

Fostering harmony and collaboration in a hybrid work environment



Even as COVID-19 vaccinations bring hope of returning to somewhat normal business operations, flexibility remains the buzzword at many workplaces. Numerous organizations continue to allow employees to decide where they want to work. This hybrid model results in some individuals returning to the office, others coming in for a few days each week, and many staying remote.

Such arrangements allow for better safety precautions and relieve some of the chaos experienced by working parents with children e-learning at home. For managers, however, the set-up can prove a major headache. With employees spread out across locations and often having different experiences being remote, on-site, or something in-between, creating a sense of harmony and community isn't necessarily an easy task.

How can leaders improve the harmony of a hybrid workforce and perhaps save their own sanity? Fortunately, there are some simple actions you can take.

Stay organized

As basic as it sounds, know each person's location every day. Quick access to whereabouts spares the time and frustration of searching. Create a central schedule available to everyone on your team so everyone knows their colleagues' whereabouts.

Prioritize communication

Always a cornerstone of success, communication takes on even greater significance in hybrid arrangements. If not careful, having different work environments can up the odds of someone failing to receive a message.

"I can't stress enough the importance of strong communication," says James Surrey, founder of Review Home Warranties. "A common problem is that members that are in the office relay messages to each other in person but don't disseminate the message to those working from home. As a consequence, half the team is mal-informed, and the miscommunication isn't fully realized until a resulting problem occurs, such as a missed deadline."

To avoid such situations, standardize communication procedures. Share information in set ways that ensure timely delivery to all involved. This might entail a group email to all individuals working on a certain project, even if one of them is sitting in a neighboring cubicle.

For staff meetings, adopt a similar mindset of everyone consistently receiving the same information at the same time regardless of location. At many companies, all employees continue to log on to Zoom for meetings whether at home or in the office. This action eliminates logistical dilemmas, promotes a sense of equality, and maintains on-site social distancing.

Simplify collaboration

Get all members of the team on the same page, both figuratively and literally. Leaders must ensure workers know company objectives and standards during this trying time and have the means at their disposal to fulfill them.

"The best way to ensure a hybrid work environment runs smoothly is to give everyone on your team the collaborative tools they need to do their jobs. This means things like Slack, Trello, Google docs, and any other tools that allow your teams to sync up what they're doing and work off of the same information," says Carter Seuthe, vice president of content at Credit Summit.

He notes, though, that these tools are only as useful as the education provided with them. Managers need to be well-versed about company technology and able to teach team members the most effective ways to use them.

Additionally, it's important your team understands how each tool is meant to be used. If you have multiple tools for communicating, it can get confusing which to use. Do you send direct messages in Google or Slack? Are files shared on a server, Microsoft Teams, or Google Docs? Having a protocol in place will help prevent confusion.

Pay attention to fairness

Resentment builds when employees think one group of workers receives preferential treatment or operates under a different set of rules. Smart managers know they must deal with this topic quickly and carefully.

"The first step to minimizing bias is to acknowledge it exists," says Phil Buckley, managing director at Change with Confidence. "Next is to define and adopt identical practices for all team members, such as meeting each member once a week for priority alignment, coaching, and feedback. Another technique is to meet with your entire team (on-site and remote) to discuss team ways of working. The team discussion will reveal potential managerial biases and ways to address them."

Monitor who receives the most choice assignments to judge if the scales tip too far toward on-site staff. Give all interested workers equal opportunities for learning and development. Avoid the tendency to provide remote workers with corrective feedback while failing to acknowledge their accomplishments.

Promote a sense of togetherness

Lastly, remember that teams thrive when people feel connected and united toward common goals. Vary who works with whom to dismantle feelings of “us” and “them.” Share good news together to build group pride. Celebrate milestones, birthdays, and holidays in ways all can enjoy. Physical arrangements change, but our desire to bond with others endures.

Additional Resource: Not sure what working arrangements are best for your business going forward? Learn how [the normal 40-hour workweek might soon be a thing of the past](#), and what options that leaves you with.