Handbook For Hybrid Leaders

Horton International
EXECUTIVE SEARCH · MANAGEMENT CONSULTANTS

After two years of reactive leadership in response to the pandemic, leaders across the globe are now welcoming a new era of leadership: hybrid leadership. This handbook offers a toolkit of skills and potential pitfalls to avoid in order to support newly hybrid leaders as they see a paradigm shift in their leadership role, responsibility and style.

Where Did It All Start?

In 2021, Pew Research Group found that 71% of US workers were able to either mostly or entirely perform all of their jobs remotely[1] . Furthermore, 54% of respondents said they want to continue working from home post-pandemic.

With employees either increasing or beginning to work remotely, the last two years have highlighted the options available to workers. While some are looking forward to getting back to the office, others have found a productivity increasing and greater employee wellbeing when working from home. As a result, organisations are now finding the future of work is a hybrid model, which gives employees the freedom of choice.

What Is a Hybrid Workplace?

A hybrid workplace is one that is inherently flexible, adaptable and nuanced. While organisations may have a slightly different view of what hybrid means to them, it largely gives employees the choice of working on-site, remotely or a mix of the two.

Some organisations may view a hybrid workplace as a place where employees can sometimes work on-site and sometimes remotely. Other organisations may have a hybrid workforce where some teams work on-site while others work remotely.

[1]https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2020/12/09/how-the-coronavirus-outbreak-has-and-hasnt-changed-the-way-americans-work/

There is no hard and fast rule about what a hybrid workplace must look like. However, the focus is on creating the flexibility that ensures optimal productivity, engagement and results.

What Is A Hybrid Leader?

During the pandemic, leaders simply shifted to support their remote workers. However, it soon became apparent that leadership didn't always translate successfully to hybrid leadership for many organisations. Hybrid leadership requires a different mindset, a different skillset and an ability to handle a variety of different hybrid scenarios and issues.

To support leaders in a hybrid workplace, this Handbook for Hybrid Leaders will cover:
- The differences between leadership and hybrid leadership
- The types of hybrid leadership
- Creating a hybrid leadership mindset
- Essential skills for hybrid leaders
- How to lead a hybrid team
- Potential pitfalls of hybrid leadership
- The future for hybrid leaders

Hybrid Leadership: No Ordinary Leadership Style

While it's true that a good leader can support their team, whether in-person or remotely, a hybrid leadership style requires a slightly different skillset. As a recent Gartner[2] report describes, "managing a hybrid team requires a level of leadership that not all managers possess".

In the past, it may have been that leaders would have one team to consider. A leader may have had a fully remote team, a fully in-person team, or a satellite team to lead.

However, with a hybrid setup, a leader may have to balance the needs of a range of workplaces. While some team members may be co-located with their manager, others may be fully remote or distributed worldwide. Others may have an office-first approach, while others may have a remote-first expectation. Furthermore, there may be satellite teams across the world that also have a dispersed approach.

The critical task of a hybrid leader is to ensure that they create an inclusive and engaged team with personalised support regardless of where their team members are located. However, it's not a blanket leadership approach. Instead, it understands the nuances of each worker and adapts leadership according to the differences in the workforce.

Managing Hybrid Challenges

While a digital transformation has helped create a level playing field for remote and on-site workers, there have been challenges in creating a cohesive team.

Since the Coronavirus crisis and the fact that many organisations saw a surprising increase in operational productivity when staff worked remotely, it became clear that offering employees the choice of where to work was vital in driving their engagement, productivity and resourcefulness.

As a result, leaders not only need to accept a hybrid approach but actively promote and support it to ensure the flexibility works for everyone. Research by Gartner has found that employees are more likely to excel when they are given a choice over when, where and how they work. Consequently, this needs to be the basis of hybrid leadership.

"Working from home is having a mixed reception in Asia. In very broad terms, people are more likely to be living in multigenerational homes so WFH isn't as easy - or attractive - as in the West, say. Add to that the strong social ties of being in an office, and a preference for working in teams, and many people actually want to come in to work."

Gary Woollacott, Managing Partner Horton International Thailand - Regional Director APAC

A hybrid leader not only gives its team a choice but encourages and supports team members to find the places where they work best, feel most engaged and productive.

The table below helps to identify the key differences between leadership and hybrid leadership and how to transition your usual leadership style into a hybrid setting.

Key Differences Between Leadership And Hybrid Leadership

Regular Leadership	Hybrid Leadership
Managing self and how you show up as a leader	Understanding the nuances in showing up when leading remotely, in-person and with satellite teams
Manages others to deliver the best performance	Adapt leadership approach according to how, where and when the team works best and drive engagement and performance with trust, recognition and inclusivity
Communicate with the team	Understand each employee's best forms of communication and adapt your questions according to a hybrid style, such as assessing their belongingness, information flows, environment analysis, and energy flows
Focus on outcomes	Create even more clarity on expectations, deliverables and accessibility. With fewer impromptu interactions, clarity is critical.

So, as we look at the expectations of hybrid leadership, let's now look at what is needed to develop into a hybrid leadership and the impact your leadership mindset can have on your success as a hybrid leader.

Key Takeaways:

A good leader doesn't always make a good hybrid leader
A hybrid leader focuses on inclusion but tailors their leadership to different workers
Leaders and employees excel when they choose their most productive setup

Hybrid Leadership – A Progressive Scale

While 83%[3] of workers believe a hybrid work model is the best way forward, there is a strong disconnect between the employee and c-suite views of hybrid's viability.

Just 5%[4] of C-Suite executives believe that their company culture could survive a permanent shift to fully remote or hybrid operations. In a Deloitte survey, 32%[5] of employers say maintaining culture in a hybrid setting is a top priority.

A key factor in a successful hybrid shift is the leadership mindset. As research suggests, very few C-Suite executives believe in the success of a hybrid model. Furthermore, 78%[6] of HR leaders believe that a leadership mindset is the biggest challenge to get in the way of a successful hybrid model.

With this in mind, the aspect of mindset becomes a key factor when we consider the types of hybrid leaders organisations may have.

Four Types Of Hybrid Leader

The Slow Starter – This type of hybrid leader can have a fixed mindset about how the workforce model should look like. They may be closed to the opportunities that hybrid working can bring. A slow starter may also lack the essential skills that are needed for successful hybrid leadership.

The Sceptic –This type of hybrid leader has all skills required to be a successful hybrid leader. However, their closed mindset towards hybrid working is preventing a successful outcome. They know how to support their team in a hybrid setup but do not trust their team or believe in the hybrid system.

The Visionary – This hybrid leader is optimistic and enthusiastic about a hybrid workforce and celebrates the opportunities it can bring. The visionary has a growth mindset and wants to see a successful hybrid future. While the visionary is supportive of the hybrid system, they may not currently have the hybrid leadership skills required for a successful hybrid leader.

This type of leader is also known as a hybrid striver.

The Hybrid Hotshot –This is the leader that hybrid workplaces strive for. This leader has an open, growth-focused mindset coupled with the skillset needed to lead a hybrid workforce.

The four types of leader can be depicted from their shift between a closed and open mindset and their skillset.

Key Takeaways:

Employees are ready for hybrid working, but leaders are lagging behind

The optimal hybrid leader will have an open mindset and a hybrid-ready skillset

The majority of HR leaders believe a leadership mindset is the biggest challenge in a hybrid workforce.

Executives believe the key focus of a hybrid workforce should be maintaining company culture

[3]https://www.accenture.com/us-en/insights/consulting/future-work
[4]www.pwc.com/us/remotework?WT.mc_id=CT10-PL102-DM2-TR1-LS3-ND30-PR4-CN_ViewpointHighlights-
[5]www2.deloitte.com/ua/en/pages/human-capital/articles/hc-trends-covid-19.html
[6]www.gartner.com/smarterwithgartner/are-you-a-hybrid-workforce-champion-or-a-laggard/

Creating A Hybrid Leadership Mindset

As seen in the section above, the leadership mindset becomes as crucial as the leadership skills you bring.

It is understandable that a hybrid team can be more challenging to lead; however, with the right mindset, it can make more of an impact on the team. Hybrid leaders can increase performance, engagement levels and sense of belonging. This mindset also helps to not only lead but coach the team, which encourages growth and development in terms of long-term thinking, agility, ownership and accountability, as well as creativity and connection.

If you are looking for ways to strengthen your hybrid mindset, there are some ways to develop your thinking and exploration of this new way of leading:

Build And Share Trust

In order toget the best of your team, you have to trust that the team are working in the most productive environments. Throughout the pandemic, there have been several studies into the level of trust and how working remotely may have eroded trust[7] between colleagues because of the lack of small interactions.

There is also evidence of a lack of trust between managers and remote workers. A Harvard Business Review found that 22%[8] of managers were unsure of remote worker's performance. There was also uncertainty in their motivation, with 41% of managers agreeing that they were sceptical about whether their remote workers could remain motivated. 17% of respondents said they were unsure about whether remote workers could remain motivated.

The lack of trust also extends to the competency of their team. With 27% of managers believing their employees lacked essential skills and 29% unsure whether their employees had sufficient knowledge to complete the job.

With these statistics in mind, it is clear that trust is critical for the success of a hybrid team. Consider that high trust teams[9] regularly outperform others, it becomes crucial to learn to trust and build trust within the team. This means trusting your employees will carry out the required work aligned with clear expectations.

It can help to be really mindful of how you communicate your trust and how you demonstrate your trust across your team.

[7]https://www.bbc.com/worklife/article/20210315-why-remote-work-has-eroded-trust-among-colleagues
[8]https://hbr.org/2020/07/remote-managers-are-having-trust-issues
[9]https://hbr.org/2017/08/high-performing-teams-need-psychological-safety-heres-how-to-create-it

"There are a number of ways to create trust as we go forward to work:

- **Communication is key**: be transparent, create opportunity for formal and informal conversations, be willing to listen and share
- **Identify the right tools, tech and processes**: Think about the platforms you use and find their purpose to allow for transparency of workflow and workload
- **Focus on outcomes**: Allow people the space to deliver and work in their own way to achieve a common goal
- **Creative equality**: Review all of above from a WFH and in office perspective so that everyone is empowered to bring their best selves to work."
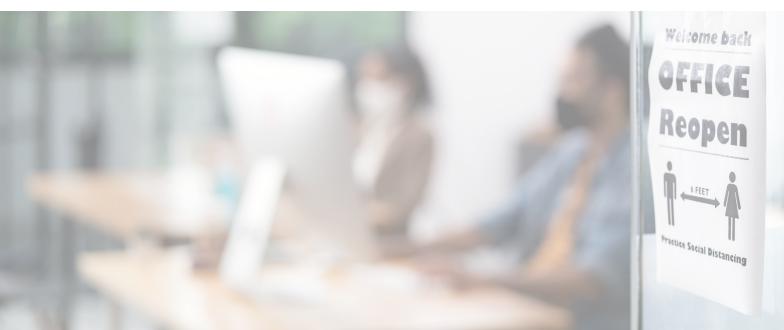
Calli Louis and Nichola Johnson-Marshall, Founders, Working Wonder - A transformational coaching and training consultancy

Create Through Compassion

Inclusivity is a crucial aspect of leadership. However, in the hybrid world, it can be easy to assume that people located in the same space are having the same experience. However, every team member has their own perspective, and a hybrid leader must show compassion to all situations the team faces.

There is also a common fear that people working remotely will miss out on opportunities that on-site workers may experience. Likewise, on-site employees may feel that they are not enjoying the perks that satellite or remote workers receive.

With all of this in mind, it is the responsibility of a hybrid leader to personalise the experience for every team member, wherever they are located. The leader will also need to use compassion to

respect and hold multiple perspectives, styles, and cultures simultaneously to create the best experience and build a diverse, compassionate, and cohesive team.

In terms of developing the hybrid leader mindset, this means dropping judgement and remaining curious about personal experiences and perspectives from every member of the team.

Encourage Accountability And Collaboration

The focus of a hybrid workforce is to facilitate optimal productivity. This means those within an organisation can complete work however they believe is optimal in order to drive the best results for the business and highest levels of productivity.

With this focus, it can be useful to take on a coaching mindset to help team members to find the answers for themselves rather than being told what is best. A hybrid leader can help to facilitate the process of determining the highest levels of productivity, but it is more effective to let the team consider what they need and how they wish to operate.

Creating an agreement within the team helps build collaboration while respecting the different work needs of each individual. For example, some may wish to be part of an accountability group. Others may need to agree on adequate response times and create clear boundaries on pausing communication outside working hours.

As a hybrid leader, you can use an open, supportive and team-led approach to help facilitate the collaboration that everyone in the team needs.

A hybrid leader can be integral to the success of a hybrid workforce. In fact, hybrid leaders can have as much as a 70% difference in employee engagement and team success. It can really help leaders to regularly reflect on their mindset regarding the hybrid way of working and what assumptions, beliefs, and experiences are impacting how your hybrid leadership currently operates.

"Being an executive search consultant, occupational psychologist, leadership coach and psychotherapist, my understanding of Hybrid Leadership is sharpened by the ongoing changes in the working world. Especially through the Covid-19 pandemic, Hybrid Leadership becomes more and more important. To my understanding, Hybrid Leadership should be based on an iterative cycle of reflecting, resonating, creating, and reflecting again.

On an individual level, it is about reflecting one's own mindset and needs as a leader towards a hybrid workforce (attitudes, prejudices, experiences, etc.). This can be facilitated through coaching.

On a team-level it's about reflecting what works best for the team, enabling self-organization in an agile manner. To support self-organization, resonance is essential. It graduates leadership with self-organisation, the leader with the team, and provides a fertile ground for diversity. Because diversity not only demands a personalized and empathic leadership, but also a personalized execution as a creative act of leadership. Thus Hybrid Leadership is always a continuous improvement process, mirroring the constant changes in the workforce."

Peter Radlingmayr, Managing Partner – Horton International Austria

Key Takeaways:

Build trust in your hybrid team and communicate this trust effectively

Be compassionate of individual experiences regardless of their workplace

Encourage collaboration for successful team bonding and support

10 Essential Skills of A Hybrid Leader

- **Build Psychological Safety**

Foster environments for hybrid teams to share their challenges and support each other.

- **Develop Inclusivity**

Use team bonding and individual experiences to create an inclusive culture regardless of location.

- **Coaching And Feedback**

Develop your team with supportive and honest career conversations that help them to grow professionally.

- **Prioritise Wellbeing And Balance**

Create systems and support that promotes healthy work-life balance and a chance to nurture other interests and passions.

- **Drive Enterprise**

Facilitate the conversations and connections that drive high levels of contribution and enterprise for innovation.

- **Increase Emotional Intelligence EQ**

40% of employees reported a decline in mental health in 2020, and 40% of these respondents said their leader failed to notice. Improving EQ can help to ensure your team feel connected and supported.

- **Level The Playing Field**

Using digital technologies, it is now possible to ensure that every employee has access to the same opportunities.

- **Learn And Adapt**

A hybrid leader needs to be aware of emerging trends and technologies that can help drive performance without constant supervision and pivot the team to different situations.

- **Champion Growth**

Ensure you equip your team with the hard and soft skills they need to grow and develop to ensure they are future-ready.

- **Communicate Effectively**

Utilise a range of virtual platforms to deliver consistent communication that reaches every team member.

How To Lead A Hybrid Team

The shift to a hybrid team can cause uncertainty. However, being strategic with the transition can help foster a team culture that emphasises communication, resilience and agility.

1.   Set Out Clear Expectations

Before implementing new practices of the hybrid way of working, collaborate with the team to mutually agree on the best ways to operate. Aspects to cover include:

- Defined working hours
- Communication – platforms, how, when and response times
- Which team members are required for meetings, decisions and information sharing
- How to demonstrate equality across different locations
- What tools, technologies, and platforms do team members need
- How you will measure productivity, performance and achievements

2.   Create The Hybrid Ecosystem

Leaders will have to establish the most effective ecosystem for a hybrid team to thrive. This will be an ongoing project to foster continuous improvement and adapt to evolving situations. Aspects of the ecosystem could include

- Communication maps and channels
- Inclusivity projects
- Fostering small-talk, informal chats and team building
- Check-in formats, meeting processes and 1:1sessions
- Develop feedback loops and channels of support
- How to share wins, frustrations and most important things
- Establishing priorities and the protocols for Code Red situations

3.   Develop The Team

Leaders will get more from their team when they focus on development and rapidly growing their skills. When team members develop, there are more opportunities to delegate, more knowledge to share and better results that the team can achieve.

One of the risks of a hybrid team is that employees can sometimes be less visible when working away from primary workplaces. This means that people development can suffer with fewer opportunities for contribution and growth.

Quarterly check-ins for career growth can help to make sure that professional development remains at the forefront. Key questions to ask during these check-ins can include;

- What have you learnt in the last quarter?
- What would you like to learn in the next quarter?
- What do you need in order to develop and achieve your goals?

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[10]https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/people-and-organizational-performance/our-insights/grief-loss-burnout-talking-about-complex-feelings-at-work

Outside of these growth sessions, you can help with on-demand development by regularly asking:

- What do you think would be the best route forward?
- What would success look like with this chosen route?
- What experiences can you draw on for this, and how did you learn from this?

4.   Manage Productivity Strategically

Reports suggest that remote workers typically work longer hours than their on-site teammates. A recent survey found that 52%[11] of remote employees work longer hours when working remotely, and 25% work an extra 10 hours a week.

While they may be working longer hours, this isn't always converting into productivity[12]. This is where hybrid leaders need to set out a system for productivity that ensures work is effective, efficient and strategically aligned to business operations.

There is a tendency for workers, particularly remote employees, to focus on the tasks that deliver the biggest sense of achievement and progress, even if the work isn't a priority. This can sometimes be due to how employees report their work to their hybrid leaders and 'prove' their productivity.

However, a hybrid leader can help manage productivity by creating expectations of deliverables and creating a system of priority to ensure productivity remains high. In fast-paced work environments, it can feel like everything is urgent. However, creating a priority escalation flow and universal language can help keep your team focused on the most important and urgent tasks at hand.

This will help to reduce the risk of missed deadlines and overwhelm for the team.

"One of the hybrid leadership challenges is onboarding. An efficient onboarding strategy is needed in order to ensure an inclusive way of working right from the start. This includes taking extra care that a new team member not only learns the new job but also feels part of the team. If this is not considered, there is a chance that the new member remains an outsider for too long. Making sure people get to meet and create personal relations is also important to boost inclusivity from the very start."

Ani Närhi, Managing Partner - Horton International Finland

Key Takeaways:

Set expectations collaboratively

Prioritise people development

Ensure productivity is strategic and effective

[11]https://www.peoplemanagement.co.uk/news/articles/half-professionals-working-longer-hours-at-home-poll-finds#gref
[12]https://www.economist.com/business/2021/06/10/remote-workers-work-longer-not-more-efficiently

Potential Pitfalls Of Hybrid Leadership

While hybrid workforces are growing in popularity and may well be the norm for future work, there are pitfalls to be mindful of:

1.   Crises still occur

Arguably the hybrid model gained traction during the Coronavirus pandemic; however, the hybrid model is not crisis-proof. Make sure to regularly review potential risks that may impact your current way of working

2.   People-skills are still vital

When shifting to a hybrid model, it is easy to move all communication to a digital format. However, people skills are still essential for collaboration and creativity.

3.   Productivity can suffer anywhere

It is easy to recall remote workers back into the office at the first sign of a productivity dip. However, this may not be the solution. Instead, look beyond the location to understand productivity struggles and challenges.

4.   Self-Reliance

A strong hybrid team may create a thriving ecosystem that is self-sufficient. However, this may mean there is less collaboration across teams, business units and geographies. Remember, that cross-collaboration increases innovation, so make sure external factors are strategically built into the hybrid ecosystem.

5.   Security risks

A variety of work locations can expose more security risks. Ensuring hybrid-specific security training and protocols is essential for keeping organisations and their clients safe.

The Future For Hybrid Leaders

According to a recent McKinsey study, 90%[13] of executives believe a hybrid workforce is the future of work, yet 68% of organisations do not have a plan in place. This suggests that before hybrid leaders can successfully roll out their hybrid ecosystem for the team, there will need to be greater organisational alignment and a shared vision for how a hybrid workforce will look and operate for a successful implementation.

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[13]https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/organization/our-insights/what-executives-are-saying-about-the-future-of-hybrid-work

"The current hybrid work environment has definitely put leadership skills to the test. Trust, communication, compassion, empathy, personalization and inclusion have played a key role in enhancing productivity and building a sense of belonging. They will continue to be important considerations for leaders in the future.

At Horton International, we work closely with our clients to help them integrate new leaders into the organization and also help newly hired leaders to integrate effectively with the rest of their team."

Maneesh Ajmani, Chairman, Horton International

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