



Developing skills for hybrid working

The skills businesses need to consider when making a shift to hybrid working

November 2021

A practical guide exclusively for members

Businesses are adopting hybrid working at scale

Get started

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Hybrid working is widespread and here to stay

Patterns of work have undergone unprecedented change during the COVID-19 pandemic, and as companies consider moving beyond pandemic response to thinking about long-term strategy, few are opting to return to pre-pandemic ways of working. A CBI-Nexus survey found that 93% of firms plan to adopt hybrid working models and only 5% expect to work entirely from an office,¹ and the CBI's 2021 Employment Trends Survey found that 76% of employers expect hybrid working to increase compared with pre-pandemic levels.² UK businesses are applying this change at speed, with around a third already rolling out post-pandemic hybrid working models and three quarters expected to have those models underway by the end of 2021.³

This guide focuses on the implications of this rise in hybrid working on skills needs and how businesses should consider responding. Hybrid working in this context is defined as a type of working where an employee splits their time between a workplace and working remotely. The consequence of this is that on any given day it's likely that many teams are a combination of people working from their office and others working from home.



76%

of employers expect hybrid working to increase compared with pre-pandemic levels.



1. CBI Economics (July 2021). The Revolution of Work: A survey on the world of work post-COVID-19. London: CBI.
2. CBI, Employment Trends Survey (2021)
3. CBI Economics (July 2021). The Revolution of Work: A survey on the world of work post-COVID-19. London: CBI.

Firms see many benefits from hybrid working

Hybrid working can improve productivity, reducing travel time and maximising 'diary time' for colleague and client meetings. Many firms have also seen an improved ability to attract a wider and more diverse pool of talent.⁴ Businesses unwilling to consider the range of possibilities that hybrid working can bring risk reduced employee engagement and increased employee turnover, with many now seeing this as core to their employee value proposition.

However, a clear role for offices and other shared workspaces remains for the vast majority businesses in the long-term. Many firms recognise their importance in facilitating interaction, team-building, collaboration, and innovation to support business growth. 70% of businesses found that remote working had a negative impact on brainstorming sessions, and 83% reported a negative effect on valuable 'water cooler' moments.⁵



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Businesses need to recognise and help employees with the greatest need to upskill

As employees begin to return to offices and adopt hybrid working patterns, businesses need to identify where skills gaps in their workforces are likely to hinder the successful implementation of hybrid working and develop targeted training strategies to overcome them. This process is already underway for some employers, with 29% of businesses reporting that they are investing in training for managers to support the rollout of hybrid working.⁶



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4. CBI Economics (July 2021). The Revolution of Work: A survey on the world of work post-COVID-19. London: CBI.

5. Ibid.

6. CBI, Employment Trends Survey (2021)

Managers whose leadership style is linked to experience in the office, or more prior job performance than managerial skills, are more likely to struggle to adapt to hybrid management. The UK's historical underinvestment in managerial skills and the phenomenon of the 'accidental manager'⁷ has already contributed to an increasing productivity gap between the UK and other G7 countries.⁸ Hybrid working requires additional skills of managers, so giving them the tools and support needed to adapt is essential.

In comparison, new starters may find adapting to hybrid working easier than existing employees required to adopt a completely new way of working. However, support during the induction period to integrate into the workforce will be critical.

The successful implementation of hybrid working requires workforces to possess 'soft' skills – empathy, resilience, collaboration, team building, and change management. These skills have always been highly prized by employers, with calls for them to be more embedded within the education system.

We have identified three overarching areas of focus for the development of skills for hybrid working:

01. Wellbeing and resilience

02. Technology and communication

03. Recruitment, onboarding, and performance management

7. Hill, A. The UK's Productivity Problem: The Curse of the Accidental Manager
8. CBI People and Skills (May 2019). Great Job. CBI: London.

Wellbeing and resilience

Support employees to work confidently in a rapidly changing working environment

Good employee mental health and wellbeing benefits employees and employers; health and wellbeing initiatives lower absence rates and lead to greater company performance and productivity.⁹ Hybrid working brings with it unique challenges for managing employee mental health and wellbeing. Many employers have recognised this, with 42% introducing tailored strategies for mental health and wellbeing to accommodate all workers, regardless of working hours or location.¹⁰

What skills should businesses develop?

- People management will become more important than ever in a hybrid working environment. Managers need to remain connected to team members in a virtual environment to spot signs of poor wellbeing and understand how to provide them with support.
- The role of a manager in engaging and energising teams, and in prioritising wellbeing and promoting activities that encourage their team members to do the same, will be central to enabling staff to maintain good mental health and develop resilience.
- Given the 'trial and error' nature of many firms' hybrid working policies and the adapting to new working practices that it brings, all employees will require a higher degree of resilience and change management skills. Employees will need to develop the coping mechanisms to handle ongoing ambiguity and having less stability in their working environment.
- Providing a space where managers and leaders can come together and discuss shared challenges to supporting teams will be important as businesses continue to adapt practices.

9. Front of Mind, Prioritising Workplace Health and Wellbeing, CBI, September 2018

10. CBI Employment Trends Survey (2021)



Employers should consider:

- How to help managers identify signs of poor wellbeing in a hybrid working environment.
- How leaders can empower their teams to perform highly in a volatile environment.
- How to encourage employees to adopt an innovative mindset and engage them in the design and development of new ways of working.

AXA reviewed a range of internal data sources to understand and design training to target skills gaps of managers

AXA is one of the world's leading insurance and asset management groups, serving 105 million clients, individuals and business, in 54 countries. AXA UK has launched hybrid working, known with AXA as 'smart working', for its approximately 9,000 UK employees, with every team in the organisation discussing their working arrangements and co-designing a team agreement.

Based on insights such as employee engagement surveys, retention rates, and health and wellbeing data, AXA identified several challenges facing managers in the implementation of smart working. In response to this need, AXA designed a suite of 60 to 90-minute virtual workshops and digital resources to give managers tools to tackle these challenges. Some of the topics covered include:

- Smart Ready - helping managers to understand the expectations of them in creating Smart teams and how to understand their challenges and introduce the behaviours they need to strengthen in order to make smart working a success. Over 50% of managers across the company have participated in these workshops.
- Smart Management in Action - focusing on the dilemma of managing under performance and looking at the role each of us must play in encouraging effective smart working behaviours.
- Building Belief - exploring how to communicate change so it drives results, wherever team members may be based.
- Building Change Fit Teams - examining the main factors determining change fitness in teams and how team members can be supported to get ready for new ways of working.
- Planning and Collaborating - covering how to prepare intentionally for hybrid meetings and get ready to overcome challenges to collaboration.

The workshops are not mandated and in some cases are offered on a tailored basis to parts of the organisation with greater need for skillsets, such as teams undergoing significant business transformation. On demand digital learning is offered for each session to enable managers to learn about the topics at a time that suits them, and resources are made available on their internal hub.



Hays adapts training for a hybrid working world

Hays is the leading global specialist recruitment group, and the market leader in places such as the UK, Germany and Australia. In the UK and Ireland, after surveying all staff on their preferred working patterns, in September 2021 Hays introduced a balanced working agreement where employees are required to be in the office five days every fortnight. Throughout lockdown and before the hybrid working policy officially began – Hays identified a need to support its workforce to develop the skills necessary to adapt to this new way of working.

To be agile and responsive to a changing market and business needs, Hays developed a bespoke virtual learning series for staff to select relevant and current L&D support to help to provide them with the right skills, behaviours and competencies to best support both themselves and their customers. This series focused on four key business areas: Fees and Productivity, Employee Engagement, Leadership & Management Development and Employee Wellbeing.

The series consisted of micro-learning video content, engaging virtual webinars utilising break out functionality and polling to encourage collaboration and honest reflection, interactive guides and other digital bite sized learning tools. It was informed by market data and insight, business steer cos and training feedback plus provided a platform for peer to peer and self-directed learning to support with not only the development of skills but also staff wellbeing when working remotely.

Hays is proud to have developed blended learning programmes that support individuals across all levels of our business, that make use of a variety of learning methods and formats to deliver future L&D that truly supports hybrid working, differing learning styles and remains agile in changing markets. As a result of the pandemic Hays has accelerated our change and transformation in L&D to build an offering for the future.



Cromwell is providing support for managers to improve their own wellbeing, as well as their teams

Established over 50 years ago, Cromwell Group is the UK's largest supplier of tools. Cromwell recognised that its managers across the business would benefit from additional skills development to support team members navigating the transition to hybrid working. Fuelled by feedback from managers regarding the importance of maintaining motivation and engagement levels, Cromwell designed Bouncing Forward, a programme involving three 60-minute booster sessions for managers to drive high performance in hybrid teams. The modular and short nature of the sessions were designed to enable as many leaders as possible to access the programme.

The sessions were created to help leaders develop a positive mindset towards hybrid working and to provide them with a safe space to discuss the challenges that they were facing in managing hybrid employees, to enable solidarity and the sharing of best practice. The first module, Leading Hybrid teams, focused on the unique challenges faced by hybrid teams and the practical techniques needed to overcome them to boost performance. The second module, Sustaining Engagement Through Motivation, gave managers an evidence-based tool that can be used to raise motivation levels and sustain motivation during remote work. The third module, Owning Your and Your Team's Wellbeing, helped managers to plan strategies to enhance the wellbeing of themselves and their team, including how to identify poor wellbeing and what kinds of conversations to have with team members.

The training was optional but take up has been high, a success which Cromwell attributes to building the training around feedback from managers on what they found challenging about hybrid working and providing practical tips to approach these challenges.



Virgin Money is helping colleagues shape a new way of working through 'A Life More Virgin'

Virgin Money is a banking and financial services organisation which seeks to reinvent the role a bank plays in people's lives, making everyone happier about money. As an employer they are exploring ways to enable their staff to adopt new ways of working through their programme 'A Life More Virgin'.

Virgin Money recognised that leaders would be operating in an environment that requires a different skillset and that they would need to support their leaders to take an open-minded, exploratory approach to new ways of working. They updated their leadership framework, Great Leadership, to emphasise the capabilities – such as setting clear direction, empowerment and coaching – and the actions - for example greater focus on wellbeing and creating stronger team connections - which are essential to brilliant performance in a hybrid working environment.

To support these refreshed leadership expectations, Virgin Money offered customised training to its c. 1100 people leaders, consisting of three 90-minute sessions over the space of around three or four weeks. The training was designed to help each people leader to hold really productive conversations with the colleagues in their teams focused on making changes that would enable them to live their best lives at work whilst meeting the needs of customers and the wider team.

Alongside covering the new leadership expectations in detail, key topics included how to shape productive team operational rhythms, healthy working practices and handling trickier colleague requests. Leaders also had the space to discuss the challenges and opportunities they had encountered during the transition to new ways of working and share best practices.

Take up of the training has been very high - over 1000 people leaders have taken part. Virgin Money has found that the sessions have helped people leaders approach new ways of working with a more flexible, inclusive and optimistic mindset. This has created real momentum for a more experimental approach to agreeing how work will be delivered in the future.



Key takeaway

Support employees to continue developing the resilience developed throughout the pandemic through formal training opportunities

Technology and communication

Help employees develop the technological skills to operate effectively in a hybrid environment

Patterns of communication and use of technology in a hybrid working environment are markedly different from those found in an in-person environment. The CBI's 2021 Employment Trends Survey found that 54% of businesses are developing new communication strategies to keep in touch with employees regardless of their location or working hours. Communicating effectively therefore requires additional technological and communication skills.

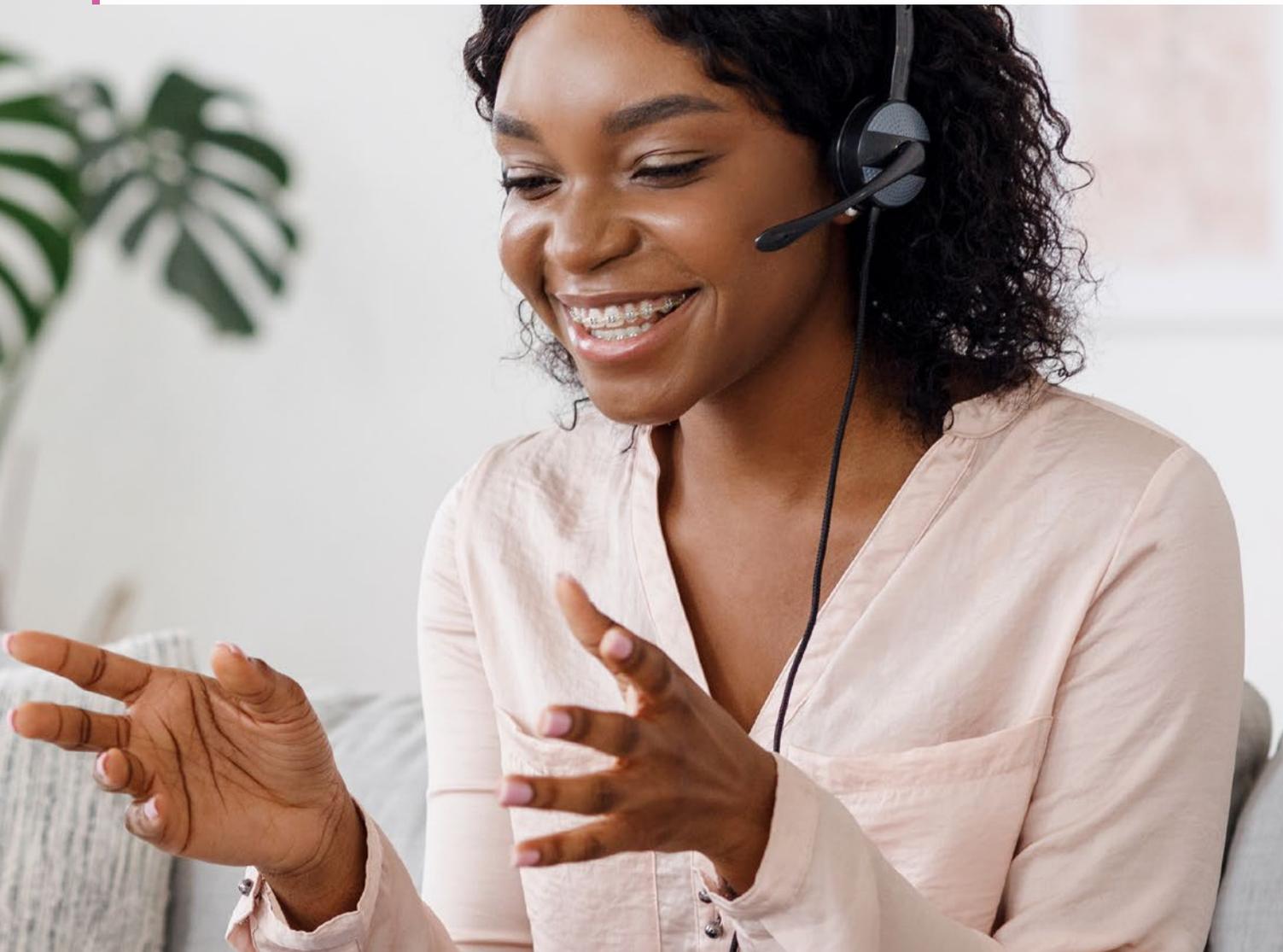
What skills should businesses develop?

- Managers and senior leaders are now required to create team environments which encourage open and regular communication in a virtual setting. Without guaranteed co-presence in an office space, managers need to be more deliberate and structured around how they facilitate communication – such as 1-2-1s – than previously.
- Managers should be able to confidently facilitate inclusive and effective mixed meetings in which some team members attend in person and others attend online, so the latter are not at a disadvantage.
- Managers should ensure that communications across their team account for varying working patterns, particularly ensuring that staff working remotely are kept in the loop to the same extent as those present in the workplace.
- The increased reliance on digital technology for communication has created a need for all employees to develop basic digital skills and an understanding of which tools to utilise for different communication purposes.
- Knowing when to use instant messaging as opposed to an email or an in-person meeting. Diary management skills are also important; employees need to be able to make effective decisions about what work to do in the office and what to do at home.
- Employees whose roles involve a significant amount of presenting and networking also need to be able to perform these functions effectively remotely, which involves building relationships and conveying charisma online.



"If there is one thing I've learned about hybrid working, it's that there's no such thing as overcommunicating."

Ally Monk, Head of People, Bright Network



Employers should consider:

- How staff working in the office can be inclusive of staff working remotely in their communications.
- How to support employees to understand which forms of communication are best used for which purposes.

"We provided guidance to staff about which communication tools should be used in different scenarios, to help with clarity on how to communicate effectively and appropriately in a hybrid environment."

Amy Forrest, Managing Director, First Intuition



The CBI has implemented training for all staff to give them the skills and confidence to transition to hybrid working

The CBI – the voice of UK business which represents over 190,000 firms across the country – partnered with Primeast to ensure that employees have the necessary skills to ensure a successful transition from home to hybrid working and embrace the change as a positive opportunity.

The CBI identified a need to raise awareness among all staff of the key skills necessary for hybrid working, and worked with Primeast to design and deliver three interactive two-hour workshops – optional for all employees – to support the transition to new ways of working.

The first workshop, Reintegrating to a hybrid workplace, was designed to assist employees in considering the benefits and challenges of hybrid working, alongside recognising the scale of change and need for resilience. The second workshop, Better skills for hybrid working, focused on the communication skills that are critical to success in hybrid working environments and particularly likely to be overlooked. The third workshop, Performance in hybrid teams, examined the impact that hybrid working has on decision making and addressed the perception that performance management is different and more difficult in a hybrid setting.

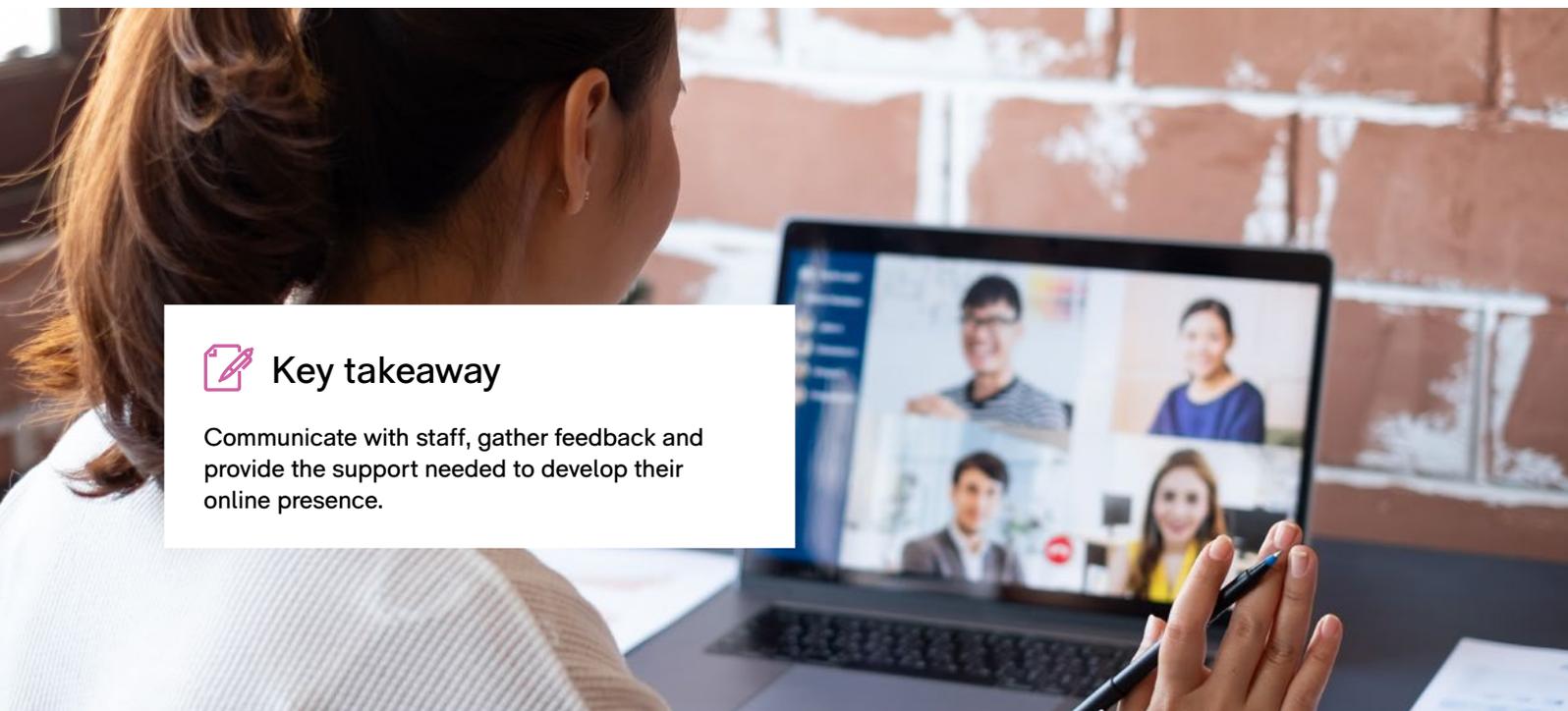
Staff who have attended the training have been highly engaged and have demonstrated application of the techniques in the workplace, particularly in terms of greater thoughtfulness in using face-to-face time with colleagues more effectively.

Feedback from the workshops has highlighted meeting facilitation and management as a key area for opportunity and improvement, alongside a wider need for establishing clear expectations and identifying business improvements to improve the performance management process.



Key takeaway

Communicate with staff, gather feedback and provide the support needed to develop their online presence.



Recruitment, onboarding, and performance management

Adapt HR processes to remain effective in a hybrid context

The way businesses recruit, onboard, and manage employee performance in a hybrid work environment will require greater emphasis on soft skills and trust between managers and staff.

Firms know that they need to help develop the skills of current employees for a hybrid work environment, as well as looking for these skills throughout the recruitment processes.

What skills should businesses develop?

- The skills essential for successful hybrid working such as: communication, empathy, and self-reliance are generally more difficult to train than technical skills. Many employers are therefore updating their recruitment processes to better identify these 'soft skills', particularly when recruiting managers.
- Businesses are placing more weight on competency-based interview questions to identify how candidates have previously demonstrated such skills.
- Businesses also need to adapt onboarding processes for new starters, particularly for those earlier in their careers. This is vital for instilling a sense of company culture and providing opportunities for new starters to network.
- Many companies are requiring new starters to spend more time in the office when onboarding than might be necessary for their role long-term, the role of managers in this process is particularly important.
- Managers need to be proactive and connect new starters with staff across the organisation where office-based mixing cannot be relied on.



Employers should consider:

- How recruitment processes could be updated to assess staff – particularly managers – on the skills and experience needed to perform effectively in a hybrid working environment.
- The steps that should be taken to ensure that new starters and junior members of staff do not miss out on informal skills development in the office as a result of hybrid working.
- How performance management processes could be updated to focus on outcomes, rather than activities.
- What effective support to remedy poor performance looks like in a hybrid working environment.

Performance management brings new challenges in a hybrid working environment

Effective performance management was a challenge for businesses long before hybrid working became a consideration. Many businesses recognise the importance of focusing on outcomes rather than just inputs with their customers, but this mindset is not always reflected by managers. In a hybrid environment with more limited team interactions, a focus on outcomes becomes even more important.

What skills should businesses develop?

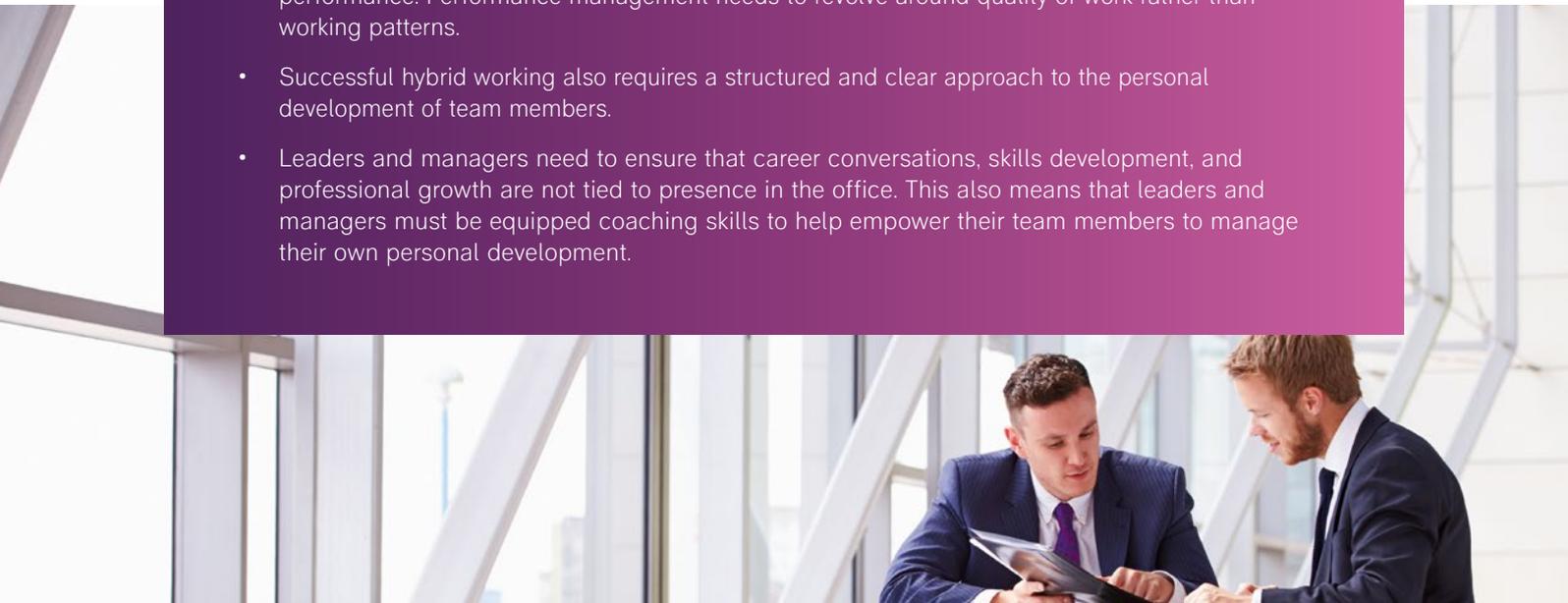
- Identifying and addressing poor performance are more difficult in settings where managers have less regular in-person contact with their team members. This change will require a mindset shift for some managers from a focus on activities (e.g., how long someone is in the office), to achievements.
- Increasingly businesses are recognising that 'time at desk' does not work as a measure of performance. Performance management needs to revolve around quality of work rather than working patterns.
- Successful hybrid working also requires a structured and clear approach to the personal development of team members.
- Leaders and managers need to ensure that career conversations, skills development, and professional growth are not tied to presence in the office. This also means that leaders and managers must be equipped with coaching skills to help empower their team members to manage their own personal development.

Siemens' performance management process ensures a continued focus on personal development in hybrid working

Siemens is a multi-national organisation headquartered in Munich, and the largest industrial manufacturing company in Europe. Siemens UK operates across the health, energy, transport, and infrastructure sectors. Siemens is committed to long-term hybrid working. Siemens has identified the need to support its people to develop the skills necessary to perform and succeed in a hybrid working environment, utilising its Global Learning Platform to host skills development for all staff. While this training is optional, automated tools have allowed Siemens to monitor engagement and adjust their targets to encourage employees to continue to learn.

Management skills emerged as key to a successful transition to hybrid working. As a result, Siemens produced a suite of good practice briefings for those managing hybrid teams, which can be accessed remotely at any time. These briefings cover topics such as helping team members to effectively manage their diaries in a hybrid context and include example scenarios to make the advice more relatable and impactful.

Finally, Siemens drew upon its updated approach to performance reviews – being rolled out prior to the introduction of hybrid working – to help managers embed hybrid working in the way they manage their teams. This includes a greater focus on managers discussing wellbeing and career development alongside performance goals through regular 'Growth Talks'. Increased openness contributes to Siemens' work to create a more inclusive and equitable workplace, where the unique working preferences and needs of each employee can be discussed and considered.



CPI is helping managers develop the tools to focus on performance outcomes

CPI is a leading independent technology innovation centre which connects academia, businesses and funders, to bring bright ideas and research into the global marketplace. Since introducing hybrid working in December 2020, CPI has been working to equip its workforce with the right skills to be successful, as well as ensuring staff wellbeing where teams are more dispersed and have less contact with each other.

Managers will be crucial to a successful transition to hybrid working. CPI reviewed and upgraded its management development interventions to ensure managers have competence in developing and maintaining relationships, inspiring confidence and trust, and ultimately creating an inclusive culture as an effective leader in a hybrid work environment.

A workshop offered to all line managers focused on boosting hybrid workers' engagement and performance by:

- Establishing clear expectations
- Creating agreements for ways of working
- Focusing on performance outcomes
- Creating new team norms for hybrid working that continue to reflect CPI values
- Communicating effectively (including understanding which communication channels to use and when)
- Checking on individuals' wellbeing.

CPI's video library was expanded to include topics covering the tools, techniques and mindsets for line managers to support those new to remote working and adapting to new ways of working.

CPI also identified a need to provide support across its entire workforce to develop the right skills to perform in a hybrid context. They provided access to virtual learning through their Learning Development Hub – including interactive webinars and guided learning – on topics such as: time management, managing one's career, and managing health and wellbeing in a hybrid work setting.

Guidance was provided to all staff on:

- Facilitating virtual meetings and meetings where some participants are virtual, and some are onsite
- The skills needed for virtual mentoring
- Recruiting virtually.

Conscious that staff might struggle to connect with colleagues in different teams in a hybrid work environment, CPI introduced CPI Connect: an employee-led forum designed to help staff improve their networking skills through informal coffee sessions. These sessions follow a 'speed dating' process, connecting staff at random to chat and network. CPI's employee engagement levels have remained high since introducing hybrid working, and participation in the online training offered has seen high levels of participation.



Key takeaway

Managers need to focus on outcomes and achievements, rather than time spent in the office.



Learning and development practises will need to reflect new demand for skills

Digitise your learning and development offer

In addition to changing the skills that companies need to remain competitive, hybrid working is changing the way that businesses deliver their learning and development.

Most companies were forced to rapidly move their entire learning and development offer online during the pandemic, and these businesses are now considering how their offer can be further adapted to a hybrid environment. The CBI's 2021 Employment Trends Survey found that 36% of businesses are already redesigning learning and development opportunities so that they can be delivered to a hybrid workforce.¹¹

Consider the different training options

Hybrid working enables a range of options for delivery, including in-person, online, and mixed training. Some forms of training, particularly those involving teamwork and collaboration and focusing on effecting behavioural change, are well-suited to in-person settings so employers may wish to require in-person presence in the office.

Other types of training, particularly those focusing on knowledge, are well-suited to online provision. Online training can drastically increase uptake of training by reducing the time investment required of employees. Furthermore, giving employees the ability to access training online not only gives them flexibility to undertake the training at a time that suits them, but also the opportunity to revisit the training at any point.

Use bitesize learning

There is a growing demand from employees for bitesize, modular learning which they can access online and fit into their work schedules as they see fit.

Decisions around training format should be driven by the desired learning outcomes and the methods most helpful to those outcomes, which in turn determine whether training should take place in-person or remotely.

Employers should consider:

- How managers can balance supporting team members to identify and address their skills gaps with employee autonomy.
- How they can encourage employees to take up optional training on skills for hybrid working, and how to monitor uptake and measure impact.

Useful resources to help you on your journey

- In need of guidance to help you successfully shift to hybrid working? Read the CBI's practical guide for top tips and insight on **adapting to hybrid working**
- Discover CIPD's advice on **planning and managing a move to hybrid working**
- Want line manager specific advice? Read **CIPD's guidance for line managers** to help support the move to hybrid working
- Read CMI's **Management Transformed: managing in a marathon crisis** report to discover how managers are approaching leading through change
- Familiarise yourself with LSE's **dictionary of behavioural biases** for hybrid working.

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