



## Making hybrid working work: Choosing the right hybrid working model

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Hybrid working models, where employees split their time between working from home and attending the workplace, offer both opportunities and challenges (both legal and practical) for employers. Working closely with a variety of clients going through this process, we've learnt a few lessons, which we will be sharing along with some case studies, over the coming weeks.

So to kick off, what should businesses consider when deciding whether to move to hybrid working and what type of hybrid working model will work best for their business?

### Be clear what you need from your hybrid working model

Start by identifying the specific needs of your business, your clients and your employees. Hybrid working won't be right for every organisation, or it may only work for a sub-set of your people (those who were previously office-based). Your choice of model will depend on your requirements and no one size fits all. The aim is to find a model which best fits your needs (given your technology, governance needs and budget), satisfies clients' expectations on service delivery and builds those relationships and can also satisfy your people and keep them productive.

With your leadership team, consider the opportunities (to save costs and be more profitable) and threats (lack of oversight and less collaboration) within your industry which may influence the implementation of hybrid working. Once you have established a model that could work for your business and its clients, it is important to get employees' views (e.g. from an employee survey). This will surface any additional challenges you may not have previously considered. Encourage employees to be open and honest so anonymous surveys are best – the



success will depend on their support and buy in.

Various hybrid-models are currently being trialed are:

- Ad hoc model – employees mostly work at office
- Choice model – prioritising employee flex, employees can work from home when they want to
- Choice with conditions – back to the office 2 days a week, employees choose their days
- No choice – enforced remote working pattern
- Distributed model – people work remotely most of the time like Nationwide, British Airways

## Things to consider when moving to a hybrid working model

### 1. Hidden costs of working abroad

Some employees see remote-working as a potential opportunity to work from abroad. This can raise additional costs for your business; employees may need to be registered and obtain insurance. Tax and social security costs may also be higher and you will need to check legal and tax implications of employing a person in a different country; it is unlikely you would want to inadvertently want to create a permanent establishment in another country which will be subject to business taxes!

### 2. Impact on productivity

Supervising employees remotely can be tricky – in the hybrid model, junior staff and new hires may want more face to face time with employees who want to be home-based. Team leaders will need to be upskilled to engage staff in meetings attended in person and remotely. Businesses should consider adapting their KPIs to focus on outputs, creativity and cooperation. Increasing one to one meetings and opportunities for collaboration is key.

### 3. Incentivising people back to the office

Use some questions in your employee survey to explore what makes staff happy in the office. A free breakfast, regular post work drinks, a travel subsidy, childcare subsidy, green spaces or simply the enjoyment of a dynamic, busy and collaborative workplace may be the answer.

### 4. Protecting your culture and including those at home

Taking a more flexible approach to where people work will allow you to attract new talent and improve equality and diversity. You need to be mindful to embrace all employees (wherever they are working) so all are included and can feel the culture. It is important that homeworkers are not excluded from opportunities or left outside the community you want to create. Aside from the risk of discriminating against someone who is less present, you want to get the best from all your people and will need to work harder to achieve this in the hybrid model.

Communication is key. Team leads should engage the disparate working groups within and across teams and ensure staff working at home are not disadvantaged in promotions and rewards. Improving technology to cater for hybrid meetings will help and consider arranging regular events at a convenient location with less of a focus on work.

### 5. Reconsider your space

Hybrid working means employees may be needing something different from the office. Our clients are finding creative ways to utilise space effectively, particularly where often the office will be at 50% capacity. Consider downsizing, team spaces, attractive communal areas and using technology to allow efficient hot-desking.

Consider removing desks to free up space for standing laptop spaces.

## 6. Supporting employees' mental health

Exclusive home working has impacted on people's mental health, with many employees saying they felt less connected to their colleagues, isolated, or finding it harder to switch off. Employers must take care to provide support to employees and allow them to disconnect. The starting point may be conversations about expectations and boundaries with an alertness to the signs of poor mental health.

## 7. Remuneration – homeworking vs office working

Unpopular as it sounds, you may want to consider paying those working from home less than those who incur commuting costs. We are seeing some organisations looking at this, particularly where employees were previously having to pay high travel costs to commute to work, but are now working primarily from home. You should assess the risks of changing reward before consulting your people. Consider whether it will affect motivation or cause departures? Could there be claims of differences in treatment? Seek advice before implementing any pay cuts.



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