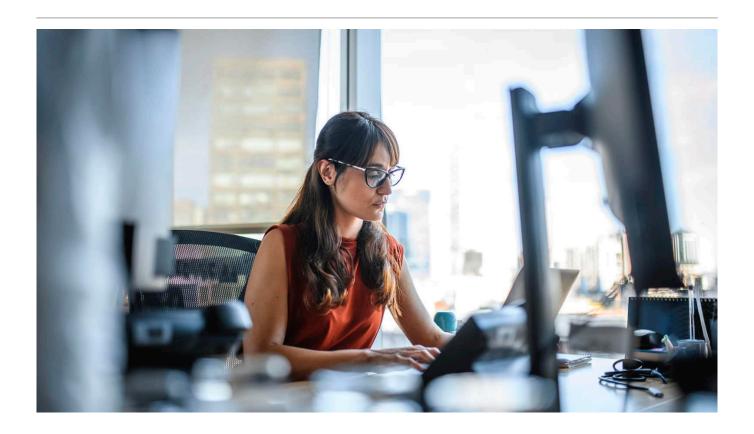# Cripps

Making hybrid work: How Yoyo has embraced technology and new ways of working to stay creative

As part of our hybrid working campaign, we're speaking to industry leaders from a variety of sectors to find out how their working styles have adapted during the pandemic. In this article we speak to Matt Lee, Head of Strategy at Yoyo, a creative agency based in Tunbridge Wells.

It took a global pandemic to prove that you don't have to be in an office to do work. But is the office a thing of the past? There are three factors handing it a lifeline: culture, collaboration and creativity. Yoyo needs these things. Every organisation needs creativity to fuel the innovation that keeps them relevant, but as a creative agency it's a fundamental part of our core service offering. If we were to become less creative, it would hit us hard, and fast. So when we found ourselves forced to work remotely, we had to figure out how to be creative in confinement. It's these learnings that are shaping our plans for a new, hybrid approach.

The challenges of going remote

Prior to the first lockdown, you'd find our team of 25 working side by side in our Tunbridge Wells studio. There would be a buzz of energy to the place as teams would huddle for project stand-ups, designers would spin their screens around to get second opinions, and questions and updates would fly across the open-plan space. We very quickly realised that we couldn't recreate our studio in the virtual world.

Trying to replicate that type of collaboration led to a relentless flow of instant messages and a serious case of Zoom fatigue. What once was a 2-minute conversation while making a cuppa would either become a booking in the calendar, or it wouldn't happen at all. In fact, our days became a series of vulnerable 30 minute slots that we'd attempt to defend from yet more impending meeting requests. We had to have a new approach for the

virtual world.

Where does creativity happen?

It was clear that the office was not the only place where creative work was done. Sometimes creative moments would happen on the commute, or during a lunchtime workout. Getting out of the office to visit clients provided inspiration, and occasionally we'd need to escape to a coffee shop if we really needed to to focus without distractions. It's certainly not confined to a desk or a meeting room.

The six modes of creative work

The creative process is a series of behaviours. It's about questioning, exploring and experimenting. It is a determination to find valuable new ways of doing things. It is resilience to being 'wrong'. Creative work requires a flux between solitude and socialising, and between active thinking and moments of relaxation and reflection.

We identified six different modes of work that we need to nurture in a hybrid environment.

Collaboration

The classic workshop session. Set up to tackle a specific challenge, here, you're sharing knowledge, exploring insights and solving problems together. Open communication and shared experiences are an important catalyst for creativity, but it's only one part of the picture.

In an ideal world, workshop sessions should be held in person, because they tend to be longer and it's difficult to stay focused for that long. You also don't have the same opportunity for social interactions around the official agenda. That said, virtual workshops can be very successful if they are carefully planned and you make the most of collaborative tools. We've enjoyed using Miro as a virtual whiteboard to make collaborative sessions more engaging. The key to success is making sure there's a clear focus on the purpose of each activity, that exercises are kept simple, and that everyone is comfortable with the technology (ice-breaker activities are an ideal way to learn new tools in a relaxed way).

Stimulation

Seeking out inspiration and new ideas by learning from others. The magic of serendipity — that chance conversation providing the insight that leads to a new idea or breakthrough.

This is one of the hardest things to get right when working remotely. Naturally, teams can become a little insular when they don't have to navigate a shared space, only speaking to the people who are directly involved in their current tasks. It's important to create a culture of sharing, but make sure it's done in the right way, to ensure it doesn't overwhelm.

We use Slack for instant messaging, and have channels for a variety of topics beyond active projects. These channels are available for people to dip in and participate when they have the time. It can't just be a one-way dialogue though, so it's important to consider aspects of proximity, privacy and permission to ensure a moment of intrigue can result in a conversation. Slack, for example, makes it easy to have a private conversation with the click of a button. We make use of emojis to show our availability, and have synchronised our calendars so it indicates whether we're in a meeting.

We've also had great fun with a tool called Wonder.me, where you can move between virtual tables and pair up with individuals or groups for spontaneous discussion.

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Focus

Accomplishing individual tasks while working in close proximity with others who can quickly provide input. This provides a certain element of pressure. If those around you are aware you're working on this task, then there's an expectation that you should have something to deliver – or at least something interesting worth talking about when the time comes. The right level of expectation provides motivation: you want to be seen being productive rather than procrastinating. Some of the team would even replicate this virtually by setting up video calls with each other to help them stay on track while they timebox some focus on individual tasks, reporting back what they've accomplished for feedback at the end.

Rather than becoming overly reliant on meetings, we make sure we're consistent in using the right tools to plan and manage work. Whether it's Confluence for meeting notes, JIRA for development tasks or Trello for to-do lists, it's easy when you know where to go for things, and when you can comment and ask questions directly in those tools as everything is tracked in one place.

Seclusion

Isolating yourself from distractions and interruption to allow time for reflection and contemplation. This solitude is the polar opposite of collaboration. It is, however, important to note that seclusion and collaboration often work hand in hand. We know well from our own experience that not everyone favours a workshop environment or is comfortable with the process of discussing and moulding ideas on the fly. Indeed, we all require time to process and ponder without the nagging fear of judgement or interruption.

We've found it important to keep time in calendars free to allow freedom to switch working modes, as seclusion may want to be broken by an impromptu discussion after a moment of reflection. We know that creative work can't easily be constrained to a fixed 9-5 schedule, but we need to set boundaries for when we're available. To help with this, we attempt to restrict meetings (whether scheduled or spontaneous) to core hours of 10am-4pm. This makes sure that both early birds and night owls are able to make time for seclusion at a time that works for them without having to work longer hours.

If days are full of back-to-back meetings, it's important to cull ones that are unnecessary to give yourself some time to think and make sure that the meetings you do have are high quality. In some cases we've managed to do this by using Loom to record quick videos where a real-time meeting wasn't necessary. Status updates don't have to be repeated for those who couldn't join, and it provides a reusable resource for "how to" type explainers.

Calm

Taking some time to disconnect, and step away from "work". We have all experienced at one time or another the random 'eureka!' moment where we are hit with a sudden spark of inspiration that neatly ties together our disparate thoughts
that we've harboured throughout the day. Our brain, when given time to unwind, can allow our subconscious to knit together the frantic, hurried thoughts into a cohesive plan or solution.

Doing simple, repetitive tasks like household chores, gardening, exercise, driving or cycling can be an ideal way of slipping into this mode when you're in a relaxed frame of mind. Working from home can therefore be the ideal opportunity to
intersperse these moments throughout the day, but the challenge is allowing yourself the time to step away from the screen.

One of the things we realised was that travelling to the office made this mode part of the daily routine for many of the team, and it's something they lost when we were forced into lockdown. While traffic can induce

stress, [walking and being exposed to nature](#) can reduce it, so even if your commute is a matter of steps, it's worth faking a commute, and getting out for a walk before work.

Social

Work and play may seem like chalk and cheese, but having fun with colleagues is a major catalyst for creativity. A chat over lunch, or events and games that inject some fun and competition provide shared experiences that create social bonds. These build trust, confidence and better working relationships – all essential ingredients for creative work.

Through lockdown we got stuck into a number of virtual events, from quizzes and murder mysteries to cooking and art classes. While these were all good bonding activities, you can't beat in-person events, which will remain a key part of our hybrid set-up. Occasional collaboration sessions followed by social activity will be an essential way of staying connected with team members who don't choose to be in the office each day.

Our recent Paddleboarding event was a great opportunity to get to know some of the newer members of the team and have some fun. At the same time, we were exercising our values as a B Corp, supporting our community and environment by picking up litter from the riverbank as we paddled down the Medway.

Autonomy and empowerment

As we emerge from a life of lockdown, the increased acceptance of remote work provides an opportunity. When there is trust between an organisation and employee to work where and when is best for them, then the flexibility on offer can be a powerful thing for creativity.

Access to offices or coworking spaces is important to ensure people can find the right environment to support the work mode they are in. It needs to be supported by a culture and leadership which acknowledges that creative work is a flux between these six modes and actively encourages modes like social and calm that often aren't deemed as "work" in the narrow sense.

Looking to the future

In the midst of the last lockdown, the landlord for our building served our notice so they could turn our beloved office into flats. We had a choice to make. For many organisations, that would have been the perfect timing and opportunity to save money by going 100% remote. But we need a home, and a collaborative space is core to our identity. So we're on the hunt for a new space, and are excited to take these learnings forward to create an ideal environment to support a hybrid way of working.

For more detail on this topic, read [Yoyo's Creativity in Confinement report](#).

About Yoyo

Yoyo help clients to deliver 'Experiences with impact', finding creative ways of engaging people through technology. Whether it's developing a new product, creating a bold campaign, building a website that brings a brand to life, or experimenting with emerging technology like voice, VR and AR; they always put users at the centre of their thinking. Yoyo are also a proud B Corporation, redefining how businesses are run by placing people and the planet at the centre of everything they do. [yoyodesign.com](#)