



Global report

# Managing hybrid teams

The ups and downs of managing a **hybrid team** – discover key learnings from a study of office workers from North America and Europe





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## Setting the scene in the new world of work

Discover key learnings from a study of office workers from North America and Europe

It is clear that the global workplace landscape has changed dramatically since the COVID-19 pandemic. Since 2020, many more people now work remotely or as part of a hybrid team and there has been a significant shift towards the digitisation of products and services.

At Insights Learning and Development, we wanted to understand how the shift towards hybrid working has impacted organisations, leaders, and employees across the world. With so much change, in such a short timeframe, we were keen to find out how workers feel about their new arrangements and what kind of development and support they need to be successful in this new world of work.



## Management findings

### Highlighting managers' opinions on leading hybrid teams

#### Global survey of over 3,000 office workers

We asked more than 3,000 office workers across North America and Europe about their existing working arrangements, their preferences for the future, benefits, challenges and what they felt they needed to be successful. The overall findings of this research were released in our ***Global Hybrid Working Report*** in March 2023.

Overall the research found that the pandemic resulted in a significant shift towards hybrid working and that this is now the most popular arrangement. Additionally, most employees want hybrid working to continue in the future world of work. Globally, 76% of respondents said they now worked flexibly, 92% said they're more hybrid since the pandemic, and 72% want that flexibility to continue.

#### Placing managers in the spotlight

Following on from the initial report, we will now explore some of the data in greater depth, focusing on the results from one particular subsection of the workforce - managers.

We asked those managing hybrid teams about their experiences of leading since the pandemic. This included how their work had changed since 2020, the benefits and challenges of managing a hybrid team, as well as their training and development need in this new environment.

#### Key findings to takeaway

The findings in this report take a deeper dive into the data taken from the management population. On a positive note, they reveal that managers see numerous opportunities arising from hybrid working which, correctly harnessed, could enable their teams to be even more collaborative, innovative and productive (see pages 5 and 6). On the other hand, the findings also highlight a clear need for additional support for managers, to ensure they can build healthy workplace relationships and drive positive organisational culture (see pages 8 and 9).

**Sample set** – The original survey was carried out by Statista among 3,000 office workers across Europe and North America. This sample set was broken down into those operating in hybrid teams. Out of that sample, 851 are managers and 899 non-managers.



## A bright outlook

It's clear that hybrid working has been embraced by the management population – 73% of those who manage hybrid teams want to continue working this way for the remainder of their career.

Only 10% stated that they want to return to the office permanently one day.

Crucially, very few managers felt a negative impact. This indicates that overall, managers of hybrid teams are positive about the impact this new way of working has had on team performance and ideas sharing, as well as learning and development.

Companies must harness this positivity, to invest in developing their managers to be successful in the new world of work, as well as employees to ensure they continue to feel supported, enabled, and productive.

Indeed, **making development a central pillar of business culture** is a great way to attract and retain top talent. This ensures employees at every level remain up to date on industry best practices, while also learning new skills. It also boosts engagement, retention and overall productivity.

We asked managers of hybrid teams, what has changed about their work since they started working in a hybrid team.

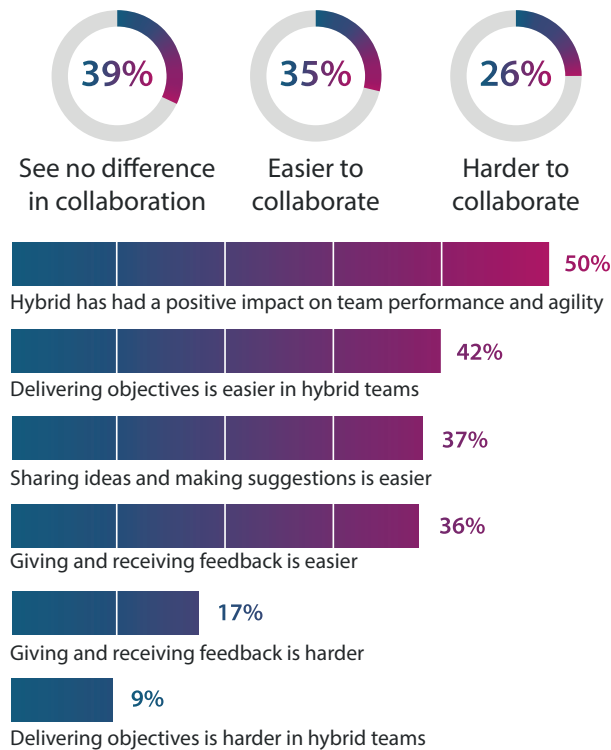


**Key reasons why people development is so important...**

1. People are more likely to stay in a job, or at an organisation, where there is an opportunity for growth. If you don't invest in your people, they're likely to find someone else who will.
2. People development isn't just an attractive employee proposition, but it's also a great way to nurture employee loyalty.
3. The better people are at their jobs, the more effective they will be, which feeds into overall business profitability. By investing in your people you are not only increasing their potential, but the potential of the overall business as well.

## A positive impact on team performance

### Managers' views on team collaboration



Over two-thirds of managers either see no difference or an increase in team collaboration since moving to hybrid working, which is leading to the more frequent sharing of ideas and feedback. Half (50%) reported that hybrid has had a positive impact on team performance and agility, **while only 15% reported this impact to be negative.**

Overall 42% of managers of hybrid teams perceive that delivering objectives is much easier **compared with only 9% who think this is harder.**

### Digital and hybrid go hand-in-hand

Our findings reinforce the consensus that digital transformation has better enabled collaboration among teams and that this was accelerated, through necessity, by the global pandemic. In April 2021, Microsoft reported 145 million people using its Microsoft Teams communications tool, jumping from 44 million in March 2020.

**Access to user friendly digital collaboration tools has made it easier** for teams to collaborate and generate ideas at the touch of a button. Previously, this level of interaction and collaboration might have been restricted to costly and time-consuming physical meetings, or more impersonal – possibly less productive – teleconferences.

In the new world of work, it's important to ensure managers are supported to continue high levels of collaboration in teams and across organisations, and that new technologies that enable this are embraced and embedded. Collaborative working is a great way to build connections at all levels.

The deep, personal connection among employees and the psychological contract between employee/ employer are the building blocks of creativity, innovation, and business success.



## Better work-life balance

While employee wellbeing and a focus on work-life balance were discussed pre-2020, the global pandemic undoubtedly pushed it up the agenda. This has benefitted managers and employees who can now enjoy more flexibility, mobility and time with family and friends.

### Diverse range of wellness initiatives

At Insights, we encourage our people to take control of their own health and wellbeing and support initiatives wherever possible. Often, this includes benefits beyond traditional physical health and fitness activities and includes nutrition, lifestyle and mental health aspects like mindfulness or stress management. Managers should endeavour to seek out and **incorporate wellness programmes** for hybrid teams that accommodate their different workplaces and flexible schedules.

For managers, the five main benefits of managing and working in a hybrid team are:



**47%**  
More time and less commuting



**39%**  
Flexibility in how to spend time most effectively



**30%**  
Better ability to prioritise family activities and commitments



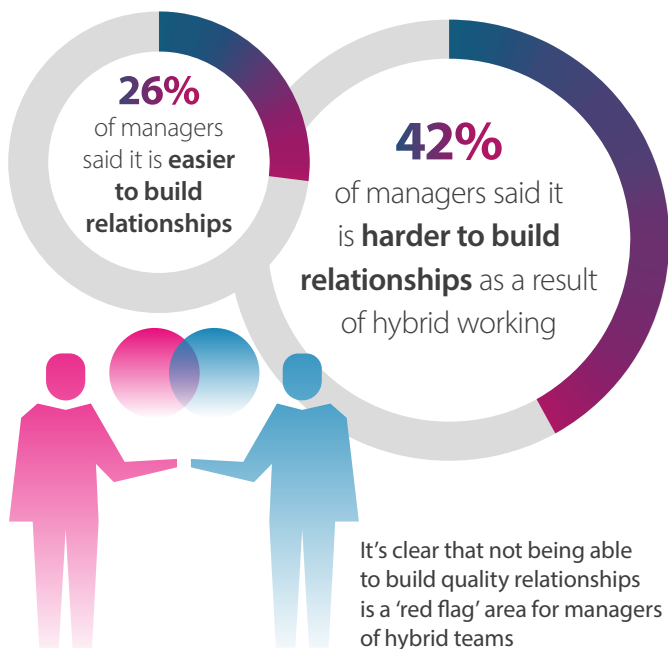
**28%**  
More mobility and autonomy in terms of living, working and career



**28%**  
Financial improvement through cost-savings

## Managing relationships

While collaboration, productivity, and an improved work-life balance are just some of the main benefits of hybrid working for managers, one area in particular stood out as a key challenge:



### What do managers feel are the main challenges of working in a hybrid team?

- 1** **34%** Lack of **social connection** and **casual conversations**
- 2** **31%** **Getting to know** new team members
- 3** **29%** Feeling **disconnected** from remote colleagues
- 4** **27%** Difficulty in **establishing relationships** with colleagues
- 5** **22%** Difficulty in **staying informed** and **included**

Additionally, over one-third (35%) say they feel less connected to their team than before the pandemic started, while 32% say that hybrid working makes it harder to work on team culture together.

While collaboration enabled by digital tools has never been easier, managers are sensitive to the danger that deep, authentic relationships could become a thing of the past. Building strong relationships that go beyond 'surface level' is so important because **human connection is essential for building a unified and cohesive community**, which are the foundations for longer-term innovation and business success.

At Insights, we use the **Insights Discovery awareness model to help people adapt and connect with others**, improve relationships and achieve better outcomes. We also use Insights Discovery's memorable language of colour to make it easier to understand people's styles and strengths and give people the tools to talk about issues in a non-judgemental, non-confrontational way.



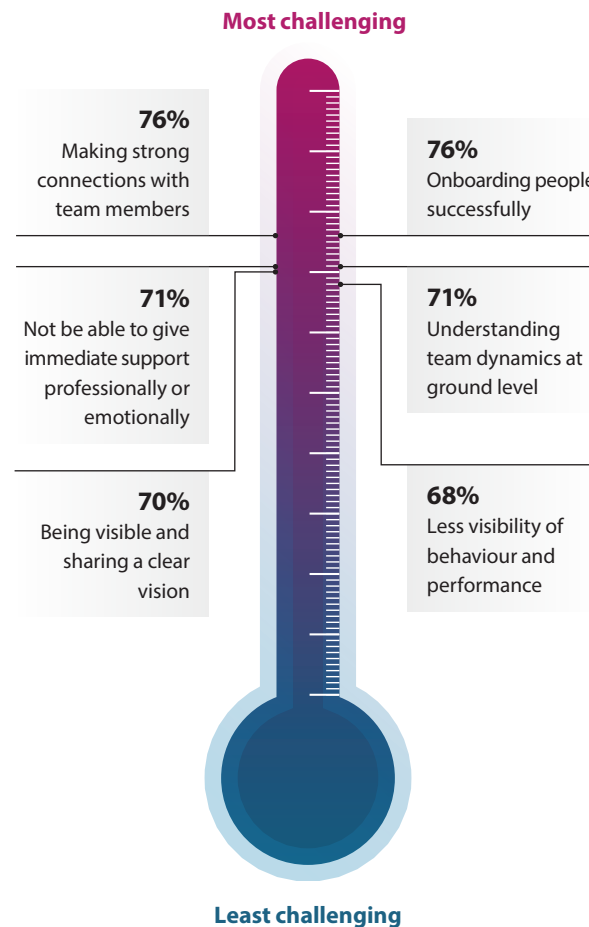
# Managing a hybrid team

A key part of any management role revolves around having strong human skills and the ability to bring diverse groups of people together and enable their success. This requires understanding what motivates or challenges each team member and how to get the best of them. It's clear that without significant effort this becomes harder in a hybrid environment, where people are physically distant for longer periods of time.

Providing support to team members in the moment can be harder in hybrid teams. While this is likely to focus on work-related issues, there are times when emotional support may also be required.

At Insights, we've found that **being a 'purpose-led' organisation helps you to be successful** despite these challenges. That's because, when there is immense disruption – like the pandemic and the global financial crisis – and a million different decisions to make and options to choose from, purpose will offer clarity and certainty, guiding decision-making, retaining employees, and attracting customers along the way.

**Challenges of managing a hybrid team**  
(from least → most challenging scale)



## Risk of burnout and loneliness

Managers are not immune from insecurity and a mistaken belief that they need to prove themselves. Indeed, this could easily lead to overwork and burnout as managers feel they need to prove their worth.

### Managers' feelings on burnout and loneliness



### Building a psychological safety net

It's important for organisations to support their leaders emotionally, so they don't feel segregated, lonely, or burdened to prove themselves in a hybrid environment. This involves developing a strong culture of trust, where everyone enjoys psychological safety. This is essential and helps reduce the risk of burnout.

It is also important that the social aspects of teams are not lost. At Insights we work hard to ensure that social occasions are an inherent part of our culture, which creates connections, strengthens relationships, and builds a unified and cohesive community – all of which are the foundations for innovation and business success.

We have also **listened to feedback around how much employees value choice** and flexibility as to where and when they work. Managers work closely with employees to find a solution that works for them and the business. Feedback from employees and managers is that they **highly value the chance to meet with colleagues in an office space** at least a few times per week, as this helps to build connections and prevent feelings of loneliness or isolation.



## Managing development

Since the wider adoption of hybrid work, one quarter of managers feel they are **better able to identify their development needs**, which enables focused training and development in identified areas. **This is notably higher than the non-management population – only 11% of non-managers feel better able to understand their development needs.** Having self-awareness at the heart of management helps to develop and strengthen relationships at all levels, better equipping everyone to navigate and mitigate the physical distance that comes with hybrid working.

**31% of managers** who responded to our survey said they've had **more opportunities to learn new things since hybrid working**, while **20%** said they've had less.

**In contrast, only 19% of respondents said their company invests in leaders who properly support and motivate hybrid teams.** One in five (20%) worry that their development needs aren't being identified by their organisation.

**When managers were asked what support they'd like to receive from their organisation to work more effectively, they said:**



It's clear that **managers need greater support from organisations to connect with and manage teams**, as well as develop their own skills in relationship building and technical aspects of the role. In particular, help with relationship building and stakeholder management was something pinpointed by managers as a far greater need than for the non-management population we surveyed (17%).

Simply because you're a manager, doesn't mean you're automatically equipped to deal with the many challenges of managing a hybrid team. More specific training is needed for managers to be able to deal with this complicated new dynamic and organisations must be encouraged to invest in training programmes to explore and enable this.



## Hybrid team skills

This new world of work is going through immense change and is more different and dynamic than ever before, therefore **an emphasis on human skills is needed to be successful.**

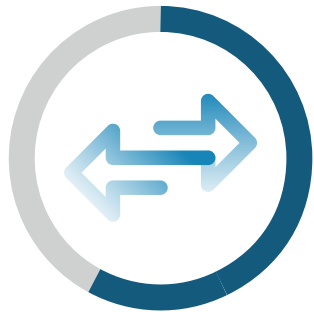
Human skills are those essential human characteristics of awareness, empathy, resilience, communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and leadership.

**Human skills enable individuals to respond positively in most situations,** build positive and productive relationships with others (colleagues, other professionals, public audiences, customers and/or patients) and communicate and co-operate effectively.

### What skills do managers think their hybrid teams should be working on together?



**62%**  
Effective communication



**58%**  
Ability to adapt to change



**41%**  
Emotional intelligence



**40%**  
Negotiating and influencing skills



## The manager vs non-manager divide

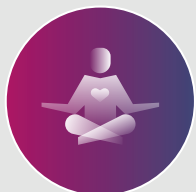
When examining the responses of managers and non-managers, we identified fundamental differences across several areas. In particular, there appears to be significant differences regarding the types of support organisations provide.

### Organisational support – contrasting opinions



While **27%** of managers say that their company **explores team culture and dynamics to help teams improve performance** only **14%** of non-managers report this is the case.

While **28%** of managers say their organisation has **put development plans in place** (which include upskilling for the hybrid world) only **14%** of non-manager agree with this.



While **32%** of managers say their organisation **supports employees with wellness initiatives**, only **21%** of non-managers report this.

### There was also a difference of opinion around the skills required to successfully navigate a hybrid workplace



**41%** of managers state that **emotional intelligence is a very important skill** hybrid teams should be working on together, compared with **31%** of non-managers.

**40%** of managers place importance on **negotiating and influencing skills** compared with **26%** of non-managers.



Our analysis determines that managers must be mindful of these differences and consider situations and issues from different perspectives.

Something that managers could consider is **creating regular opportunities for discussion** about different topics through recurring team meetings or ‘connects.’ This could help surface new and alternative ideas and could be where newer employees learn about different opportunities that are open to them, and how to access them.

Managers could also consider **pairing newer employees with long-serving employees** who have significant organisational knowledge and can answer any questions during the ‘settling in’ process.

## Key takeaways for managers

### Dedicated team time

Maximise the many benefits of hybrid teams – including extra time for collaboration, productivity, and ideation. Regularly build in team time – for collaboration, or simply for connection.

### Understanding roles and responsibilities

Make sure your team fully understand roles and responsibilities and ensure team members know where to go for additional support. It might be that they're not confident to call out the little things that could make a huge positive difference – especially if they're new to the team.

- Regularly meet as a team to go over roles and responsibilities, agreed outcomes and deadlines.
- Check in regularly to make sure everyone is fully aligned.

### Creating a psychological safety net

Nurture an environment of trust and psychological safety. Psychological safety is the belief that you can share ideas, ask questions, challenge and raise concerns, and even make mistakes without fear of retribution.

You can achieve this by:

- Helping employees to feel accepted and valued – this starts even before 'day one,' through the 'pre-boarding' experience.
- Encourage an open and honest dialogue at all levels across the business.
- Regularly ask employees for their thoughts and ideas, discuss them as a team, and then implement the best ones.
- Replace blame with curiosity.

### Build a strong community

Proactively seek out opportunities for teams to connect online and in-person – and not just for work, but also for fun. This will help to build a collegial community environment.

- If someone in your team has a particular passion or skill for this, ask them to take the lead.

### Self-awareness is key

Invest in self-awareness which will give you the skills to better manage all impacts of hybrid working – for yourself and your team.

- [Insights Discovery](#) is a simple and memorable four colour model that aims to help people understand themselves, understand others, and make the most of the relationships that affect them in the workplace.
- Bring your team together to work on culture. This will ensure shared understanding and buy-in from everyone involved.

Bring your team **together** to work on **culture**



## Key takeaways for organisations

**Invest in targeted training** that equips managers for hybrid working, including the human skills needed to manage relationships with teams/stakeholders, in order to build a positive culture and community.

Ensure managers are adequately trained in the **latest digital tools** so they can use them to best effect and support their people to use them also.

Invest in **self-awareness for managers** to help them understand themselves and others and build stronger, more meaningful and effective relationships at all levels. This will also help them further identify any additional training needs for themselves and their people.

**Regularly check in with managers** and support them to ensure they know they're not alone.

**Set realistic expectations for managers.** It's all too easy for managers to worry about the impact they're making and work extended hours. A positive workplace with a climate of trust will help address this, while also inspiring loyalty.

Invite managers to fully participate in **visionary exercises and culture building activities.** This has a powerful trickle-down effect that ensures positivity flows down through the organisation.





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