

SUPERVISORS GUIDE TO OPTIMISING HYBRID WORKING

INTRODUCTION

In 2020, Monash University adopted a hybrid working approach for professional staff (ongoing and fixed-term), sometimes referred to as 'flexible working' or '3:2 hybrid working' and is a form of working that allows employees to split their time between attending the workplace and working remotely (typically from home). This has always been available for our academic staff.

This guide to 3:2 hybrid working has been prepared to help you effectively discuss and establish hybrid working norms within your team.

FOUR KEY CONVERSATIONS TO HAVE TO FACILITATE HYBRID WORKING

Hybrid working will vary in practice between teams and from person to person based on the jobs that they do. As the supervisor, you are responsible for approving and managing hybrid arrangements with the team, in line with the [Working From Home procedure](#). Teams will need to consider the impact of hybrid working on how they operate and how they can balance service delivery and operations against individual needs for flexibility.

Clear communication and expectations of working practices will set the team up for success, as will setting periods to evaluate and adapt the team's approach as we learn new things.

Supervisors are encouraged to consider hybrid working from four important perspectives and to think through the lessons learned from remote working to date. What's worked well, what can you stop, start and continue in your hybrid working practice?

1. Jobs and Tasks (Activity-based working)

Supervisors must determine the suitability of the role to be performed from home. The University has some core principles to consider, which includes;

- meeting the operational requirements and outputs of the role;
- if you have the ability to work productively without onsite supervision;
- overall team service coverage onsite for the full working week.

Supervisors and teams should discuss how hybrid working can maximise the critical drivers of productivity (energy, focus, coordination and cooperation) best suited for different activities required in the role. Whether set working days or flexible working days from home are right for your team will vary, but considering when the work can be done (synchronous (at the same time) or asynchronous (at different times)), and place (onsite or other location) can affect output and engagement for key jobs and tasks that can maximise your team's performance.

2. Managing Projects and Workflows

To make flexible working a success, supervisors need to consider how work gets done. Coordination was relatively straightforward when team members all worked in the same place at the same time, but in the era of hybrid working, it has grown more complex.

Below are some approaches that have been proven successful and can be considered:

- *Maximise the use of technology to coordinate activities*

Technology helps bridge the distance between hybrid teams. Use of technology solutions to collaborate and coordinate work, support staff to connect and understand work no matter where they are based for the day (e.g. using Google Hangouts and other collaboration tools such as [Trello](#) or [Miro](#) to manage workflows).

Ensure your staff are across the team's preferred tools and ways of working and provide training and support where individuals are unfamiliar with key technology.

- *Reimagine workflows*

You may find existing cumbersome practices, which were manageable under traditional work arrangements or when we were all working from home, are no longer sustainable as we adapt to hybrid working. Consider three crucial questions if existing workflows don't seem to be working:

1. *Are any team tasks redundant?* e.g. Are there too many traditional meetings? Can some be eliminated or can others be made asynchronous e.g. (providing status updates).
2. *Can any tasks be automated or reassigned to people outside the team?* e.g. filling in forms etc.
3. *Can we reimagine a new purpose for our place of work?* e.g. can we encourage collaboration, creativity and invest in tools to enhance these interactions?

3. Inclusion and Fairness

[Research](#) shows that feelings of unfairness in the workplace can hurt productivity, increase burnout, reduce collaboration and decrease retention; however, flexibility naturally varies between teams and people. As supervisors, ensuring considerations and expectations are transparent and understood will be key.

In developing practices of more hybrid working, supervisors should consider involving not just the 'usual suspects' but all staff from various levels, generational cohorts, circumstances (diverse perspectives that inform the design) and encouraging a culture of speaking up, empathy, cooperation and collaboration, essentially, creating a safe space for employees to speak candidly about what is working or isn't working for them (or the team) and taking action to support their needs.

A number of biases can be at play in a hybrid work environment (such as [presenteeism](#), exposure effect, etc).

[Research](#) suggests that cognitive training can help minimise cognitive biases in thinking, which may impact how you manage and approve hybrid arrangements. Some things you can do to help overcome biases that might influence your thinking and decision-making include:

- Being aware of bias - i.e. consider how bias might influence your thinking.
- Consider factors that influence your decisions - are there factors such as over-confidence or self-interest at play?

- Challenging your biases - what are some factors you have missed? Are you giving too much weight to certain factors? Are you ignoring relevant information because it doesn't support your view?

As supervisors, it is important to role-model the desired behaviours in leading by example. This includes giving equal weight to staff onsite and at home, using language that does not belittle work efforts undertaken away from the office, managing hours of work to be within the defined span of hours, with a shared understanding of core working hours for the team to be available and contactable, without disadvantaging individuals.

4. Individual Preference

As the world of work evolves, staff seek to bring more of themselves to their place of work, and as we work from home, more of our lives integrate with work. Supervisors should seek to understand individual preferences and discuss ways the needs of the team can be met whilst considering these. Equally, where you can't accommodate an individual's needs, be transparent as to why and any alternative compromise that may be explored. A reminder that hybrid working is not the only benefit to staff, and you may support Flex in other ways. See how we Flex at Monash.

ESTABLISHING WORKING NORMS

1. Team Charter - An approach to planning and succeeding with hybrid working

Teams that are successful in hybrid working have clearly defined values and goals, know how to achieve them and commit to adapting and improving as they go.

Supervisors are encouraged to dedicate time to establishing a Team Charter. A Team Charter is an agreement, co-created by everyone in the team, that clearly states what the team wants to accomplish (goals), why they are important (purpose) and how the team will work together to achieve its goals. A team charter is a living document that is updated regularly and reflects the team's consensus on the way work gets done. It can help instil a sense of fairness, empowerment and engagement since it reflects the goals, values, and norms of behaviours of all team members.

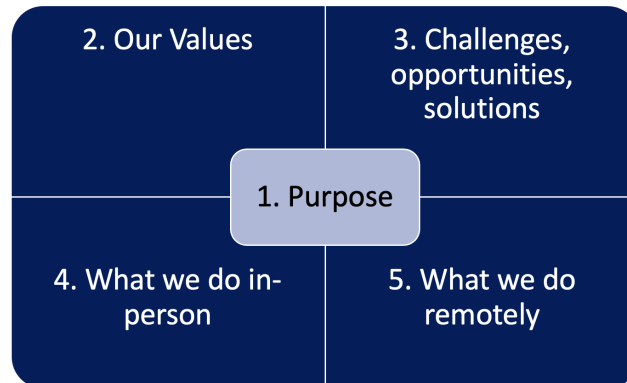
A team charter will look different for each team. When used effectively, they can be a proactive tool to anticipate issues and agree on how the team will address them so that when they do occur, they are more easily managed. Team charters are not a "set and forget" activity.

Refer to the example of the Team Charter canvas on the next page.

Team charters should be reviewed for currency and updated regularly (on an as-needed basis, particularly when circumstances such as team composition and availability of team members are changing.)

Discuss and agree on each item as a team. Everyone can start off working individually to add their own sticky notes (either into a flip chart in a physical meeting or a virtual whiteboard such as Miro in an online session) under each heading. Then facilitate a team discussion and visibly capture the points you all agree as a team that you'll commit to.

Team Charter Canvas for Hybrid Working Discussions (Source: Hybrid Meetings and Workshops, The Big Bang Partnership)



Here are some discussion prompts for each heading in the Team Charter canvas.

1. Purpose – Define the purpose of the team

What are you there to do? What are your priorities? What's important for you as a team?

2. Values – Define what you believe in

Values are the important principles, beliefs, ways of behaving and seeing the world that connects everyone. They represent *how* your team *does* business. This can include understanding key stakeholders' needs, how teams respect each other's differences, playing off strengths and weaknesses, and more. Think about the values that will be important in bringing to life a positive hybrid work environment.

3. Challenges, opportunities and solutions

Map out all the hybrid working challenges, opportunities and solutions you may face as a team. Then, decide how you'll handle them together if and when they arise. (i.e. Staff are not available at prescribed times, opportunities not available to participate in key onsite activity when at home, unknown location of staff etc.)

Be proactive and find solutions early rather than waiting for things to happen.

4. What we do in-person

Make a clear and comprehensive list of all those things you really do need or want to be together for in-person to do. Plan your working days around this, along with core hours of coverage required onsite.

5. What we do remotely

Remember also that some things might actually be more effective if they're done remotely, such as quick updates or action-planning sessions. Make an agreed list of all these things, too.

2. Communication

Setting expectations around how and when your team will communicate is essential to the success and engagement of all staff. Teams should establish:

- **Communication priorities** – What does everyone have to know, what would be nice to know and what can be optional? Does the information you need to know vary depending on where you're working for the day?
- **Communication channels** - How is critical information communicated (consider email, workplace)? How do urgent messages get delivered (chat function (Google Hangouts, Workplace, Slack), phone calls)? Daily stand-ups for check-in (meetings or online workflow tools)

Consider how you will make sure that everyone feels appropriately included and that conversely, you also don't include people in communication for the sake of it. It's not great if the people who are on-site on a certain day or more often than others get to find out about and get involved in more decisions or more projects than those who are working remotely. Alternatively, the team may agree that onsite staff respond to urgent or change priorities as appropriate to enable those at home to make the most of their focus time or individual activities.

What current and potential communication gaps and challenges does the team experience or foresee? What solutions could you put in place to improve them?

Communicate about your working days and where you will be. The working-from-home form sets a baseline agreement between the staff and supervisor members. However, teams should share with all colleagues where they will be working from ahead of time and communicate any changes. Google Calendar permits staff to share home or office locations with permissions - this should be used as a record of the agreed place of work.

3. Meeting Protocols

Meetings can be a source of frustration in hybrid working teams should have conversations regarding meeting protocols, including when online, in-person or hybrid settings are appropriate.

Meetings generally fall into two categories:

- **Convergent meetings** for exchanging information, providing general updates and making decisions. Generally straightforward, you just need to make sure you include all the right people so that everybody's informed.
- **Divergent meetings** for creating new ideas, collaborating or exploring topics. In this case, teams should agree on the best way to manage these and to really work on the balance of participation from both remote and physical attendees.

Both convergent and divergent meetings can be done online and/or in person, subject to good planning and organisation. Some tips to help with your preparations:

- Come prepared
- Provide all attendees with an agenda in advance of the session
- Clearly state the objectives of the meeting
- Encourage virtual attendees to have cameras and mics on

Clearly communicate what meetings you're going to have and when, and set expectations if an onsite requirement is needed.

Supervisors and staff should be flexible if days onsite need to vary to meet key protocol expectations, similarly, if onsite attendance is optional, staff may seek to attend virtually if that works for them (and the team).

It is easy to book meetings back to back to back when you're online. But people need some space between meetings to refocus and have a quick break. With some people being in the office, you'll also need to allow time for them to travel between physical locations.

Consider defaulting meetings to 50 minutes or 25-minute blocks as appropriate. Allow staff to schedule focus time (now available in Google Calendar) when onsite or at home to complete essential tasks. Communicate the needs of the teams and external stakeholders to agree on what works best.

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