts, undermining overall team effectiveness.

What can be done to foster psychological safety in hybrid and remote work settings ?

To build and sustain psychological safety in remote teams, it is essential to adopt intentional, proactive strategies. Here are several actions that managers and HR professionals can implement:

-  **Foster Open and Transparent Communication**
Remote work can often lead to communication breakdowns, with fewer opportunities for informal exchanges. To mitigate this, remote teams should establish clear and regular communication channels, prioritise open discussions, and create opportunities for employees to share thoughts and feedback without fear of negative consequences. Leaders should model transparent communication, acknowledging challenges and mistakes. By doing so, they demonstrate that vulnerability is acceptable and that no one is expected to be perfect, thus reducing the fear of judgment.
-  **Establish Clear Behavioural Expectations and Roles**
Psychological safety thrives when employees understand their roles and expectations clearly. Leaders should communicate expectations for work processes, communication practices, and team behaviour from the start and make sure everyone on the team understands how to interact with each other, what behaviours are expected, and how to raise issues constructively.
-  **Encourage the Practice of Active Listening**
In remote teams, where body language and other non-verbal cues are often missed, active listening becomes even more important. Encourage team members to listen attentively, respond thoughtfully, and ensure that everyone has an equal opportunity to speak during meetings. Leaders should be especially proactive in engaging quieter team members. Ask open-ended questions and create space for less vocal team members to share their perspectives, ensuring that all voices are heard.
-  **Empower Employees to Give and Receive Feedback**
A culture of feedback is essential for developing psychological safety. Leaders should encourage regular feedback loops, both positive and constructive. Feedback should be framed in a way that is supportive and solution-oriented. Creating an environment where employees feel comfortable receiving feedback without fear of negative consequences is essential. Additionally, team members should be encouraged to share feedback with each other to improve processes and relationships, fostering continuous improvement.

What is the role of Managers and Human Ressources ?

Managers



- Managers should encourage team members to voice concerns, share ideas, and ask for help without fear of negative consequences.
- By openly acknowledging challenges, asking for feedback, and sharing personal experiences, managers can create an atmosphere where vulnerability is seen as a strength, not a weakness.
- Actively involve all team members, especially those who may be quieter or less visible in virtual meetings, to ensure everyone feels heard and included.
- Offer regular, constructive feedback and check in on team members' well-being to prevent isolation and foster trust.

Human ressources



- HR should offer training programs on building psychological safety, addressing remote work challenges, and promoting inclusivity in virtual teams.
- HR should help mediate conflicts and provide tools to address interpersonal issues that may arise in remote work settings, ensuring a fair and supportive environment.
- HR can also serve as a bridge between leadership and employees, collecting feedback and identifying trends related to social isolation.

Conclusion

Developing psychological safety in remote teams is essential for fostering collaboration, trust, and a high-performing culture. By taking intentional steps to enhance communication, inclusivity, and connection, leaders can create an environment where all employees feel valued and confident in expressing themselves. Psychological safety is not a one-time achievement but an ongoing commitment to ensuring that team members feel heard, respected, and supported, no matter where they work.



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https://doi.org/10.4135/cqresrre20230505](#)
- [Lechner, A., & Tobias Mortlock, J. M. \(2021\). How to create psychological safety in virtual teams. Organizational Dynamics, 51\(2\), 100849.
https://doi.org/10.1016/j.orgdyn.2021.100849](#)
- [Perry, R. \(2018\). Belonging at work: Everyday actions you can take to cultivate an inclusive organization. PYP Academy Press.](#)

Non-violent communication

“Non-violent Communication (NVC) provides a structured approach to expressing needs and listening actively, reducing conflict and strengthening connections.



Introduction

This factsheet introduces Non-violent Communication (NVC), which fosters empathy, clarity, and mutual respect. By focusing on observations, feelings, needs, and requests, NVC helps create a more authentic, inclusive, and collaborative workplace.

This factsheet sets the ground to explore practical strategies and approaches to enhance understanding and connection in diverse work environments, stressing the importance of how statements and situations are perceived.

Relevance of non-violent communication in the context of HRW



In hybrid and remote work settings, clear and empathetic communication is essential to foster inclusion and collaboration. Without in-person cues, messages can be misinterpreted, leading to misunderstandings, frustration, or exclusion. Non-violent Communication (NVC) provides a structured approach to expressing needs and listening actively, reducing conflict and strengthening connections.

NVC helps team members communicate with clarity and respect, even in written or asynchronous interactions. It promotes psychological safety, ensuring everyone feels heard and valued, regardless of location.

Using NVC in remote work settings supports inclusive decision-making, reduces miscommunication in diverse teams, and enhances cooperation across cultures and time zones. It enables employees to navigate sensitive topics constructively, fostering trust and a sense of belonging. By integrating NVC principles, organisations can create more inclusive, empathetic, and effective hybrid workplaces.

Moreover, adopting NVC can improve leadership and team dynamics by encouraging a culture of open dialogue and constructive feedback. Leaders who practice NVC can better support their teams, address concerns proactively, and create a work environment where individuals feel empowered and safe to express themselves authentically. This ultimately leads to higher engagement, stronger collaboration, and a more resilient remote workforce.



Implementing NVC in hybrid and remote work settings

Here are key strategies to create a more inclusive work environment through the strategic use of Non-violent Communication:

☑ Use Inclusive language

Be mindful of language that may unintentionally exclude or stereotype. For example, instead of saying, "That idea is crazy", try "That idea is unexpected; let's explore it further".

☑ Practice active listening

When colleagues express concerns about bias or exclusion, listen without interrupting or dismissing their experience. Acknowledge what you hear and ask them to explain themselves further or to suggest possible solutions: "I hear that you felt overlooked in the meeting. What would help you feel more included?"

☑ Encourage equal participation

Remote settings can amplify power imbalances. Rotate speaking opportunities in meetings, use structured turn-taking, or leverage chat functions to ensure all voices are heard.

☑ Clarify intentions and impact

Misinterpretations can easily arise in text-based communication. If feedback seems harsh, ask for clarification rather than assuming negative intent: "Could you help me understand what you meant by that comment?" Likewise, before sending a message, reread it to ensure it conveys respect and inclusion.

☑ Foster a culture of empathy, valuing feelings and emotions

Encourage team members to express needs and emotions without fear of judgment. For instance, use the "I feel" statement and invite others to express their feelings. Focus on how messages are received: instead of saying, "You never respond on time," try, "When I don't receive a response, I feel uncertain about the next steps. Can we set clearer expectations?"

☑ Address microaggressions proactively

If someone uses exclusionary language, respond with curiosity rather than accusation: "I noticed that comment might be interpreted as exclusionary. Can we reframe it to be more inclusive?"

Conclusion

Non-violent Communication (NVC) offers a structured approach to expressing thoughts, feelings and emotions, and listening with empathy, helping to bridge gaps caused by physical distance. By fostering constructive dialogue and mutual understanding, NVC supports a work culture where collaboration thrives, differences are valued, and everyone feels respected, heard, and safe to express themselves authentically.



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<https://management30.com/blog/nonviolent-communication/>
- A Guide to Non-Violent Communication
<https://www.cultureally.com/blog/nonviolent-communication-a-guide-to-empathetic-conversation>

Inclusive language

“What you mean is one part of the interaction; how people receive and understand it is another, and their perception matter as much as your original intent.”



Introduction

Whether it is online or in-person, communication at work should always be respectful and inclusive. Using an inclusive language matters for several reasons: it promotes **belonging and psychological safety** in the organisation, it can help **build trust and reinforce collaboration** within diverse and distributed teams, it **supports diversity and inclusion policies and values**, and it can help **avoiding reinforcing stereotypes or bias**.

The following guidelines present the general principles of inclusive language and offer specific recommendations as well as practical tips for virtual and written communication. **Keep in mind that these are not “one size fits all” recommendations:** depending on your organisational culture, inclusive language can take different forms. This is especially true when considering work environments where people speak different languages.

Inclusive language

General principles

- Avoid assumptions and don't assume gender, background, family structure... when meeting and interacting with someone. This implies challenging your bias, whether they are unconscious or not!
- Use a language that is widely understood and avoid jargon or idioms that exclude those not familiar with them
- Be open to learning new things: language is constantly evolving
- What you mean is one part of the interaction; how people receive and understand it is another, and their perception matter as much as your original intent

Specific recommendations

Gender and pronouns

- Make a habit of sharing your pronouns when introducing yourself – this helps normalising pronouns sharing and avoiding assumption of gender identity
- Ask for people's pronouns when first meeting them
- Use gender-neutral job titles: "chairperson" instead of "chairman", "salesperson" instead of "salesman"
- Avoid gendered language when unnecessary, and use "they" as a singular pronoun

Sexual orientation

- Avoid gendered assumptions about partners and family: use "partner" instead of "wife" or "husband" unless specified
- Be mindful of inclusive celebrations and language around personal events (family leave, pride events)

Disability and neurodiversity

- Have a "person-first" perspective: say "person with a disability" rather than "disabled person", unless someone states a preference
- Avoid phrases like "This is crazy!": it can carry some stigma for people facing mental health problems. Instead, prefer "I can't believe it."

Practical tips for virtual and written communication

- Have a “person-first” perspective: say “person with a disability” rather than “disabled person”, unless someone states a preference
- Avoid phrases like “This is crazy!”: it can carry some stigma for people facing mental health problems. Instead, prefer “I can’t believe it.”



Further reading

- Government of Canada, Inclusive writing – Guidelines and resources
<https://www.noslangues-ourlanguages.gc.ca/en/writing-tips-plus/inclusive-writing-guidelines-resources>
- American Psychological Association, Inclusive Language Guide
<https://www.apa.org/about/apa/equity-diversity-inclusion/language-guidelines>

Communication and collaboration: **best practices for remote, synchronous, and asynchronous communication**

“Achieving a successful combination of synchronous and asynchronous communication in a hybrid working model requires careful planning, the use of appropriate tools, the creation of clear rules and expectations, and a flexible approach to adapt to the changing needs of the team.”



Introduction

Hybrid work environments benefit from a balance between synchronous (real-time) and asynchronous (flexitime) communication, but both have benefits and drawbacks. A strategic combination of both communication styles is crucial for effective collaboration and productivity in hybrid workplaces.

This guide offers strategies for improving best practices for remote, synchronous, and asynchronous communication.

Understanding the issue



What are the disadvantages of synchronous and asynchronous communication?

Fatigue and reduced productivity of synchronous communication

Virtual meetings via online platforms can be tiring due to the need to maintain eye contact through the cameras and screens, which generates cognitive strain and addiction. Furthermore, there is a lack of informal and formal interactions, and the employees' feeling of being watched can lead to mental fatigue and anxiety.

Difficulties in establishing employee availability in synchronous communication

Synchronous communication requires all employees involved in a team meeting to be available at the same time. This leads to disruptions in individual workflow, as well as scheduling limitations leading to overlapping due to excessive demand for virtual meetings.

Lack of immediacy of asynchronous methods

Employees without availability to attend online meetings at the same time as their colleagues can result in responding similar questions and doubts in different moments. This situation can lead to a sense of disconnection or lack of immediate collaboration and social interaction. In addition, waiting for responses and opinions means postponing decision-making.

How can we mitigate these **disadvantages**?

Reduce the number of meetings and shorten them to keep focus.

Schedule only strictly necessary meetings and opt for asynchronous communication with the presence of all employees whenever possible. Set also meetings with short duration and ensure that these are well-structured through protocols.

Define clear roles and expectations

Establish when and for what purpose each type of communication should be used.

Synchronous: to address urgent issues, decision making, and team meetings.

Asynchronous: tasks that do not require immediate interactions and decisions, such as project updates, quick consultations, information sharing, and establishing response times.

Improve technological resources

Ensure that employees have technology equipment and tools for synchronous and asynchronous communication. Desktop pooling can be used to determine which employees are in the office and how computers are shared. In addition, internet connectivity and remote collaboration tools need to be easily accessible in all situations or countries to ensure smooth collaboration.

What are the roles of Managers and Human Resources?

Managers



- Streamlining communication and driving collaborative decision-making, ensuring projects stay on track and teams stay engaged
- Designing a task management strategy and action plan

Human resources



- Limit synchronous work to its most necessary function by establishing blocks of collaboration limited to several hours.
- Provide training to employees in using communication tools and techniques and establish good written communication practices.

Conclusion

Achieving a successful combination of synchronous and asynchronous communication in a hybrid working model requires careful planning, the use of appropriate tools, the creation of clear rules and expectations, and a flexible approach to adapt to the changing needs of the team. This not only improves efficiency, but also team wellbeing and cohesion.



Further reading

- Asynchronous vs Synchronous Communication in Hybrid Teams:
<https://pragmaticthinking.com/blog/asynchronous-vs-synchronous-communication-in-hybrid-teams/>
- Asynchronous vs. Synchronous Teams: What You Need to Know:
<https://www.remofirst.com/post/asynchronous-vs-synchronous-teams>



Adapting communication styles for **inclusive remote and hybrid work**

Information on the Case Study

Organisation: AthenaTech Solutions

Size: 150 employees

Location: Athens, Greece

Sector: Information Technology and Software Development

Operational Context

AthenaTech Solutions is a technology SME based in Athens, Greece, specialising in developing software solutions for clients across various industries. The company employs software developers, project managers, UX/UI designers, and support staff. Following the COVID-19 pandemic, AthenaTech Solutions adopted a hybrid work model, allowing employees to work remotely and on-site per their roles and preferences. The shift to hybrid work aimed to provide flexibility while maintaining productivity and collaboration.

The Problem/Opportunity

Problem: The transition to remote and hybrid work highlighted communication challenges within the company. Remote employees reported feeling excluded from critical discussions and decision-making processes. Differences in communication styles and preferences led to misunderstandings and reduced collaboration. Communication practices needed to be adapted to ensure inclusivity and effective collaboration in the hybrid work environment.

Opportunity: AthenaTech Solutions recognised the opportunity to address these communication challenges proactively. By adapting communication styles to be more inclusive, the company aimed to improve employee engagement, foster a sense of belonging, and enhance overall productivity.

What Was Done

1. Conducting a communication audit:

Action: The HR department conducted a comprehensive audit of existing communication practices to identify gaps and areas for improvement.

Example: Analysed communication channels, meeting formats, and feedback mechanisms through employee surveys and focus groups.

2. Implementing inclusive communication training:

Action: Provided training for all employees on inclusive communication practices.

Example: Conducted workshops on active listening, non-verbal communication cues in virtual settings, and cultural sensitivity. Specialised training for managers on leading inclusive virtual meetings was also provided.

3. Standardising virtual meeting protocols:

Action: Developed standardised protocols for virtual meetings to ensure equal participation and inclusivity.

Example: Established rules such as rotating facilitation roles, using round-robin formats to ensure everyone has a chance to speak, and encouraging the use of chat functions for input. Ensured all meetings had clear agendas and were recorded for those unable to attend live.

4. Enhancing asynchronous communication:

Action: Increased the use of asynchronous communication to accommodate different time zones and work schedules.

Example: Used project management tools like Trello and communication platforms like Slack for updates and discussions. Created a central repository for project documentation and updates accessible to all team members.

5. Creating feedback loops:

Action: Established regular feedback loops to improve communication practices continuously.

Example: Implemented monthly surveys and virtual suggestion boxes where employees could provide feedback on communication effectiveness and inclusivity. Held quarterly town hall meetings to address feedback and discuss improvements.

6. Promoting a culture of transparency and openness:

Action: Encouraged transparency and openness in all communications to build trust and inclusivity.

Example: Regularly shared company updates and strategic decisions with all employees through virtual all-hands meetings. Encouraged leaders to model open communication by sharing their experiences and encouraging questions.

Outcomes

1. Improved employee engagement:

Outcome: Inclusive communication practices led to higher employee engagement.

Evidence: Employee engagement scores increased by 25%, with specific improvements in the areas of communication and collaboration.

2. Enhanced team collaboration:

Outcome: Teams reported better collaboration and fewer misunderstandings.

Evidence: Project completion times improved by 20%, and team satisfaction scores regarding collaboration increased by 30%.

3. Increased participation in meetings:

Outcome: Standardised virtual meeting protocols ensured more equitable participation.

Evidence: Surveys showed a 35% increase in employees feeling that their voices were heard and valued during meetings.

4. Greater flexibility and work-life balance:

Outcome: Enhanced asynchronous communication allowed for greater flexibility.

Evidence: Employees reported better work-life balance, with satisfaction scores in this area improving by 20%.

5. Continuous improvement and adaptability:

Outcome: Regular feedback loops enabled continuous improvement of communication practices.

Evidence: Ongoing adjustments based on employee feedback led to incremental improvements, with quarterly reviews showing consistent progress.

6. Stronger sense of belonging:

Outcome: Transparent and open communication fostered a stronger sense of belonging and trust.

Evidence: Employee surveys indicated a 30% increase in feelings of inclusion and belonging within the company.

Conclusion

By proactively adapting communication styles to be more inclusive, AthenaTech Solutions successfully navigated the challenges of remote and hybrid work. The company's comprehensive approach improved employee engagement, collaboration, and overall satisfaction. These efforts not only enhanced the work environment but also contributed to better business outcomes, demonstrating the critical importance of inclusive communication in a hybrid work model.

Preventing social isolation in hybrid and remote work

“Social isolation in the workplace occurs when employees feel disconnected from their team, manager, or organisation. Hybrid and remote work amplify this risk due to physical distance, fewer casual interactions, and reliance on virtual communication.



Introduction

Hybrid and remote work offer flexibility and convenience, but they also present the risk of social isolation for employees. The lack of in-person interactions can lead to loneliness, reduced engagement, and even mental health challenges. Preventing social isolation is essential for fostering a connected and motivated workforce. This fact sheet explores strategies to address social isolation and build stronger relationships in hybrid and remote work settings.

Understanding the issue

Social isolation in the workplace occurs when employees feel disconnected from their team, manager, or organisation. Hybrid and remote work amplify this risk due to physical distance, fewer casual interactions, and reliance on virtual communication.

The effects of social isolation include:

- 1 Declining mental health and well-being.**
- 2 Lower job satisfaction and engagement.**
- 3 Increased turnover and burnout.**
- 4 Communication silos and reduced collaboration.**

Organisations must address these challenges proactively to ensure employees feel supported and valued, regardless of where they work.

How can we mitigate these risks ?

Encouraging regular connection points is essential to combating social isolation. Organisations should schedule regular team meetings, one-on-ones, and informal check-ins to maintain engagement. Additionally, implementing virtual coffee chats, team-building activities, or “watercooler” sessions can create opportunities for casual interactions and foster a sense of community.

Fostering a sense of belonging is another key strategy. This can be achieved by celebrating team milestones, birthdays, and achievements, which helps build employee camaraderie. Promoting employee resource groups (ERGs) or social clubs enables individuals to connect with others who share similar interests, further strengthening organisational relationships.

Leveraging technology for collaboration is vital in hybrid and remote work settings. Tools like Slack, Microsoft Teams, or Zoom can facilitate both work-related and casual communication. Organisations should also create dedicated channels for non-work conversations, such as hobbies, pets, or wellness tips, to encourage informal interactions.

Promoting hybrid team events provides opportunities for employees to connect beyond their screens. Organisations should encourage periodic in-person gatherings for hybrid teams, such as retreats or collaborative workdays. Hosting hybrid-friendly events that include both on-site and virtual participants ensures inclusivity and reinforces team bonds.

Providing mental health resources is crucial to supporting employees in managing isolation and its effects. Sharing access to employee assistance programs (EAPs) or mental health apps can offer valuable support. Hosting webinars or workshops on topics such as managing loneliness, stress, and work-life balance also equips employees with tools to prioritise their well-being.

Building a culture of inclusion requires an ongoing effort from organisations. Managers should be trained to recognise signs of social isolation, such as lack of interaction with colleagues, feeling disconnected from the team, or having limited access to support and being overlooked in communications, and take proactive steps to address them. Encouraging open communication about employees' challenges when working remotely can help create a supportive environment where individuals feel heard and valued.

What is the role of Managers and Human Resources ?

Managers



- Create a safe space for employees to share feelings of isolation or loneliness.
- Balance workload distribution to prevent burnout and ensure team members have opportunities to connect.
- Actively involve remote employees in discussions, decision-making, and celebrations.

Human resources



- Establish policies that prioritise social connection, such as hybrid-friendly event planning.
- Develop training programs to help managers support remote employees.
- Provide tools, platforms, and resources to facilitate team connection and collaboration.

Conclusion

By fostering connection, promoting inclusion, and equipping managers with the right tools, organisations can create a culture where employees feel supported and engaged, no matter where they work. Building relationships and prioritising well-being are key to ensuring long-term success in the evolving workplace.



Further Reading

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Gathering **team members' needs**

“By embedding structured and ongoing needs assessments into workplace culture, organisations can foster a sense of belonging, improve collaboration, and enhance overall job satisfaction.



Introduction

Understanding team members' needs is essential for fostering inclusion, engagement, and productivity in remote and hybrid workplaces. Without in-person interactions, unspoken challenges can go unnoticed, leading to disengagement or inequity. Proactively gathering and addressing employees' needs ensures a supportive, effective work environment where everyone feels valued, heard, and empowered to contribute their best.

Supportings remote employees

Remote and hybrid work environments offer flexibility but also pose challenges in identifying and addressing employees' needs. In physical offices, informal interactions help managers gauge well-being, workload, and engagement. However, in remote settings, the absence of spontaneous check-ins can lead to overlooked struggles, such as isolation, lack of recognition, or work-life balance issues.

Different team members may have varying needs based on their roles, personal circumstances, or work styles. Some may require clearer communication, while others need more social connection or better access to professional development. Without proactive effort, companies risk an environment where some employees feel unsupported or disengaged.

Moreover, remote teams may span different time zones, cultural backgrounds, and technological proficiencies. A one-size-fits-all approach does not work; instead, organisations must actively seek feedback, create inclusive policies, and tailor solutions to diverse needs.

By embedding structured and ongoing needs assessments into workplace culture, organisations can foster a sense of belonging, improve collaboration, and enhance overall job satisfaction.

Implementing need-assessment strategies

To ensure equity and fairness, organisations must approach need-gathering with inclusivity in mind. Here are key strategies to mitigate discrimination risks:

1 Ensure equal access to communication channels

Employees should have multiple ways to express their needs, such as surveys, one-on-one meetings, and anonymous feedback forms. Some employees may feel uncomfortable speaking up in group settings, so diverse methods ensure all voices are heard.

2 Use data to identify patterns

Regularly analyse feedback to detect disparities in experience. If certain groups report higher stress levels or less access to opportunities, targeted action can be taken to close gaps.

3 Avoid bias in decision-making

Managers should be trained to recognise unconscious bias when assessing and responding to employees' needs. For example, assuming parents need more flexibility while overlooking similar needs for employees with disabilities can create inequity.

4 Implement inclusive policies

Flexible working arrangements should be designed to benefit all employees, not just those with the loudest voices. Structured policies on meeting times, workload distribution, and career growth ensure fairness across the board.

5 Encourage psychological safety

Employees should feel safe sharing their needs without fear of negative consequences. Clear leadership messaging and confidentiality protections can help build this trust.

Conclusion

By implementing structured feedback mechanisms, fostering open communication, and proactively addressing disparities, organisations can create equitable work environments where all employees feel heard, valued, and supported. Prioritising these efforts leads to stronger engagement, better collaboration, and a more supportive company culture.



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Problem solving framework

Structured problem-solving frameworks give teams a clear methodology to follow, which is especially important when collaboration spans across different time zones and work styles.



Introduction

In remote and hybrid work settings, teams face unique challenges that require specific problem-solving strategies. Having structured frameworks and rituals in place enables remote teams to address issues collaboratively and systematically, ensuring productive outcomes. These approaches provide clarity, reduce misunderstandings, and promote inclusion, leading to stronger communication, innovation, and cohesion in distributed teams.

Problem solving frameworks and rituals in the context of HRW

In hybrid and remote work (HRW), the absence of physical presence can lead to slower decision-making processes, miscommunication, and feelings of isolation. As a result, having clear problem-solving frameworks becomes essential for overcoming these barriers.

Structured problem-solving frameworks give teams a clear methodology to follow, which is especially important when collaboration spans across different time zones and work styles. These frameworks allow teams to break down complex problems into manageable steps, assign tasks efficiently, and track progress effectively, whether working synchronously or asynchronously.

Rituals, such as daily stand-ups, weekly retrospectives, and scheduled brainstorming sessions, provide consistent touchpoints for teams to share updates, identify challenges, and create solutions together. These rituals promote transparency, encourage participation from all team members, and create a sense of routine and predictability that helps remote teams feel more connected, with a shared understanding of goals and processes.

Implementing problem-solving frameworks

Below are key strategies to minimise the risk of discrimination in HRW and create an equitable environment when implementing problem-solving frameworks and rituals:

Ensure equal participation

In remote and hybrid settings, some team members may inadvertently dominate discussions, while others may be quieter or less inclined to speak up. Facilitators should actively encourage everyone to contribute by creating safe spaces for sharing. For instance, structured rituals like round-robin discussions or using digital tools for anonymous input that can ensure that every voice is heard.

Use clear and inclusive language

When framing problems or solutions, it's important to avoid language that may unintentionally exclude or marginalise certain groups. For example, referring to "groupthink" or "tradition" may inadvertently overlook innovative ideas from more diverse perspectives. Use neutral and inclusive language that encourages creative input from all employees.

Provide equal access to resources

Ensure all team members have the necessary tools and information to contribute effectively to problem-solving. This includes making sure remote employees have access to the same resources as their in-office counterparts, such as real-time collaboration platforms and relevant documents. Equitable access helps minimise feelings of exclusion and prevents some employees from being at a disadvantage.

Be mindful of time zone differences

Hybrid teams with members in different time zones may face challenges in coordinating problem-solving activities. To avoid leaving anyone out, rotate meeting times or offer asynchronous ways to participate. This ensures that everyone has an opportunity to contribute, regardless of location.

Encourage feedback and reflection

After problem-solving sessions or rituals, encourage team members to share feedback on the process. What worked well? What could be improved? This continuous feedback loop ensures that any inadvertent biases or exclusionary practices are identified and addressed.

The following table outlines problem-solving approaches in hybrid and remote work settings. It highlights common challenges, solutions, and tools that can be used to address them.

Challenge	Hybrid Work Solution	Remote Work Solution	Tools & Strategies
Communication Gaps	Schedule regular in-office collaboration days	Use async communication & scheduled check-ins	Slack, Microsoft Teams, Loom, Asana
Decision-Making Delays	Combine in-person and virtual decision-making meetings	Use structured decision frameworks (e.g, RACI)	Miro, Trello, Notion, Google Docs
Team Alignment	Hybrid team meetings with clear agenda & follow-ups	Virtual town halls & clear documentation	Zoom, Google Meet, Confluence
Collaboration & innovation	Encourage whiteboarding sessions during office days	Use digital brainstorming tools	MURAL, Miro, FigJam
Employee Engagement	Blend in-person bonding activities with virtual ones	Virtual team-building & recognition programs	Donut (Slack), Anecdotes (Kahoot)
Work-Life Balance	Set core in-office hours but allow flexibility	Encourage boundary-setting & async work	Clockify, RescueTime, Pomodoro apps

Conclusion

Problem-solving frameworks and rituals play a crucial role in the success of remote and hybrid teams. By providing structured approaches and regular rituals, teams can address challenges efficiently.



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- "How to Improve Problem-Solving Skills in Remote Teams"
<https://superglue.games/how-to-improve-problem-solving-skills-in-remote-teams/>
- "Rituals: The Missing Link in the Hybrid Workplace" by Aquent
<https://aquent.co.uk/blog/rituals-the-missing-link-in-the-hybrid-workplace/>

Establishing remote employee resource groups

“Affinity groups are a useful medium to foster inclusion and cohesion among employees that would otherwise never meet. As they are mainly employee-led, their emergence must come from an identified need for connection and sharing.



The importance of affinity groups in hybrid and remote work (HRW)

Affinity groups, or employee resource groups (ERGs) are voluntary, employee-led communities that bring together individuals with shared characteristics, interests or life experiences. These may relate to race, gender, LGBTQ+ identity, disability, neurodiversity, caregiving responsibilities...

In hybrid and remote work settings, affinity groups can play a critical role in **fostering inclusion, reducing isolation and enhancing a sense of belonging**, particularly for underrepresented or marginalised employees who may otherwise feel disconnected from the organisation or team culture.

Thanks to regularly scheduled meetings, affinity groups provide **connection and solidarity**. The tone is generally more informal formats than other work-related projects and meetings and it may be easier for **underrepresented voices to express themselves**.

Establishing remote **affinity** groups

In hybrid and remote work (HRW), the absence of physical presence can lead to slower decision-making processes, miscommunication, and feelings of isolation. As a result, having clear problem-solving frameworks becomes essential for overcoming these barriers.

Structured problem-solving frameworks give teams a clear methodology to follow, which is especially important when collaboration spans across different time zones and work styles. These frameworks allow teams to break down complex problems into manageable steps, assign tasks efficiently, and track progress effectively, whether working synchronously or asynchronously.

Rituals, such as daily stand-ups, weekly retrospectives, and scheduled brainstorming sessions, provide consistent touchpoints for teams to share updates, identify challenges, and create solutions together. These rituals promote transparency, encourage participation from all team members, and create a sense of routine and predictability that helps remote teams feel more connected, with a shared understanding of goals and processes.

Key **principles of success**

- 1 Clear purpose and scope:** Each group should have a defined purpose or mission, and clear objectives aligned with the organisation's broader inclusion and diversity strategy
- 2 Voluntary participation:** Affinity groups rely on the active and voluntary participation of its members. They can be opened to allies of the represented identity or group
- 3 Executive sponsorship:** Secure visible support from senior leaders who can champion the group's purpose, advocate for its needs, and help remove systemic barriers
- 4 Equitable access:** Use digital tools that are accessible and easy to use, and schedule meetings or events at varied times
- 5 Confidentiality and psychological safety:** Ensure ground rules are in place to create respectful, supportive and inclusive spaces
- 6 HR and management collaboration:** Provide administrative support through HR or diversity and inclusion teams

Getting started

- Begin with one or two groups based on interest and demand
- Provide a simple charter template to help group founders articulate purpose, membership guidelines and key goals
- Publicise the group internally and make it easy for remote employees to join
- Ensure the group has a dedicated communication channel
- Check in regularly to understand the group's evolving needs

Remote affinity groups can be powerful drivers of inclusion and cohesion in hybrid and remote settings. By providing intentional spaces for connection, shared identity and mutual support, they help create a workplace where everyone can thrive, no matter where they are located.



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Managing mixed team dynamics **in Hybrid & Remote Work**

“Regularly checking in, offering flexibility, and using technology to bridge gaps are key to building a cohesive and high-performing team, no matter the location.



Introduction

Managing mixed team dynamics in hybrid and remote teams presents unique challenges, but it also offers great opportunities for growth, collaboration, and innovation. This factsheet is designed to help leaders and team members navigate the complexities of balancing in-office and remote workers by offering practical strategies to foster clear communication, inclusivity, and effective collaboration. By implementing these best practices, teams can bridge the gap between different work environments, ensuring that all members feel valued, supported, and empowered to contribute to the team's success, regardless of their location.

Understanding the issue

Understanding how to manage mixed team dynamics in hybrid and remote work (HRW) is crucial because the success of these teams depends on how well leaders navigate the complexities of balancing in-office and remote workers. Without effective management, hybrid teams can experience communication breakdowns, feelings of isolation, and inequitable access to opportunities, which can negatively impact productivity and morale. When these dynamics are not properly addressed, remote employees may feel disconnected, and in-office workers may lack an understanding of the challenges their remote counterparts face. By understanding and actively managing these dynamics, organisations can create a more cohesive, inclusive, and efficient team environment, leading to higher engagement, better collaboration, and improved overall performance.

Best practices for managing mixed team dynamics in HRW

Promote clear and consistent communication

Set expectations by defining communication protocols and the best tools for different situations, such as Slack for quick chats, Zoom for meetings, and email for formal updates. Over-communicate important information to ensure remote employees stay informed about key project details and updates. Since hybrid teams work across different time zones, using **asynchronous communication** tools like project management software helps ensure that no one is left out due to scheduling conflicts.

Foster inclusivity and equity

To promote inclusivity and equity, avoid favouritism toward in-office employees by ensuring remote workers have **equal opportunities** to contribute to meetings and decision-making. Rotate meeting roles so both remote and in-office team members have the chance to lead discussions or share updates. Use collaborative tools like shared documents or interactive whiteboards to ensure all voices are heard, and consider video conferencing for meetings to guarantee equal participation regardless of where team members are located. Fair treatment and visibility for both groups help foster a more cohesive and inclusive team culture.

Create opportunities for social interactions

Organise virtual social events and encourage informal chats by setting up virtual "watercooler" spaces where team members can discuss topics unrelated to work. Establishing buddy systems or pairing remote and in-office employees helps foster peer support and build stronger relationships across the team, mitigating feelings of isolation for remote workers.

Foster a culture of **trust and transparency**

Set clear, measurable goals that align all team members—both remote and in-office—toward the same objectives. Regular one-on-one check-ins between managers and employees help provide personalised support, feedback, and coaching.

Encourage **open feedback from all team members** to address any challenges or concerns regarding team dynamics, communication, or workloads. By building a foundation of trust and openness, teams will feel more comfortable sharing ideas and addressing issues as they arise.

Monitor and address **potential conflict**

Pay attention to any signs of frustration, misunderstandings, or miscommunication between remote and in-office workers. If tensions arise, address them quickly and openly to prevent escalation. Establish clear conflict resolution mechanisms and encourage team members to address issues directly and constructively. **Providing training on empathy and conflict resolution** can also help prevent conflicts from disrupting team dynamics and foster a supportive atmosphere for all employees.

Conclusion

Managing mixed team dynamics in hybrid and remote environments requires intentional strategies to ensure effective communication, collaboration, inclusivity, and support. By implementing the practices outlined in this factsheet, teams can break down barriers between in-office and remote employees, foster trust, and create an environment where all members feel equally valued. Regularly checking in, offering flexibility, and using technology to bridge gaps are key to building a cohesive and high-performing team, no matter the location.



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Team bonding **for** hybrid teams

“Without strong interpersonal connections and an inclusive culture, teams may struggle with innovation, creativity, and problem-solving, as individuals may feel less inclined to share ideas or collaborate effectively



Introduction

Creating strong team bonds in hybrid environments can be challenging, but it's essential for fostering collaboration, engagement, and overall well-being. This factsheet provides practical strategies and activities that can help bridge the gap between remote and in-office team members, ensuring everyone feels connected and valued. From virtual coffee breaks to inclusive team-building events, these ideas are designed to cultivate a sense of belonging and improve communication, regardless of location.

The importance of team cohesion in hybrid and remote work

The significance of team bonding in hybrid teams cannot be overstated, as it directly affects both the psychological well-being of employees and the productivity of the team. When remote team members feel isolated or disconnected from their in-office counterparts, it can lead to disengagement, reduced morale, and a sense of exclusion. These feelings of isolation may cause remote workers to withdraw or become less motivated, ultimately impacting the overall success of the team. On the other hand, in-office team members may not fully understand the challenges faced by their remote peers, leading to a lack of empathy and a divide between the two groups. This misalignment can hinder collaboration and communication, preventing the team from reaching its full potential.

Furthermore, the significance of fostering team bonding in hybrid teams extends to the long-term health of the organisation. Without strong interpersonal connections and an inclusive culture, teams may struggle with innovation, creativity, and problem-solving, as individuals may feel less inclined to share ideas or collaborate effectively. A lack of bonding can also lead to higher turnover rates, as employees may feel unsupported or disconnected from the organisation. In contrast, a cohesive hybrid team is better equipped to adapt to challenges, leverage diverse perspectives, and build a positive work environment where all members feel valued. Therefore, addressing this issue is not just about improving day-to-day dynamics; it's about creating a foundation for sustained growth and success in a hybrid workforce.

Enhancing team bonding in hybrid teams

Encourage open communication

To keep communication flowing and ensure everyone's voice is heard, schedule regular one-on-one or team check-ins, which can be short, informal meetings to maintain connection. Additionally, leaders can offer virtual "open door" hours, allowing team members to join video calls for casual chats or to discuss work-related concerns, helping create an approachable and open atmosphere.

Implement inclusive virtual team building activities

Foster connection through virtual coffee breaks where team members can engage in non-work-related conversations. Show-and-tell sessions, where team members share something personal—like a hobby or favourite book—can help people get to know each other beyond the workplace, strengthening personal connections.

Foster cross-team collaboration

Pairing remote and in-office employees together for projects or tasks fosters teamwork and breaks down divides between the two groups. In addition, mentorship or buddy systems create opportunities for individuals to support one another, promoting a sense of belonging and connection across the team.

Celebrate milestones & successes

Celebrate milestones such as birthdays, work anniversaries, and team accomplishments with virtual cards, shout-outs in meetings, or online parties that include all team members, regardless of location. Use platforms like Slack or Microsoft Teams to recognise achievements and highlight team progress, ensuring everyone's contributions are acknowledged.

Create a sense of belonging with inclusive practices

Ensure that virtual team meetings are inclusive by using collaborative tools such as shared documents or interactive whiteboards so that all voices are heard. Maintain transparent communication by ensuring that all team members, whether remote or in-office, have access to the same information and resources, avoiding any feelings of exclusion or isolation.

Offer flexibility in social activities

Organise hybrid-friendly social events that can include both in-person and remote team members. When scheduling these activities, consider different time zones to ensure everyone has an opportunity to participate, fostering a more inclusive and fairer environment.

Gather feedback and make adjustments

Use quick polls to gather feedback on team bonding activities, inclusivity, and remote work challenges, then adjust future initiatives based on what resonates most with the team. Regularly check in with team members to understand how they feel about team dynamics and make adjustments to continuously improve inclusivity and connection.

Conclusion

Fostering strong team bonds in a hybrid work environment is essential for maintaining a connected, motivated, and high-performing team. By implementing strategies such as encouraging open communication, engaging in inclusive virtual team-building activities, and promoting cross-team collaboration, organisations can bridge the gap between remote and in-office employees. Celebrating milestones, creating a sense of belonging, and offering flexibility in social activities further strengthen relationships and improve morale. Regular feedback and adjustments ensure that the efforts remain relevant and effective. By prioritising team bonding, hybrid teams can overcome isolation and division, leading to a more collaborative, inclusive, and successful work environment for all.



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Tips for Setting Boundaries in Remote Work

“Setting clear boundaries is not only about work-life balance but also ensuring equitable and inclusive treatment of employees in remote environments.”



Introduction

Remote working offers flexibility and efficiency, but it also blurs the lines between work and home. Establishing clear boundaries is essential to prevent burnout, maintain productivity, and ensure work-life balance. This guide provides actionable strategies to help remote workers define their work and personal time while fostering a healthy and sustainable remote work environment.

Understanding the issue

One of the most pressing issues in hybrid and remote work (HRW) is the **blurring of professional and personal boundaries**. Without a clear distinction between work and home life, employees may find themselves constantly engaged in work tasks, leading to increased stress and difficulty in disconnecting after hours. Furthermore, the expectation to be available at all times can create an '**always-on**' culture, where employees feel compelled to respond to messages and emails outside of regular working hours. This can contribute to burnout and reduced job satisfaction. In addition, working from home often means increased **family interruptions**, making it difficult to maintain focus and productivity.

Given these complexities, it is essential to implement strategies that promote a sustainable and inclusive hybrid work model. By setting clear boundaries, using technology responsibly, and fostering a culture that prioritises work-life balance, companies can create a healthier and more equitable remote working experience for all employees.

What can be done to limit these risks

Setting clear boundaries is not only about work-life balance but also ensuring equitable and inclusive treatment of employees in remote environments. Below are key strategies that can help set effective remote work boundaries and foster a balanced, supportive work culture.

- **Establish clear remote working policies** : Clearly defining official working hours is crucial in maintaining a healthy work-life balance. Companies should implement structured policies that define working hours and explicitly communicate when employees are expected to be available for work and when they should disconnect. Moreover, companies should support a “right to disconnect” policy that prevents after-hours work expectations, ensures that employees have designated time to recharge and minimises the risk of burnout.
- **Equitable workload distribution** : Managers should ensure fair workload distribution, preventing biases against remote workers who may be perceived as less engaged. In addition, performance should be measured by output rather than time spent online, ensuring that remote workers have equal access to career development opportunities.
- **Normalise flexible working arrangements for caregivers** : remote employees with caregiving responsibilities (e.g. parents, those supporting elderly family members) should have flexibility to manage their work schedules without stigma. Employers should normalise discussions about personal work schedules and ensure that remote workers—regardless of their caregiving responsibilities—are not seen as less committed or productive.
- **Encourage regular breaks** : Employers should promote short breaks and mental wellness activities, reinforcing the idea that taking breaks improves productivity. Equally important is creating physical workspaces that are separate from personal spaces to reinforce the mental boundaries between professional and personal life.

By embedding these principles into company culture, businesses can foster a healthier, more balanced remote work environment—one where employees are both productive and well-supported in their personal well-being.

Conclusion

Setting boundaries when working remotely is critical to both productivity and personal well-being. Without a clear separation between work and personal life, employees risk increased stress, burnout, and job dissatisfaction. Employers should play a proactive role in fostering a healthy working environment through structured policies, training, and inclusivity measures. By ensuring fair workloads, respecting the right to disconnect, and implementing flexible arrangements, companies can create a sustainable and inclusive remote working culture.



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Fostering social cohesion in the digital age

Information on the case study:

Organisation: UpWORK (created in 2015 from Elance)

Size: 798 corporate employees, 2022 freelancer or contract workers, with workers in over 800 cities. (2021)

Location: USA (San Francisco)

Sector: Digital Economy

Operational context

Upwork is an online freelancing platform that connects companies with freelancers for short or long-term projects. The majority of Upwork employees works from home. The company adopted a remote working model long before it became a global trend. As a platform dedicated to freelancing and remote working, Upwork advocates a flexible and decentralised way of working, which is also reflected in its own internal practices. The practice of working from anywhere has been the company culture since its founding in 1998 when it was "Elance."

According to the Upwork President and CEO Hayden Brown, COVID 19 provided an opportunity: "It was really a moment to say, we're going to leverage the strengths we have as a team that knows how to work remotely and do that really well," she said. "And lean into my brand as the new CEO around communication, clarity, transparency, and amplify all of that at once and make sure everyone is hearing from me and our leadership team."

The problem/opportunity

The company maintains two offices for collaboration and socialisation, and remote working environment is the main rule for most of corporate team members. The company has developed a remote-friendly work approach, and employees have the flexibility to work from home or come into the office. In the company *Upwork Future Workforce Report 23*, figures showed the importance of remote work for employees. More full-time workers will want the opportunity to work remotely, maybe not on a 5/5 basis but clearly more on the flexible working side. A 2024 study¹ shows that 12.7% of employees are fully remote in the US, with 30% participating in some hybrid model. In ten years, some experts predict that those numbers will rise to 30% and 60-65% respectively.

For employers, remote work could be the better and more cost-effective option as long as managers understand that remote workers are facing different challenges, such as time zone differences, miscommunications as relaying on e-mail might increase understanding mistake, plus the risk of a feeling of isolation and neglect. But on the bright side, benefits for both sides can be found by saving money on office space and real estate, being able to hire talented

¹ <https://www.justworks.com/blog/future-of-remote-work-and-working-from-home>

people from a global market and increasing diversity workforce. For the employees, the gain can be measured by a better work life balance, less stress and an increased feeling of commitment.

According to Upwork, they are developing a new model: the “hub” company. With the growing importance of freelancing as a social trend among younger generations, Upwork aims at integrating corporate workforce with freelance talents from outside the company. In this model, most of the workforce works “in the cloud”, corporate employees as well as freelancers. Then how can Upwork maintain the link and foster a culture of commitment and retention among the members of the “hub” and harvest all the benefits of remote work without falling into its pits?

What was done

Upwork uses several strategies to maintain social links and encourage collaboration among its teleworking employees. But the mindset is essential, and trust is first. Trust towards the employees, acknowledged as professionals committed enough to deliver what is expected from them. Second is the shift of focus from “time in seat” to outcomes. Modern teams want autonomy and flexibility to enhance their productivity.

Several actions have been developed.

1. Creating connection by using remote collaboration tools (Slack, Zoom, Microsoft Teams...) to engage in team-building activities, socialise, and share personal content like a music playlist or vacation photos and avoid the feeling of loneliness and being put aside.
2. A strong remote team culture necessary to foster a sense of belonging, encouraging collaboration, and motivating individuals to work out differences when issues arise. It has been assumed by many business leaders that a company’s culture is built within its four walls, but a Gartner survey from 2021 show unexpected results. According to their findings, more than half (53%) of remote workers who had the most flexibility in where, when, and how they work reported high cultural connectedness. The Upwork values are based on trust, encouraging autonomy and collaboration, in addition to transparency and open communications.
3. Virtual social events (online games, quizzes, open discussions).
4. Teams’ rituals with regular check in to discuss ongoing projects but also their daily life, and virtual cafes meetings.
5. Face to face retreats and events: the company operates on teleworking basis but face to face meetings enable employees to connect through collaborative workshops, team building sessions or group dinners. These events are considered very important for the group’s cohesion.
6. Project management and collaboration tools such as collaborative platforms (Asana, Trello, Jira) to develop online collaboration.

Upwork uses several tools and methods to measure the social cohesion and commitment of its teleworking employees, such as surveys on employee’s satisfaction, Employee Net

Promoter Score², Real-time feedback tools like pulse surveys, anonymous feedback tools, analysis of digital interactions from the data of the project management tools. Upwork gathers information from the analysis of participation rate in online social events and team's rituals in addition to the HR classical metrics such as staff retention and turnover rate.

Outcomes

By combining these methods, Upwork obtains an overall view of the social cohesion in the company and can adjust its practices to encourage a better collaborative environment. Upwork has not been officially certified as a 'Great Place to Work', but it enjoys a good reputation in terms of employee satisfaction, thanks to its flexible, teleworking environment. The company is rated 4.2 out of 5 by the Indeed website with 437 reviews and a score of 4.3 on work life balance and 3.9 for management and Culture.

Employee reviews on platforms such as Glassdoor are generally positive. In 2023, the company had an employee satisfaction rating of 4.3/5 on Glassdoor, with comments highlighting its flexibility, collaborative corporate culture and management commitment.

The company is developing the hub model company, acknowledging at least in the US the rise of freelancing especially among the younger generation, as 60% of freelancers work remotely and the younger generations see freelancing as a viable career option.

In this organisational model, people analytics are very important to monitor a remote workforce and keeping it motivated, engaged and productive. Upwork is actively developing new HR processes to match the evolution of their workforce. The importance of HR is assessed by a recent interview (2024) of Upwork's Director of Remote Organisational Effectiveness Jessica Reeder who considers herself as an inventor working on creating a gold standard for remote work so Upwork can deliver a "best in class" remote-first experience for employees.

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² This indicator measures the likelihood of an employee recommending their company as a good place to work. A high score suggests good social cohesion and strong commitment, while a low score indicates areas for improvement.