

MAKING HYBRID INCLUSIVE – A GUIDE FOR EMPLOYERS

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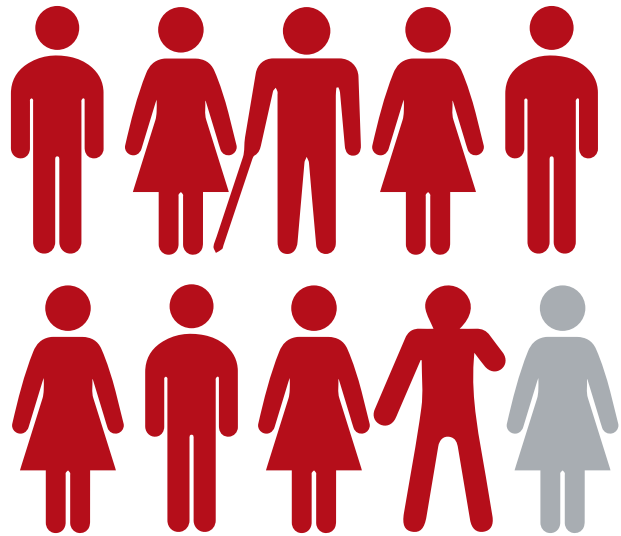
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Executive Summary

Despite Government removing all guidance to work from home where possible earlier this summer, there are signs that the pandemic has prompted a lasting shift to more remote working in many organisations. Almost 9 in 10 workers we surveyed don't want to return to pre-Covid working patterns.

However, there remains a risk that increased hybrid and remote working could exacerbate existing workplace inequalities, and lead to the emergence of new ones. [Our research](#) indicates that without the right planning and support, this new model could present challenges for distinct worker groups. Furthermore, focusing narrowly on work location risks missing an opportunity to deliver genuine flexibility that meets both business and individual needs.

That's why it is vital that employers engage proactively with this shift, addressing organisational policy-to-practice gaps to align with this new way of working. We have produced this guide to ensure managers and leaders can support inclusive hybrid working.



Nearly 9 in 10 workers told us that they don't want to return to pre-Covid 19 working patterns.

Key actions for managers and leaders:

1. Communication and consultation with staff is essential.

- a) This needs to be a continual process, particularly in the context of a shift to hybrid working that may involve some degree of experimentation, to enable employers to understand and respond to employees' needs and preferences.
- b) Consider implementing a right to disconnect to ensure employees don't burn out.

2. Do not underestimate the power of role modelling behaviour

- a) Ensure managers are adequately trained and prepared to manage hybrid teams and role model hybrid working.
- b) Develop action plans around hybrid and remote working which prioritise diversity and inclusion.

Benefits and risks of remote and hybrid working

Remote working has specific benefits for different groups of workers, including carers, parents and disabled workers. It allows them to manage their time and energy more flexibly and can play an important role in ensuring individuals access and remain in work.

However, the pandemic has been instrumental in shifting the misconception that flexible work is *only* for these groups. Our **employee survey has found that men are now as likely as women to want to continue to work remotely at least one day a week.**

Our research has found that legacy attitudes towards remote working and what it means for career development may persist, which presents real risks for those who do pursue hybrid options as we emerge from the pandemic.

Risks to look out for

Working from home can mean reduced visibility in the workplace which may result in differential rates of progression¹. This could affect those who may already face disadvantage as a result of structural inequalities in the workplace and who may be more likely to work remotely, such as disabled workers.

Managers also have concerns about other staff missing out as a result of hybrid working - particularly younger staff (under 24 years old), women and those with caring responsibilities.

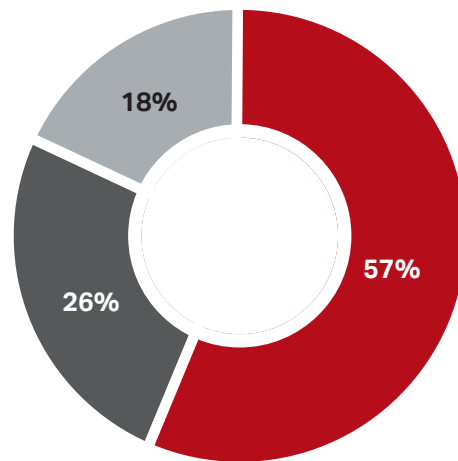
Employers need to proactively address these challenges to avoid rolling back on progress made towards greater inclusion in the workplace.

Exploring wider forms of flexibility

Not all jobs can be done remotely, and remote working is not for everyone. Employers need to consider that for some employees, remote work can cause isolation or anxiety, and those without an appropriate workspace at home may need access to the office. As we emerge from the pandemic employers should look beyond hybrid or remote working and see the shift in working practices as an opportunity to support the full spectrum of flexible work, including job-sharing, flexitime and compressed hours.

We are already seeing progress in this area, with 3 in 5 managers surveyed (57%) saying their organisation is widening access to other forms of flexible work. It's important for all managers and leaders **to consider how they can improve access to flexibility, to support access to work and retention for under-represented groups.**

Figure 1: Proportion of managers reporting that their organisation is widening access to other forms of flexible working.



- Organisation is widening access to other forms of flexible working
- Organisation is not widening access to other forms of flexible working
- Don't know

Source: CMI/Work Foundation survey of 964 managers

What managers and leaders need to do

1. Consult with staff to develop an approach to remote and flexible work.

- Results from our employee survey show that there are positive impacts for businesses from consulting with staff about how hybrid working should be implemented and how it should operate in their organisation.

Employees in organisations that have carried out consultations on remote working policies are more likely to:

- be happy about their remote working arrangements than those in organisations that have not consulted staff (91% compared with 75%).
- feel that decisions about who can work remotely are made fairly (75% compared with 57%).
- believe that their organisation is inclusive of remote workers in its day to day operations (89% compared with 75%).

2. Experiment and engage with staff to find an approach that works.

- Consultation should be a continuous exercise aimed at developing a thorough understanding of employees, and the kinds of responsibilities and pressures they deal with that impact their work. This will help managers and leaders to better adjust conditions to help workers be more productive.
- This could involve regular information and feedback sessions, additional questions in staff surveys and engaging regularly with dedicated staff networks.
- Where a shift to hybrid working involves some degree of experimentation, it is important that employers check in regularly and are responsive to employees' feedback.
- This can include holding an open dialogue with employees around contact hours, disconnecting from work, and how the workplace is best used.
- There is a compelling business case for getting engagement right at the outset of organisational change; evidence shows employees who perceive they lack influence over decision making in organisations can feel alienated or become withdrawn, potentially impacting on their performance and retention.²

3. Consider introducing an organisational "Right to Disconnect" policy.

- Developed through consultation with staff and worker representatives, an internal policy would aim to establish a shared approach to work communications that supports workers to fully disengage from work outside of core hours and while on leave in a way that supports wellbeing and productivity.
- Communication needs will vary across sectors and organisations so it's important for employers to engage with their workforce to develop an approach that works for them.
- This new model is already rapidly gaining traction, both among employers including Volkswagen, as well as through legislation, with countries including Ireland, France and Spain introducing a legal Right to Disconnect.³

4. Be a role model.

- Where managers and leaders are supportive of remote working and role model this behaviour, this makes workers significantly more comfortable in requesting access to this form of flexible work:
 - More than half of workers (54%) indicated that their line managers' support was the main reason they were comfortable in asking for remote working.
 - Line manager support was considered particularly important by disabled workers, with 61% of disabled workers indicating they felt comfortable asking for remote working because their line manager was supportive of it (compared with 51% of non-disabled).
 - Conversely, lack of senior staff support (29%) and lack of role modelling behaviours among line managers (28%) were among the main reasons why workers felt uncomfortable in asking to work remotely. This shows line manager and senior staff behaviour can play a key role in lowering barriers of access to remote work.

5. Increase take-up of flexible working arrangements among men.

- This would help absorb flexible work into the working culture, reduce misconceptions and associated career penalties⁴ and could achieve important progress towards achieving equality at work.
- We know that flexible working is valued across all worker groups. For example, our survey showed men were now just as likely as women to say they want to work remotely at least one day a week.

6. Ensure managers are adequately trained and prepared to manage hybrid teams.

- This could include a focus on capacity to support performance and wellbeing of workers who are working remotely, effective communication and appropriate use of technology to support collaboration.

7. Develop action plans around hybrid and remote working which prioritise diversity and inclusion.

- Publicise goals and policies on hybrid working to foster greater transparency and provide a leading example for other organisations.
- This could include monitoring the take-up of flexible work among staff by characteristics including gender, age, disability, sexuality and gender identity, and developing mechanisms to embed flexibility into the working arrangements of all staff, as BAE has set out to do through their Working Adjustments Passport.

Case Study:

BAE Systems Air develops a tailored approach to staff consultation

BAE Systems' Air currently employs more than 13,000 people across the UK in the development, manufacture, upgrade and support of combat and fast jet trainer aircraft.

During the first lockdown of the Covid-19 pandemic, three quarters of Air UK employees were given the resources and support needed to work remotely. As of September 2021, the majority of staff continue to work in a hybrid or remote way.

The Air UK business is now undertaking a 12-month exercise, to develop a strategic approach around where and how to work in the future. This 'pathfinder' consultation and planning project is centred on empowerment and trust of staff; across Air UK, managers are engaging in open, two-way conversations to enable them to consider the needs of their teams, alongside the requirements of their stakeholders and customers. There is no 'one size fits all' approach; potential arrangements include working on a BAE Systems site, at a customer location, working at home or working in a hybrid way.

There can be particular advantages for some disabled employees in a remote or hybrid working model, which can enable them to better manage their impairment or condition. While adjustments to ways of working or equipment may be needed to enable a transition to remote or hybrid work, some workers may not wish to identify as disabled, presenting a barrier to requesting the support they might need.

To address this, the BAE Systems Air Disability Employee Resource Group (ENabled) suggested a different way for employees to indicate the adjustments or working style changes that would make them thrive at work. The 'Working Adjustments Passport' is a live record of workplace adjustments discussed and agreed between any employee and their manager – regardless of whether they identify as disabled.

This document allows employees to request adjustments that are transported across positions and departments if an employee moves roles. This is useful in a remote or hybrid working environment as well as serving to embed flexibility more broadly.

Richard Shakespeare, Diversity & Inclusion Manager, BAE Systems Air

Next steps for remote and hybrid work

The pandemic has provided opportunities for employers and workers to innovate and develop new ways of working together. As it is becoming increasingly clear that remote and hybrid working is here to stay, employers should seek to capitalise on the benefits of these new ways of working, and simultaneously mitigate risks to under-represented worker groups.

Our research has shown that employer consultation with staff and employee representatives is key and that it is important for employers to build flexibility into roles and teams where possible, consider the potential for remote working, as well as other types of flexible work, such as compressed hours, flexitime, job share or other adjustments.

Further, managers and senior staff have a critical role in embodying company values and culture, and employers must make sure managers are equipped to run hybrid teams so they are productive and inclusive regardless of where and when their teams are working.

About Us

About The Work Foundation

The Work Foundation is the leading think tank for improving work in the UK. We have been an authoritative, independent source of ideas and analysis on the labour market and the wider economy for over a hundred years.

As the pace of economic change continues to disrupt the ways we work and do business, our mission is to support everyone in the UK to access rewarding and high-quality work and enable businesses to realise the potential of their teams.

To do this, we engage directly with practitioners, businesses and workers, producing rigorous applied research that allows us to develop practical solutions and policy recommendations to tackle the challenges facing the world of work.

We are part of Lancaster University's Management School, and work with a range of partners and organisations across our research programmes.

About The Chartered Management Institute (CMI)

The Chartered Management Institute (CMI) works with business and education to inspire people to unleash their potential and become skilled, confident and successful managers and leaders.

With a wealth of practical qualifications, events and networking opportunities on offer throughout the UK and Asia-Pacific, CMI helps people boost their career prospects and connect them with other ambitious professionals in any industry and sector. In fact, CMI has more than 100,000 people training to be better managers right now.

Backed by a unique Royal Charter, CMI is the only organisation allowed to award Chartered Manager status – the ultimate management accolade, and Chartered Management Consultant status which sets and maintains the highest standards for the management consulting profession.

CMI's thought leadership, research and online resources provide practical insight on critical issues for our **160,000+** membership community and anyone looking to improve their skills, nurture high performing teams and help pave the way for the next generation of managers and leaders.

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Richard Shakespeare, BAE Systems Air

Additional resources

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